

**RIVERSIDE ELEMENTARY: AN EXPLANATORY CASE  
STUDY USING SELECTED PRINCIPLES  
OF SENGE (1995)**

by  
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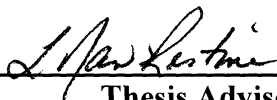
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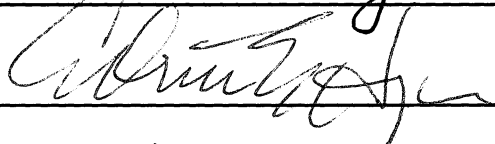
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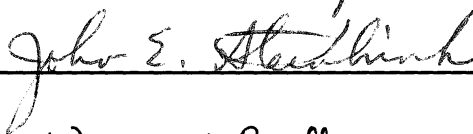
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Many change initiatives in schools rapidly emerge and disappear while others result in superficial rather than substantive change. Practitioners who are convinced of the need to broaden the dimensions of meaning and understanding must comprehend the developmental nature of change. As Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) suggest,

One of the most fundamental problems in education today is that people do not have a clear, coherent sense of meaning about what educational change is, and how it proceeds. Thus, there is much faddism, superficiality, confusion, failure, unwarranted and misdirected resistance, and misunderstood reform. What we need is a more coherent picture that people who are involved in or affected by educational change can use to make sense of what they and others are doing (pp. 4-5).

Discussion of an explanatory case study of the developmental nature of change contains several elements. A cursory review of the existing literature generates important and salient information for scrutinizing the process of change as it relates to improvement in schooling. Senge's Learning Organization Principles (1995) provide three areas of interest for this study of substantive change. Through a thorough analysis of a series of interviews of key participants in an elementary school setting, Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement provide insight for leaders searching for enduring organizational improvements during times of escalating change.

## **Background of the Study**

A significant amount of professional literature and research reveals that few change initiatives have lasting influence (Burns, 1978; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Goodlad, 1994). Moreover, of those initiatives with lasting influence, most are first-order changes which are seeking to reform structures which already exist, rather than reinventing organizations through second-order changes (Cuban, 1997; Fullan & Miles, 1992). Senge (1995) suggests that certain principles are operative in learning organizations and necessary for creating learning organizations that produce substantive (structural and cultural) change. Creating strong, responsive, resilient learning organizations is the moral imperative of leaders designated to serve those organizations (Senge, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1997). Related to educational leadership, many other topics of concern such as collaborative community engagement and transformative leadership also depend upon expertise in understanding influences on organizational change (Hord, 1992).

According to Joel Spring (1988), we sort out the priorities we have for the existence of our society through that of our children. As we reject, sometimes vehemently, current school practices of inequity, we take heart in designing a better future. Especially for the disenfranchised and minorities in society's midst, it is the common schools that must maintain standards of implementation and articulation that spell out what face a better future might take in the Information Age. Besieged by two trends of importance, that of pluralism and increasing technological influence, schools must consider facets of both in providing substance and meaning. It is our moral imperative to change with the times, inventing our own educational leadership practice in keeping with distinctive culture of schooling (Sergiovanni, 1996).

In contrast, schools in the Industrial Age were known as reflective elements of a society beset by a slow rate of change. These rigid designs of schools as organizations display discrete patterns of information flow. Typical bureaucratic organizational patterns insure security, but generate little creativity of thought, thus thwarting the advance of schooling into more resilient systems (Golarz, 1995). Rather than dredge up past practices, leaders might seek renewal techniques that empower participants in schooling, whether as student, board member, community stakeholder, patron or teacher-professional.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Fullan (1991) points to the establishment of shared meaning when considering solutions to the problem of facilitating substantive rather than superficial change. The leader's work in fostering a learning organization as proposed by Senge (1995) emphasizes three areas of interest for studying Riverside Elementary School as an emerging learning community: (1) Systems Thinking, (2) Creative Tension, and (3) Team Learning and Continuous Improvement. Creative Tension aligns organizational vision with present realities. As such, the impetus for change then emerges from the conflict between present status and future positions.

Another consideration, Systems Thinking, proposes that successful leaders might be less concerned about day to day events than change forces and underlying trends. Instead of finding significance in singular events, these leaders are process-oriented individuals. Dynamic complexity, rather than details, becomes strategically important. Systems Thinking suggests that additional emphasis be placed on efforts that result in enduring organizational improvements.

A final area of interest reflected in this study is expressed as follows: “If our aim is to help students become lifelong learners by cultivating a spirit of inquiry and the capacity for inquiry, then we must provide the same conditions for teachers” (Sergiovanni, 1997, p. 152). By examining Team Learning accompanied by Continuous Improvement, the duality of peer involvement and individual capacity alternate between practice and performance. Team Learning and Continuous Improvement suggest application and ongoing evaluation of decisions as they relate to changes designed to improve schools. Examined in light of an elementary school setting, Creative Tension, Systems Thinking and Team Learning provide insight for leaders searching for enduring organizational improvements.

Adoption of these perspectives as they impact the change process provides new avenues for understanding a dynamic educational institution such as Riverside Elementary School (Hord, et. al., 1987). Substantiation for Senge’s learning organization framework as delineated by Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement is suggested by Wheatley (1992) as follows:

We have started edging toward an answer to this question in our growing focus on studying organizations as whole systems rather than our old focus on discrete tasks. Organizations that are using complex system modeling are experimenting with these skills. In other organizations, this newer awareness of dynamic shape may occur simply in how problems are approached. Is there an attempt to step back from the problem, to gain enough perspective so that its shape emerges out of the myriad variables that influence it? Are people encouraged to look for themes and patterns, rather than isolated causes? (Wheatley, 1992, p. 138)



## **Purpose, Problem, and Related Research Questions**

The identification and discussion of factors encouraging Continuous Improvement may be influenced by collaborative, transformative leadership style (Burns, 1978; Reynolds, Rigsby & Wang, 1995). Because of the belief that change is the only truly constant phenomenon in this universe (Zukav, 1979), this study focused on the influences impacting organizational change processes and accompanying shifts in configurations necessary to respond to external and internal mandates (McWhinney, 1992; Wheatley, 1992). As in Bruner's (1977) framework for learning, the interrelationships of individual identity, organizational reality and leadership capability may well satisfy initial questions while serving to spawn additional professional inquiry (Clark, Goering, Herter, Lamar, Leonard, Moss, Robbins, Russell, Templin & Wascha, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1993; McKenzie, 1993; Wehlage, Rutter, Gregory, Smith & Fernandez, 1989).

Although research and literature provide insights about change, few studies have examined a particular site in-depth, over an extended period of time, and from multiple participant perspectives. Since individual schools are the most important units of pervasive change (Goodlad, 1984; Louis & Miles, 1990; Meier, 1995), this study was conducted to describe and explain the changing nature of Riverside Elementary School over a six-year period using Senge's (1995) Principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement.

The research addressed the following questions: (1) To what degree and in what ways are Senge's (1995) principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement useful in explaining change in Riverside Elementary School? (2) What sources (theory, concepts, research) explain the anomalies

not explained by Senge's (1995) principles?

### **Inquiry Methods**

This study used qualitative case study methods for data collection and analysis. More specifically, data collection and analysis employed explanatory case study methods (McCracken, 1988; Merriam, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Yin, 1989). Respondents were identified because of their participation in a school-centered change process during a six-year period from 1992 until 1998. Respondents included teachers, counselor, parents, community stakeholders, administrators and board members.

The process required to capture the subtleties of the process of organizational metamorphosis, whether by means of first order or second order change characteristics (Fullan, 1991), or by fundamental or incremental means (Cuban, 1997), is best addressed by an explanatory case study (Merriam, 1988). The focus of the study was the examination of Senge's (1995) tenets of a learning organization such as Creative Tension, Systems Thinking and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement which influence individual, school, and institutional improvement. The examination of such functions produces insight into the renewal of individual and educational systems generated from understanding the process of change when viewed from an individual school site (Boyd, 1992).

To address the nature of change at Riverside Elementary School, data included documents, anecdotal records, personal narratives, and long interviews. Data analysis involved reflective presentation, identification, and interpretation of multiple processes involved in a school centered change initiative.

Leadership is a key for school improvement projects that create lasting

improvements over a number of years in the life of the school community. As such, this study of Riverside Elementary School describes change initiatives through participant observer techniques with a thick, rich description of the six-year story of Riverside Elementary School. Notably, the process of data collection focused on the leadership in change initiatives derived from intensive participation within a school environment and how it served as a basis for individual, school and institutional improvement, as an alternative to fostering gridlock (Goldratt, 1984).

Explanatory case study research techniques provide tools with which to identify and discuss internal and external change forces as they interact with each other and within a given system. A cross section of key participants contributed to the school-centered improvement initiative originating in 1992 and continuing today in East Tower City (McCracken, 1988; Merriam, 1988). Interviews involved the school counselor, eight classroom teachers, three parents, two members of the Tower City Board of Education, two central office administrators, and four community partners. Individuals were selected because they possessed unique perspectives and knowledge of change involving Riverside Elementary School during the six-year period.

As suggested by Yin, (1989), following interviews, data collection and document review, five sources of evidence demonstrate changes at Riverside Elementary School beginning in 1992. The first source includes documents containing information from letters, agendas, projects and media coverage. A second source focuses on archival materials such as charts, maps, calendars and surveys. Formal and informal interviews provide the third source of insight for explanatory case study information. The fourth source of evidence emerges from the role of a participant observer within the context of

Riverside Elementary School. Finally, artifacts representing school culture and climate constitute a fifth source of information.

Three principles of data collection -- establishing multiple sources of evidence, formulating a retrievable case study data base and creating a chain of evidence were used to establish validity and reliability for the purposes of explanatory case study (Yin, 1989).

To address the propositions of explanatory case study, analysis depends on reflective practice combined with presenting data and interpreting influences related to substantive change as manifested in the Riverside Elementary School project (Yin, 1989). Assembling chronological events employs a specialized form of time-series analysis, involving the study of change.

A challenge presented itself in formulating research-subject relationships that reflected the least amount of research bias possible. The nature and rigor of the study required sufficient effort in observation, much like an outsider, balanced with active participation as an insider (Merriam, 1988). This duality of roles in gathering data adds to the difficulty of determining the extent of the impact the researcher has on the nature of the subject (Merriam, 1988). In order to overcome preconceptions, the researcher should respond appropriately to contradictory evidence. While still in the data collection phase of the study, Yin (1989) suggests reporting initial findings to a few critical colleagues for their insight to reinforce discretionary capability and to reduce bias.

Clearly, the process of investigation is influenced by the presence of the observer, in this case the principal of Riverside Elementary School. When interpreting data the researcher must overcome a tendency to put themselves in the place of the subjects of the study (Merriam, 1988). For all practical purposes, researchers must monitor the effects

of bias by taking such factors, especially that of a supervisory role in the school, into consideration when interpreting data.

Activities of those being observed might be altered by the following: (1) if suspicious, they might compensate with more desirable behaviors, (2) if aware of being assessed, they might have reacted to the study conditions, or have adjusted their responses based on feedback inadvertently provided by the investigator (Merriam, 1988).

To account for factors which might contribute to bias, the researcher maintained a constant effort to achieve natural interaction, denying the possibility, however desirable, of complete neutrality in investigation (Merriam, 1988). As the primary instrument in gathering and analyzing data, the principal as a human investigator reminded herself to be tolerant of ambiguity, sensitive to individual roles within the setting, cognizant of associated variables and data, and adherence to maintaining strong rapport with participants (Merriam, 1988).

### **Significance of the Study**

A study of change regarding schooling, its content and processes, presents a picture of institutions involved in establishing initiatives which link change and school improvement (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996). The challenge for schools in the change process is characterized by potential loss of power that ultimately threatens to escalate public vulnerability.

A haunting dilemma emerges for practitioners as change agents when such processes require personal transformation within a context of group vision. Even the most appropriate change initiative, earmarked by intense commitment and accompanied by intensive energy and effort, requires comprehensive technical and emotional support

for the transformation (Hargreaves, 1997). When subjected to waves of ineffective change measures, even educational enthusiasts quickly retire to a posture of negativity regarding future involvement in change initiatives or, worse, succumb to bitterness about their efficacy. By recklessly disregarding the nature and meaning of change in learning organizations, having rejected collaborative and transformational leadership techniques, educational change agents often complicate their own change initiatives at best, or sentence them to failure at worst, resulting in regression.

Educational practitioners who are convinced of the need to broaden the meaning and understanding of school change and improvement through employing an expanding variety of research-based “best practices” in organizations must understand the developmental nature of change. Practitioners often assume roles as catalysts for change in learning organizations but, unlike other settings, the risks suggest enormous expenses in terms of human and material resources if the change does not correspond to needs of the individual schools (Senge, 1995).

This chapter introduced the study of change in regards to schooling, the developmental nature of change as related to the research purpose, problem, the background of the study, conceptual framework, qualitative inquiry methods and significance of the study within the context of an explanatory case study. All of these elements contribute to our capacity to understand change as it occurred in a school-centered initiative at Riverside Elementary School.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter examines the nature of change within schools as learning communities, including three elements of the Learning Organization as proposed by Peter M. Senge (1995). Six areas of literature will be discussed beginning with the first section that characterizes the nature of change. The second section discusses supportive and shared leadership. The third section gives attention to collective creativity. The fourth section develops the notion of shared values and vision. The fifth section describes supportive conditions. The sixth section recognizes the importance of shared personal practice.

#### **The Nature of School Change**

Although school improvement is touted as the goal of change, many contrasting, often weaker characteristics emerge when they are compared to projects concentrating on individual sites as the most promising unit for meaningful institutional change. Change as a meaningful process, especially when accompanied by astute organizational leadership, clearly leads to school improvement reinvention (Golarz, 1995; Goodlad, 1994).

According to McWhinney (1992), the problem in formulating a sound theory for implementing substantive change is that few of the memorable change strategists, whether from scientific, social or political realms, have generated definitive outlines regarding such a process. McWhinney relates that the change process, as a cultural function, is based upon the emergence of environmental contingencies and entirely influenced by the worldview of the individual participant. Burns (1978) suggests that

collaborative and transformative functions may serve as catalysts for change while at the same time stabilizing institutions involved in change.

Senge's (1995) publication, The Fifth Discipline, signaled a new era of organizational theory for business and educational management circles. Senge (1995) recognized the need for pervasive organizational learning capacities not dominated by traditional authoritarian activity. Senge's ideas aroused renewed interest in the notion of redesigning existing mental models that previously had dominated organizational frameworks and practice.

Senge (1995), in collaboration with corporate members of the Center for Organizational Learning, founded in 1991 at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, proposed daunting changes in management theory. Building learning organizations represents a profound cultural impact on traditional Western Civilization goal-oriented managerial theory (1995, p. xv). As an alternative, Senge supports a radical redesign is the process of structuring corporations and educational institutions as communities of inquiry and experimentation (1995, p. xv). Thought (mental models) and interaction (dialogue) dictate the fundamental ways in which organizations work. "Only by changing how we think can we change deeply imbedded policies and procedures. Only by changing how we interact can shared vision, shared understandings, and new capacities for coordinated action be established" (1995, p. xiv).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher selected three of Senge's (1995) Principles presented in The Fifth Discipline of potential application to the school-centered change initiative at Riverside Elementary School. Explanation of these selected principles and an exploration of their interactions within an educational institution are



essential to an analysis of the data gathered during interviews at Riverside Elementary School.

### **Systems Thinking**

Senge's (1995) principle of Systems Thinking involves the dynamics and interrelated actions within an educational setting. Instead of focusing on organizational activity in small segments involving isolated parts of the system, every event and organizational activity is connected. Each activity impacts others with influences that are camouflaged unless we intentionally focus on contemplating the entire setting rather than as individual parts.

Systems Thinking finds its greatest benefits in helping leaders distinguish high from low leverage changes in highly complex situations. In effect, Systems Thinking lies in seeing through complexity to the underlying structures generating change. Systems Thinking does not mean ignoring complexity. Rather, it means organizing complexity into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and how they can be remedied in enduring ways. What we most need are ways to know what is important and what is not important, what variables to focus on and which to pay less attention to (Senge, 1995, p. 128).

### **Creative Tension**

The most effective leaders are those who can instill their vision while understanding cultural reality. This principle of Peter Senge's (1995) is also true for learning organizations that are committed to examining current practice in light of the vision. The organization's capacity to recognize and adapt from its mistakes proves crucial, especially during discouraging times. During the most trying times the vision

can spread based on clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment. As dialogue continues, enthusiasm for the proposed benefits can begin to build. At this point in the process of building Creative Tension, discussions may produce conflicting opinions about the vision. If the learning organization does not permit this diversity of viewpoint, polarization can increase, reducing the enthusiasm needed to attain the idea. As advocates for the vision, skilled leaders must also inquire about others' views of the ideal, thereby enlarging the context of discussion and efforts for this achievement. Visions can die because learners become discouraged when their version of the ideal is not incorporated into the dialogue of the learning organization and when only leaders advocate their version of such an ideal. Emerging visions can also erode because learners become overwhelmed by the demands of current reality. Leaders must find ways to streamline efforts in fighting crises and in managing current reality, so that the ideal does not completely exceed one's grasp.

Finally, a vision can die if people forget or remove their connections to each other. This can occur as a result of urgency for task completion that limits opportunity for interaction, meaningful dialogue, and relationship building and maintenance. Senge's (1995) postulate of Creative Tension requires commitment to a larger purpose and to one another.

### **Creative Tension Related to Systems Thinking**

Creative Tension is the picture of what we want to create as the ideal in the form of our vision and current reality. Systems Thinking conceptualizes how we have created and how we maintain what we currently have. Senge (1995) reminds us that vision becomes a living entity only when learners truly believe they can shape their future.

Many educational practitioners do not provide leverage in creating current reality or demonstrate ownership. Daily problems are created by somebody “out there,” or by the system. The dominance of this “event mentality” exposes the name of the game in organizations as one of simple reaction to change in deference to generating change itself. People formulate their own learning organizations and begin to learn how existing policies and actions impact current reality. This process provides a basis for more confidence in actually attaining an otherwise illusionary vision. Individuals must realize that reality is only one of several possibilities.

As learning organizations adapt to a new understanding and the possibilities of achieving a vision based on current reality, participants begin to build reference points for their thinking. Such patterns do not simply rely on events or crises, but evoke understanding of such events. This transition in mental habits requires reliance on holistic, rather than linear thinking. The essence of Systems Thinking lies in a shift of mind: (1) grasping interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect change and (2) seeing processes of change rather than snapshots of events” (Senge, 1995, p. 73). Senge explains that the real challenge of leadership in a learning organization lies in understanding dynamic complexities, not just detail. Many strategic planning and analysis methodologies previous to Senge (1995) provided focus on details rather than essential dynamics for change.

The use of Systems Thinking puts an end to the blame game in organizations. “Systems Thinking shows us that there is no outside; that you and the cause of your problem are part of a single system. The cure lies in your relationship with your enemy” (Senge, 1995, p. 67).

Using this notion, learning organizations may contemplate long-term initiatives in place of short-term crisis management. In this manner the organization begins to strengthen its ability to shoulder its own burden, in short, stabilizing its capacity for change. The leader's task becomes designing the learning processes required for change:

Building learning organizations involves developing people who learn to see as systems thinkers see, who develop their own personal mastery and who learn how to collaboratively surface and restructure mental models. Given organizations in today's world, this may be one of the most powerful steps toward helping us rewrite the code, altering not just what we think, but our dominant ways of thinking. In this sense learning organizations may be a tool, not just for the evolution of organizations, but for the evolution of intelligence (Senge, 1995, p. 367).

### **Team Learning**

Team Learning and Continuous Improvement is a priority for individuals and for groups. In order for this to occur, principles of healthy communication within and between groups must accompany a continuous learning principle. When healthy communication takes place, individual group members maintain an environment for optimum learning. They learn about themselves and about others. The group also learns. This group consciousness generates a synergistic wisdom that proves greater than the sum of its individual members. With such a basis, these teams can become unusually decisive and uniquely creative. In The Road Less Traveled And Beyond, Peck, (1996), identifies a working group with team capacities as a sustainable community. Senge, (1995) refers to this same synergistic function as a learning organization. Peck relates:

There is great reason to believe that the matter of group health is even more

significant than that of individual health. Just as individuals must continue to learn in order to survive well, so must our organizations and institutions. The survival of our civilization may well depend upon whether our institutions can evolve into sustainable communities and hence become ongoing learning organizations (1996, p. 136).

Deborah Meier, (1996), builds on this proposition:

No matter how many good programs there are, or how brilliantly conceived, because of their context they often turn into a charade. It is the culture of the school, not its programs that count. To create a culture is not easy; it takes a lot of face-to-face encounters. We built big buildings because we had some other idea in mind--factory style efficiency and because of the cost of space in large urban areas. But the buildings exist. What we want to do is use them to house small communities, each with sufficient autonomy to create for young people a living model of what it is like to be in control of one's environment, to have strong, stable, and continuous relationships (1996, p. 135).

Meier continues, acknowledging the importance of Team Learning and Continuous Improvement for educational practitioners:

Our intellectual curiosity about the world around us, our interest in it, our noticing that this or that is an amazing fact, an amazing idea--this is what makes each day memorable. Pursuing our interests develops habits of mind that gives hope...that sustain us through pain. It is fundamental to our health. Optimum learning takes place when we have continuous contact with people who are more expert than we are; when our learning organization or sustainable community is composed of

various stages of expertise (Meier, 1996, pp. 133-134).

### **Team Learning and Continuous Improvement**

Most of the outstanding leaders that I have worked with are neither tall nor especially handsome; they are often mediocre public speakers; they do not stand out in a crowd and they do not mesmerize an attending audience with their brilliance or eloquence. Rather, what distinguishes them is the clarity and persuasiveness of their ideas, the depth of their commitment and their openness to continually learning more. They do not 'have the answer' but they do instill confidence in those around them that, together, we can learn whatever we need to learn to achieve the results we truly desire (Senge, 1995, p.359).

Sometimes it is necessary to produce more questions and together determine the answer to those questions. "As our educational settings become more complex and diverse, schooling must become more learningful for all its participants" (Senge, 1995, p. 4). Strategies developed from the top of the organization are no longer appropriate at other levels of the organization when handed down with grandiose expectations of implementation. Rather, Senge suggests the following: "The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in the organization" (Senge, 1995 p.4). This capacity taps the innate human preference for learning in a team setting where group function depends on continuous inquiry and change, intrinsically a powerful motivational tool (Senge, 1995).

In an effort to analyze the complexities of the change process, Michael Fullan (1992) describes the realities of first order and second order change initiatives, the latter

providing recognizable lasting influence. His work validates the existence of phenomena he labels the Implementation Dip -- initial phases of change accompanied by organizational inertia. Fullan (1991) describes other basic characteristics of change:

1. Change is developmental rather than linear in nature.
2. The process of change depends upon individual implementation, translation and clarification involving uncertainty and ambiguity.
3. Conflict is essential to the meaning of change if individuals are going to understand the process.
4. Relearning is the essence of change because it involves pressure, effective only under conditions which allow time to react, formulate reactive positions, interact with others, and to obtain emotional and technical assistance.
5. Persistence is the foundation of change. Specific innovations require three to five years, systemic innovations five or more.
6. Do not assume that outright rejection to change exists without considering other possible factors.
7. Do not expect all or even most people or groups to change at all or in the same manner. To increase the amount of change, increase the number of people affected by breaking the process down into progressive steps.
8. Employ collaborative methods of planning and implementation based on models reflecting knowledge of the developmental change process.
9. Decisions about change will always involve ambiguity.
10. Changing the culture of institutions is the overriding goal instead of implementing single innovations (Fullan, 1991, pp.105-107).

Ainscow, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Balshaw, and Black-Hawkins, (1994), developed six techniques for mapping the process of change in organizations. Despite the many instances of externally mandated changes, their research attributes success of many change initiatives most often to the commitment of individual teachers. Certainly the result of any change in student achievement is the result of teacher behavior in the educational setting (1994) . At the same time, these investigators posit that the school culture makes an important contribution to developmental changes. Interaction between both levels is required if we are to understand the relationship between the individual and institution in processes of change (1994).

In contrast to Fullan's framework, Cuban (1997) conceptualizes two facets of change comprised of fundamental and incremental categories as outlined in his eighty-two year longitudinal study involving medical schools. The conclusion of his study suggests that medical schools as learning institutions have benefited from constantly adapting to needs for minor organizational changes rather than adopting sweeping reforms. Adaptation through incremental change fostered organizational capacity for continuous change to a greater extent than if major waves of reform periodically swept through the organization. Such shifts could be linked to the scientific culture of medical facility itself (Cuban, 1997).

Whether change occurs in individual instances or in systemic shifts involving continuous institutional improvement (Cuban, 1997; Grant & Peterson, 1996; Vinovskis, 1996) stakeholders from all venues of influence, motivated by desperation if nothing else, must tackle the challenges involved in embracing diversity and complexity in schools (Spring, 1995). If survival during times of transition is truly the toughest challenge of



one's resourcefulness, then educational leaders as researchers and practitioners must balance stability in the face of potential chaos (Sergiovanni, 1996, p.23).

Sergiovanni (1996), categorizes change rationale as either rules-based or norms-based and cites change mechanisms appropriate to educational settings to be ones featuring continuous-improvement and values-based transformational measures.

Goodlad's (1984) research involved thirteen diverse community prototypes included representation of all socioeconomic levels, (urban, suburban, rural, large, and small). The project involved more than one thousand classrooms, thirteen hundred teachers, eight thousand parents and seventeen thousand students, totaling more than twenty-seven thousand individuals.

Goodlad (1984) supports the notion that individual schools are the most important units of pervasive change. Goodlad stated three purposes in initiating his research. The first was to assist in a better understanding of schools and the problems that beset them. Other purposes included identifying priorities for school improvement and establishing the importance of monitoring data relevant to the process of improvement at a particular school.

Significant educational improvement of schooling, not mere tinkering, requires that we focus on entire schools, not just teachers, or principals, or curricula or organization or school-community relations but all of these and more. We might begin with one or several of these but it is essential to realize that all are interconnected and that changing any one element ultimately affects the others. Consequently, it is advisable to focus on one place where all of the elements come together. This is the individual school. If we are to improve it, we must

understand it. If we are to improve schooling, we must improve individual schools (Goodlad, 1984, p. xvi).

Goodlad's qualitative investigation included charting time on task, analyzing the nature of the tasks students were asked to accomplish, surveying curriculum offerings and evaluating the educational process. Goodlad advised evaluators to look less to test scores in determining the quality of education in our schools and more on what students are called upon to do (Goodlad, 1984). The research extended to examining organizational factors of institutional trust, bureaucratic structures, and unity of stakeholders in establishing partnerships for school improvement.

The fact is, however, that we are only beginning to identify the most significant problems, some of which are deeply entrenched and virtually chronic. Sorting them into a priority ordering and addressing them with some hope of success call for commitment, ingenuity, and collaborations beyond anything envisioned (Goodlad, 1984, p. xvi).

Goodlad's massive study of schooling suggests that community partnerships might successfully restore education as a community-based function. To redesign schooling, he proposes the following rationale: (1) to improve the quality and general effectiveness of existing institutions, (2) to develop an understanding of education as a community wide rather than only a school-based activity, and (3) to develop a new configuration of educational institutions including both the traditional ones and those of the media, business and industry, and cultural agencies (Goodlad, 1984, p. 354).

### **Supportive and Shared Leadership**

If the findings of McWhinney (1992) have integrity, the paucity of research about

the concept of leadership and meaningful change within learning organizations has limited our ability to analyze and utilize change initiatives for the purpose of improving schools. It is also evident that, in spite of the work of Goodlad (1994), Cuban (1997), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), Burns (1978) and others, leadership techniques could prove to be far more reflective of meaning as suggested by Senge, (1995) than is now evident.

Lieberman and Miller (1986) linked promising school improvement strategies that centered around the teacher, the classroom and interactions between teachers themselves and with administrators. Their findings, along with those of Lortie, (1975) indicate that schools still organize themselves as dispensaries of knowledge rather than centers of professional development and inquiry (pp. 108-109). The key idea presented by Lieberamn and Miller (1986) includes formulating improved learning communities for students by establishing a professional community focused on teacher development. Additional propositions are:

1. Building collaborative, cooperative structures and practices.
2. Understanding unique cultural characteristics of each school and how they affect developmental characteristics of change.
3. Sharing leadership.
4. Resisting simplistic solutions to complex challenges; realizing that teaching can be characterized as a craft.
5. Providing time for dialogue and continuous inquiry, which in turn, builds organizational capacity for establishing meaningful change (1986, pp. 108-109).

Sarason (1990) states that the leader is one entity considered most vulnerable when establishing new institutional settings. Schools themselves grow increasingly vulnerable as institutions while they are simultaneously berated for struggling with sweeping reforms. This is balanced with a kind of comfortable stability that the public expects from institutions serving as the social and emotional hub of individual communities (McKenzie, 1993). As schools strive toward meaningful new settings, it becomes important for leaders to recognize organizational factors regarding seamless, tangible, visible social change, for the sake of their own interests and that of followers (Kouzes & Pozner, 1993).

A school renewal project toward generating organizational and institutional excellence is a challenge of enduring significance. The determination of “excellence” connotes a process of systemic effort toward optimum achievement through group and individual accomplishment. Such a concept might be achieved by charting internal and external goals attained by means of a carefully crafted timeline and considerable study of the existing school culture and climate (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

Sarason (1995), and others suggest that scrupulous study of the history of a learning community will provide an appropriate foundation for investing in second-order change, which he contends is the only justifiable rationale because of its pertinent, pervasive character. If one ignores historic concepts, the ugly ones can come back to haunt even the most brilliant administrative tactician.

At the outset of a change initiative, an honest leader would sound a word of wisdom to those in the learning community concerning the ideas of Etzioni. Etzioni (1996) warns that motivational effort designed to change a setting by means of a coercive

or remunerative force will generate a climate of alienation or cold calculation. As an alternative, he suggests that those involved in integrating school improvement efforts should invoke a moral commitment to the cause, to one another, and future needs of schooling (Etzioni, 1996).

Daniel Lortie (1975) examined the world of schooling through teachers' eyes in his school-centered sociological research. He identified the cellular structures of schools as organizations as a unique feature of school communities, fostering isolation of teachers from interaction with other adults and alienation from professional settings that create knowledge in use. It is possible to draw parallels in Lortie's (1975) work with inmates' existence in prisons, because activity is organized around routine invoked to the detriment of continuous inquiry and reflection required for intellectual stimulation. Lortie (1975) identified teaching cultures as present-oriented, conservative, and loosely structured.

Preparation for change with appropriately planned resources is an integral process. Sergiovanni (1996) recommends that ongoing support for new techniques, in addition to essential routine monitoring, must occur. Monitoring without support mechanisms leads to intensifying the need for change, but shuts off the immediate mechanism for doing so.

Both internal and external sources of information should be sought for study, since Lortie, (1975) and others remind educators about their insulated perspectives of educational practices and of themselves. Intentionally involving the outspoken critics in the community is not a face-saving process, but generates collaborative thinking in the process of identifying past weaknesses. Burns (1978) stated that embracing conflict in

the learning community is not for the faint of heart, but can precede change of the most appropriate nature, technically and politically.

Key participants within the organization can also provide trust in the proposed changes for those who question new resolutions (Rosenholtz, 1989).

### **Collective Creativity**

Burns (1978) points to lasting change as a vital and continuous leadership function. He states, “Real change means the creation of new conditions that will generate their own changes in motivations, new goals, and continuing change” (Burns, 1978, p. 441). As need for future changes are prioritized, a rationale for change may emerge for most, but not for all in the present organization. Approximately eighty-five per cent of those involved will already have changed or will acknowledge the need for improvements. The remaining fifteen per cent will not readily change on the basis of volition.

The process of determining criteria for change and communicating with multiple players is important. As organizational theory reminds us, treating the symptoms is careless and half-witted, while identifying the underlying problem and designing pertinent solutions constitutes the real task at hand (Senge, 1995). It would serve most of our learning organizations quite well if we made a determined effort to flatten the existing organization in order to insure grass-roots involvement in decisions, thereby maximizing organizational ownership and energizing subsequent activity in a school-centered study (Golarz, 1995). A study of leadership and change is vital because the power of leadership in school improvement projects is complicated by the profile of the followers. Flawed collective visions and hapless individual roadmaps for renewal

destroy incentive for continuous improvement. As a result, enlightened leadership and individual and organizational capacity for change can prove to be vital to those who serve as change agents (Drucker, 1997).

It is not enough for leaders to know a little about change theory, because a little knowledge and corresponding application is dangerous in terms of the use of power and coercion so evident in organizations struggling with change initiatives (Elmore, McCarthy & Peterson, 1996; Louis & Marks, 1995). In such cases, organizations have neither the time nor the existing resources to allow such misdirection to dominate and destroy educational settings.

### **Shared Values and Vision**

In 1990 The Rand Corporation published research involving thirteen Catholic, special purpose public, and comprehensive public high schools serving similar urban populations. Within those settings, researchers (Hill, Foster & Gendler, 1990) found similarities in characteristics and achievement between the Catholic and special purpose public schools, termed “focused,” and the comprehensive public schools, termed “zoned.” The distinguishing factors between the two types of settings was the existence of the higher calling of a regenerating social contract, “that allows the community to speak to principals, parents, teachers and students with a moral voice” (Hill, Foster & Gendler, 1990, pp. 38-39). Other characteristics included:

1. Focus schools emphasize student outcomes over other considerations such as rules, programs and procedures.
2. Focus schools demonstrate a strong commitment to parenting by stressing ethical considerations of honesty, reliability, fairness, self-respect, and respect

for others. Zone schools transmit information and build skills.

3. Focus schools develop a core curriculum and common perspectives, through mentoring and other forms of activities perpetuating cultural norms.
4. Zone schools offer different curricula to different groups within the population (Hill, Foster & Gendler, 1990, pp. vii-viii).

The findings of the Rand Change Agent Study (1990) implied that leaders interested in creating change for the improvement in schooling should strive to create settings characterized with a norms-based rather than rules-based foundation in order to bring satisfaction and fulfillment to participants (McLaughlin, 1990).

### **Supportive Conditions**

Many factors determine when, where and how the staff can engage in the work of a learning community. School settings require learning laboratories that provide opportunities for collaborative planning, study, action research and decision-making. Louis and Kruse (1995), identify several physical factors that support the continuous improvement process: time for interaction, physical proximity, small school size, interdependent teaching roles, streamlined communication, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment. Additional factors are involvement in hiring new staff, and encouraging participants who are not compatible with current practice to find a more comfortable setting.

Louis and Kruse (1995) cited characteristics of teachers in a productive community as willing to accept feedback and to work toward improvement. Their study provided a strong link with findings by Boyd (1992), that identified: (1) optimistic attitudes toward schooling, students, and change; (2) enhanced learning interest and



engagement; (3) norms of continuous inquiry and improvement; (4) consensus of purpose; (5) norm of involvement in decision-making; (6) collegial relationships; (7) caring relationships; and (8) strong sense of school community, accompanied by supportive parents and community partners.

Boyd and Hord (1994) clustered physical and human factors that influence each other, generating a highly interactive environment. Their study identified four conditions that build a setting conducive to change and improvement which were reducing staff isolation, increasing staff capacity for change, a satisfying and productive environment, and enriched curricula.

If excellence through school renewal can be accomplished, the entire school culture reflects the professional identities of the individuals involved while the school identity becomes enriched and revitalized. An extended visit to a school involving itself in a local change initiative is essential to the meaning and understanding of what elements assist in embracing changes in schooling (Goodlad, 1984).

### **Shared Personal Practice**

One goal of school improvement is to provide appropriate learning environments for students. A second goal involves providing “an environment that values and supports hard work, the acceptance of challenging tasks, risk taking, and the promotion of growth” (Midgley & Wood, 1993, p. 252). Sharing personal practice enhances such a supportive setting. Wignall’s (1992) qualitative case study described a high school in which teachers shared their daily practice, collaboratively building respect and understanding. “Teachers tolerate (even encourage) debate, discussion and disagreement. They are comfortable sharing both their successes and their failures. They praise and recognize

one another's triumphs, and offer empathy and support for each others' troubles" (p. 18). One condition that supports this setting is the responsibility shared with teachers in interviewing, selecting and hiring new teachers to insure seamless transition as new staff members regenerate the school culture (Wignall, 1992).

Understanding the process of change initiatives according to Senge's three elements generates insight and meaning within institutions clouded with individual disillusion, frustration and confusion (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Goodlad, 1994). Coercive, whimsical, insubstantial change must be replaced by school-centered initiatives that supply meaning, understanding and continuous self-renewal. Through enlightened leadership, collective vision can unite with individual transformation, providing seamless cohesion of past, present and future school-centered improvement efforts (Goodlad, 1994).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented research and practice applied to the identification of substantive factors in school-centered change initiatives and the nature of change within schools as learning communities. Six attributes were discussed, (1) the nature of change, (2) supportive and shared leadership, (3) collective creativity, (4) shared values and vision, (5) supportive conditions, and (6) shared personal practice.

Chapter III describes the qualitative methodology used for this study. The chapter explains the rationale for selection of qualitative research methods, examines research bias, data collection techniques and data analysis.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

Chapter I discussed the implications that research and literature provide when seeking insights about change, given that few studies have examined a particular site in-depth, over an extended period of time, and from multiple participant perspectives. Since individual schools can successfully demonstrate meaningful change (Goodlad, 1984; Louis & Miles, 1990; Meier, 1995), it is useful to describe and explain the changing nature of Riverside Elementary School over a six-year period using three of Senge's (1995) principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement.

Chapter II provided an examination of the existing literature concerning the nature of school change, the influence of leadership as a critical function for school improvement and subsequent renewal, and schools as community entities. The review of literature concluded that change that focuses primarily on needs at the individual school site provides the optimum opportunity for creating meaning and understanding for participants. In order to create lasting change, the process has to be personalized according to the needs of the stakeholders involved (Hargreaves, 1997).

This chapter will present the research methodology which guided this study and the qualitative methodology used; including a descriptive profile of participants, information about the interview process, the methods of data collection, analysis and researcher subject relationship.

## **Rationale for the Method**

The purpose of this study was to present a school-centered change initiative from the perspective of twenty participants in an elementary school setting. When examining the nature of individual perceptions about change, it can be helpful to address ways of demonstrating the nature of reality according to positivism and naturalistic inquiry. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), comparing axioms of positivist and naturalist paradigms provides clarity in a discussion of research methodology appropriate for a study of human behavior. They suggest that,

1. Positivist reality is compartmentalized; in contrast, naturalistic paradigm realities are holistic.
2. Positivist inquiry represents a dualism between investigator and subject; while naturalistic inquiry is based on an interactive relationship between the two.
3. The positivist paradigm allows for a context-free and time-free environment for study and generalization; instead, the naturalistic paradigm is confined in terms of context and time.
4. Positivist inquiry allows for clear identification of direct links between cause and effect in system dynamics; naturalistic inquiry requires no clear distinction between the two influences.
5. Positivist inquiry is insulated from values; naturalistic inquiry is closely associated with a pre-existing value system (p. 37).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further argue that a positivist approach to research generates simple explanations about human behavior displayed in socially complex

environments. Because positivists assume that truth can be measured and interpreted precisely, differences in interpretations of human events that are difficult to quantify may subsequently be ignored. Rubin and Rubin (1995) express such a limitation for researchers, “In short, the counting aspects of the research, although useful, tell only a small part of the story and not always the most interesting or useful part” (p. 34).

Research strategy selection is a decision that is based upon the focus of inquiry established by the researcher (Yin, 1989). Understanding the process of change involved more depth of information than classifying and categorizing events that took place during a six-year period of school improvement beginning in 1992 and ending in 1998 at Riverside Elementary School. The goal was to examine and understand elements of change according to specific tenets of learning organizations as suggested by Senge (1995). Senge’s elements include Systems Thinking, Creative Tension and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement. Using the individual school as a context, it is important to determine the meaning of key events, and how respondents perceived these events using Senge’s Principles of a Learning Organization as a lens for data collection and analysis.

Positivist models search for universal laws by testing for pre-defined variables, usually deduced from existing theory (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.32). Guba and Lincoln (1995) suggest that the positivist paradigm meets the requirements for controlled experiments, such as demonstrated in the field of quantum physics; however, they assert that naturalistic inquiry makes an important contribution to social and behavioral research. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), scientific inquiry, however important to “hard” sciences such as physics and chemistry, is not completely appropriate for the

study of complex human behavior. As an alternative measure, naturalistic researchers develop an understanding of the world of the participant based on experiences, interpretations, descriptions, and the underlying contextual setting.

In order to select a research strategy, Yin (1989) suggests that the researcher base the decision on the nature of the research question. The selection process should reflect both the substance and form of the research question. Yin outlines three questions: (1) What is the form of the research question? (2) Does the research seek control over behavior, or does it describe natural occurrences? (3) Is the time dimension contemporary or historical?

In this study the researcher is interested in determining which of Senge's elements are helpful in explaining individual meaning and organizational transformation when an individual school site is involved in a six year change initiative. The series of real-life events highlighted in the study were based on individual perspectives about the process, the forces brought to bear on the individual school, and the institutional transformation as applied to schooling. Researchers and practitioners examine such functions as processes critical to continuous improvement of educational systems (Merriam, 1988).

Merriam (1988) asserts that qualitative research methodology requires a process of inductive inquiry in place of deductive and experimental procedures. Although both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used, qualitative methods are generally preferred for social science research because they generate rich, thick descriptive interpretations of complex settings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Merriam (1988) lists six characteristics of qualitative research:

- primary concern is the process rather than products,

- interest is in determining meaning and understanding,
- researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis,
- fieldwork is required for observation in the natural setting,
- words or pictures are used to describe rather than quantify,
- inductive reasoning builds rather than tests theory (pp. 19-20).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) discuss qualitative case study as appropriate “when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events” (p. 51). Yin (1994) argues that case study embraces a contemporary event in a realistic context using multiple sources of evidence. Yin (1994) contends that case studies satisfy research requirements when “how” or “why” questions involving contemporary events over which little control exists. According to Merriam, (1988), other factors include the nature of the research questions, the ability to control, and the final product (p. 9).

Yin (1989) classified case study research into explanatory, descriptive and exploratory types. If causal factors in real life prove to be too complex for experimental or survey tactics, then the first type, explanatory case study, is warranted. A second type, descriptive case study, depicts a context in realistic terms that were impacted by formal intervention. Finally, exploratory case study is required if the researcher encounters situations that lack a singular conclusion.

The focus of inquiry addressed in this research required qualitative case study method and data collection techniques. The study focused on the following questions: (1) To what degree and in what ways are Senge’s (1995) Principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement useful in explaining

change in Riverside Elementary School? (2) What sources (theory, concepts, research) explain the anomalies not explained by Senge's (1995) Principles?

### **Inquiry Methods**

McCracken's (1988) inquiry method guided this study by employing four means of investigation. The initial step of inquiry was an extensive review of the literature that was inspired by reading Goodlad's (1984) A Place Called School that scrutinized a cross-section of thirteen educational settings across the nation.

The second step of the investigation process declared the researcher as the "primary instrument" for assembling data (Merriam, 1988, p.19). Data collection and analysis was related to the function of leadership at the school site since the building principal conducted the qualitative study. As supervisor, my participation in an administrative role afforded an advantageous wellspring of information related to the project. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that an on-going working relationship with the participant is of primary importance to the research process, "Your interest, curiosity, and concern encourage the conversational partner to discuss the topic at length" (1995, p.41). My keen interest as researcher involved in school change, longevity of more than ten years in school administration, and abiding advocacy in maintaining collegial relationships with co-workers may have positively influenced the rapport established for purposes of this research study.

The same supervisory role jeopardizes the research study, presenting instances where interview content may have been compromised, especially in maintaining close relationships over a period of time. Rubin and Rubin suggest, "We need to pay attention to how interviewees perceive us and how those perceptions influence what they are



willing to say and how openly they are willing to talk” (1995, p.40).

An ongoing relationship existed between the interviewee and the school principal as researcher because of mutual involvement at Riverside Elementary School (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Contacts with these individuals were made in person or by phone in order to schedule interview sessions each lasting not less than a minimum of forty-five minutes to a maximum of two hours each. The series of interviews began on March 14, 1998, reaching completion by June 30, 1998. Each interview was tape-recorded and the data transcribed verbatim in order to address possible need for clarification of information by means of ongoing member checks.

Following the initial interview, phone calls or follow-up conversations provided clarification of interview content. The analysis of the interviews and the explanation of the changing nature of Riverside Elementary School over a six-year period using three of Senge’s (1995) Principles revealed emergent themes of interest in discovering how Senge’s (1995) principles were useful to explain the project. Discovering of meaning and understanding from the multiple perspectives of key participants in a school-centered change initiative provides the greatest potential for best professional practices in educational settings (Merriam, 1988). This step provided a need for member checks in the form of informal follow-up interviews. As discussed by Rubin and Rubin, “Sometimes what you follow up on are contradictions between your broader understanding of a situation and the immediate responses that you hear” (1995, p. 216).

According to Erlandson and others, (1993), case study research techniques provide tools with which to identify and discuss internal and external change forces as they interact with each other and within a given system. Rather than a smattering of

variables, the case study approach to research problems describes, examines and interprets events (Merriam, 1988). “There is no manipulation of treatments or subjects, the researcher takes things as they are” (Merriam, 1988, p.7). Extensive referential materials involved a cross section of key participants in the school-centered improvement initiative originating in 1992 and continuing today in East Tower City (McCracken, 1988; Merriam, 1988).

### **Data Collection**

This study of Riverside Elementary School described a change initiative through document analysis, interviews and direct observation yielding thick, rich accounts of the six-year chronology of the change initiative at Riverside Elementary School. Yin (1989) contends that interview constitutes a valuable source of case study information. Long interviews included the school counselor, three lead teachers, five regular classroom teachers, three parents, two members of the Tower City Board of Education, two central office administrators, and four community partners. Two of the teachers selected held special education certification, three served as intermediate level teachers and three as primary level teachers. The school counselor and one Board of Education member were former primary and early childhood level classroom teachers. Individuals were selected because they each possessed unique project perspective and knowledge of changes involving Riverside Elementary School throughout the six-year study. The majority of the tape-recorded interviews took place in the Riverside Elementary School office, others in school, legal or professional development offices, Tower City central offices, or East Tower City restaurants.

As suggested by Yin, (1989), interviews, observation and document review are

useful data sources. Documents included information from letters, agendas, special projects, electronic media and print media coverage. A second source focused on archival materials such as charts, maps, school calendars and formal surveys. Formal and informal interviews provided the third source of information. Typical interview format invited the participant to consider six questions as posed by the researcher. Principal Roberts asked participants to describe how Riverside Elementary School had changed during the previous six years, how the changes occurred, who was involved in making the changes, what perceptions could be shared about them, and what aspects of the changes were most and least rewarding professionally and/or personally. The fourth source of evidence emerged from the role of a participant within the context of Riverside Elementary School captured as the principal's perspective. Finally, artifacts representing school culture and climate such as yearbooks constituted a fifth source of information.

Each private interview session protected the confidentiality of teachers, parents, community partners, board members, and administrators involved. The average requirement for one taping session was forty-five minutes. No more than two hours' time was necessary for any interview. Each participant agreed to meet with the researcher at places and times of convenience. Duplicate tape recordings were generated for each session to offset a malfunction in devices. Tape recordings were labeled and catalogued by the respondent's pseudonym, role, date, time and tape recording number from one to twenty. Each session and individual participant provided a unique experience for the investigator. Surprisingly, a teacher respondent who seemed reluctant to speak loud enough even for a tape recording sound level check, proceeded to clearly and succinctly summarize her experiences in easily understood and insightful terms requiring

approximately thirty minutes of meeting time. In contrast, an attorney belonging to the Tower City Board of Education, spoke for two hours duration supplying ambiguously general responses to content questions posed by the researcher.

These encounters ranged from breakfast, luncheon meetings, and casual conversations over coffee, to sessions scheduled before or after formal professional development training. One interview session had to be rescheduled because the participant, in this case a member of the Tower City Board of Education, developed a conflict in responsibilities. For protection of confidentiality, each key participant voluntarily signed a Consent Form (Appendix A). Pseudonyms replaced the names of individual participants, institutions, and printed documents to insure that references would be confidential. Typed transcriptions provided a hard copy of the data that was then scanned into a computer database. Back-up copies of the interviews were made on floppy disks to insure accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

After data collection, interviews were transcribed then scanned into a computer database established for analysis purposes by cataloguing by date, time, participant and topic. To address the propositions of explanatory case study, data analysis depended on reflective practice combined with presentation of evidence and comprehensive interpretation of influences related to substantive change, as discussed in the Riverside Elementary School project (Yin, 1989). Assembling chronological events employed a specialized form of analysis, involving the study of changes over time, as portrayed by the Riverside Elementary School profile, especially as reflected in aspects involving Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement.

Chronology served the need of this study in a variety of ways, most notably by describing leadership of school-centered change spanning a six-year course of the study from 1992 until 1998.

To preserve the focus of the research study, on-going analysis of the data occurred in order to process the amount and type of data. Emergent themes appeared from the recorded comments of key participants that could then be clustered under general headings. Other themes appeared as anomalies in connection with organizational elements described by Goodlad (1984) and others (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1996). Quotes and reference by paraphrase were also cross-referenced to Senge's elements (1995) when appropriate. As the themes developed, the researcher utilized spaces in the pages of hard copies to sketch insights, additional comments, need for follow-up conversation for clarification of understanding, or additional detail (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

### **Trustworthiness Criteria**

Three principles of data collection, establishing multiple sources of evidence, formulating a retrievable case study data base and creating a chain of evidence were used to establish validity and reliability for the purposes of explanatory case study (Yin, 1989). Erlandson and others, (1993) suggest that building trustworthiness as described by Guba and Lincoln, (1989) encompasses credibility that can be closely tied to the focus of inquiry, can be communicated, applied and verified as to investigative process and findings. Research that demonstrates and provides a basis for truth-value in response to valid inquiry allows external judgments to be made about procedural consistency and neutrality (Erlandson et. al., 1993).

## **Credibility**

Credibility represents the relationship between the data generated from the inquiry and the corresponding phenomena. In order to establish this important relationship, the school principal as investigator sufficiently invested in, “prolonged engagement,” with the setting for a period of six years in order to understand a daily events as a matter of course (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 30). Persistent observation produced depth of understanding by approaching interpretation of events by generating continuous trial interpretations, each representing a different perspective (Erlandson, et. al., 1993). By accumulating information from multiple points of view, the researcher was able to separate espoused beliefs from actual behaviors, which were then confirmed by documentation and records, producing “triangulation of information” (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 31). Materials supplied ample information for contextual understanding of the data, or “referential adequacy,” (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 31). “Peer debriefing,” and “member checks,” offered extensive discussion, and verification of information (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 31). Lincoln and Guba (1989) stated the importance of a member check for establishing credibility. Because participants are currently members of the same school community, their immediate access provided a convenient reference for the purposes of member checks required for a credible ongoing study.

Although naturalistic inquiry is context-specific, the researcher strives to accurately describe the setting under study and responsibility for demonstrating transferability (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 33). Creating a “thick description,” of the setting allows the reader to understand as though the reader, were in the participant role (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 33). “Purposive sampling,” afforded richly detailed data and

information (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 33).

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the process by which the study was conducted, represented by a “dependability audit,” or outline of procedural events, logged in journal form (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 34).

### **Confirmability**

The “confirmability audit,” provides for examination of a sampling of data (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p 148). Even though qualitative research efforts do not rely upon replication to other sites in order to establish reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1988) suggest that demonstrating internal validity confirms reliability requirements. An audit trail was created to review documentation and explain data and confirm reliability of research data. Six categories of audit trail materials were reviewed and discussed in order to establish triangulation of information. These included raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis items, process notes and photographs, videotapes, materials relating to participant intentions and dispositions, and information relative to any instrument development (Lincoln & Guba, 1988, pp. 319-320).

On January 19, 1999, an audit team of study participants convened as a prerequisite tool for confirming data. Members included three Riverside Elementary School parents, three partners, six teachers, counselor, two teachers from neighboring schools, and three Tower City District administrators. In order to provide a comprehensive member check for the final stages of the research project, audit team participants reviewed compiled narratives of the long interview as background information for a Tower City School Public Schools Elementary School Evaluation

session (Erlandson et. al., 1993).

Triangulation of information from multiple sources reinforced reliability and internal validity (Merriam, 1988). Multiple methods of document analysis, interviews and direct observation enhanced the emergence of themes (Yin, 1989), and trustworthiness.

Since reliability and internal validity are closely aligned with generalizability, it is unrealistic to expect that explanations of Senge's Elements of the Learning Organization and sources explaining anomalies (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1996) would be useful to all other settings, but are transferable in other comparable settings.

### **Researcher Subject Relationship**

Patton (1990) advised that awareness of the researcher's perspective influences fieldwork and presents a strong need for documenting research procedures, openly acknowledging potential for limitations caused by the researcher's role or perspective. Rather than achieving objectivity, the issue then becomes the conscientious documentation effort made by Principal Roberts as researcher to establish reliability and validity by maintaining sensitivity about observer bias (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1969).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) propose that the "finest research skills that can be introduced into a research project are empathy, sensitivity, humor, and sincerity" (p.12). As Riverside principal in this instance, the researcher maintained an evolving relationship with each participant at Riverside Elementary School because of an existing leadership role. Rubin and Rubin (1995) discuss the difficulty in maintaining neutrality, choosing to maintain balance, instead, by asking for multiple sides of the same story: "Too little



identification with the subjects of the research distances and distorts, but too much identification can obscure the faults of the interviewers” (p. 37).

Rubin and Rubin suggest that access to participants is an advantage richly afforded by the investigator in this explanatory case study design (p. 55). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), the convenience of ongoing member checks generated by participation in the daily events of the Riverside Elementary School change initiative confirms the trustworthiness of the research, “...if you cannot understand something in the specific first, you cannot understand in the general later” (p. 39).

The administrative role fulfilled by the researcher, generated data blended from personal and institutional insight to benefit the research project. As argued by Wheatley (1992), the investigation warranted intense effort by “to step back from the problem, to gain enough perspective so that its shape emerges out of the myriad variables that influence it” (p.138). Wheatley urges the investigators to “find combinations of key patterns or principles that express the system’s overall identity and great levels of autonomy for individual staff members” (Wheatley, 1992, p.11). To gain perspective, frequent conversations focused on follow up questions and assisted the investigator to figure out how to put together partial or unclear responses which might ultimately reflect researcher subject relationship rather than what perspectives participants held in general (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Throughout the course of the research and follow-up, the researcher struggled to resist the constant temptation to “go native,” presented by prolonged field experience as building administrator (Turnbull, 1968). Opportunity for participant review of the compiled narratives of the interviews provided confirmation of information in the form of member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Throughout the

duration of the study, conversations at weekly breakfast meetings provided opportunities for peer debriefing. The January, 1999, audit team review of information allowed the investigator to formatively and summatively discuss and evaluate interviews and continuously refine the focus of inquiry (Erlandson et. al., 1993).

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the reasoning for the method of the study, selection of key participants, methods of data collection, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness criteria and discussed impact of the Riverside Elementary School principal as researcher in regard to researcher subject relationships. A framework provided by McCracken's (1988) four-step inquiry-based procedure involved a review of the existing research literature, followed by data collection and analysis, and determining of what themes were useful in explaining changes at Riverside Elementary School.

## CHAPTER IV

### RIVERSIDE ELEMENTARY

Discussions of the nature of school-centered change initiatives pique the interest of many, from educational researchers to practitioners. Many changes in schooling can occur as a result of school-centered needs rather than as a result of district-wide decisions. Introduced at a school site rather than solely at central offices, the impetus for lasting change provides mutual benefit for researcher and practitioner as they analyze the events, ideas, and explanations of the change process beginning in 1992 at Riverside Elementary School (Goodlad, 1984).

Previous chapters outlined the purpose of the study, provided a review of the related literature, and discussed the methodology guiding the study. Chapter IV will present the research data related to the questions of inquiry:

1. To what degree and in what ways are Senge's (1995) Principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement useful in explaining change in Riverside Elementary School?
2. What sources (theory, concepts, research) explain the anomalies not explained by Senge's (1995) Principles?

#### **Before the Waves of Change**

On the first day of school in the month of August 1992, Ms. Applegate witnessed several students giggling near a hallway drinking fountain. As she turned the corner beyond the fountain, she overheard an excited fourth grader turn to a friend and say, "This is the same building, but a new school" (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Riverside Elementary School, for seventy-five years a local Tower City landmark

and educational safe haven, overlooks a scenic tributary, which resembles at times a rolling river, at others a mere trickle. Like the waterway, this school is one of remarkable contrasts (Goble, 1997, p. 16). Riverside Elementary experienced dramatic changes involving strong characteristics of collaboration and transformative leadership. Before the waves of change began, schooling was different as described in this case study.

It was in the early 1880's that what we know as Tower City emerged as optimistic merchants and skilled traders sought opportunities associated with the newly built railhead just east of the bend in the Tower River (Goble, 1997). Completion of the trestle enabled the passage of steam engines across the river to the bustling East Tower community of New Castle, nestled at the foot of local landmark, Hideaway Mountain, previously known as New Castle Hill. Switches and rail yards stimulated additional economic activity as New Castle became a commercial center for cattle drives and exchange of items from neighboring territories (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

The discovery of oil in a neighboring area increased the exploration activity all along the communities along the rails. Spawned by a boom of immense proportion in New Castle in June of 1901, activity related to exploration for oil multiplied in East Tower City, which at one time hosted almost two dozen refineries (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997). Like New Castle, communities nearby appeared to develop almost overnight, fostering distinctive small town identities shielded from the urban sprawl to the northwest by the Tower River (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

East Tower City's "Golden Triangle" of modern expressways simplifies access to any Tower City location. Loyal East Tower City residents considered themselves

fortunate to inhabit this historic “Gateway to Tower City,” one which provided a small town community identity within metropolitan sprawl (Goble, 1997, p. 68). Generations of families have chosen to bring their families “back to” East Tower City for its neighborly small town environment (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

First settled a century ago by white families associated with the industrial complexes, East Tower City is the historic stronghold of the working and welfare class family. Several loosely connected historically grounded communities still exist in the area, exhibiting strong loyalty to the microcosmic community, and East Tower City entirely. Almost two dozen industries called the area home fifty years ago (Goble, 1997). More recently, three planned communities whose dwellings surround a golf course appeared in the 1970’s. Described to outsiders as “clannish,” Eastside residents have an independent orientation toward city life, including fundamentalist religious conservatism. Religious zealots boast of a yearly open air Easter Sunrise Pageant and a lifestyle similar to any small town in the Midwestern United States (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98). A stubborn streak of blatant independence and abject disregard for conventional social conventions, normally honored by other residents of Tower City, constitute a point of civic pride (Seawright Interview, 6/7/98). Even so, East Tower City’s ease of accessibility to downtown regions or suburbs make it possible to be practically anywhere in Tower City in a matter of minutes (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

Shielded by the Tower River from the clutter and sprawling congestion of west Tower City, today’s East Tower neighborhoods, whether aging or newly developed, preserve the feeling of intimacy sought after in mainstream American communities. Small businesses, schools and churches retain a strong focus on generational ties, some

reaching back to the early 1880's as trailblazers clustered around the newly-built railhead near the bend in the Tower River (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

One illustration of the ferocity of commitment to Eastside family identity and traditions occurred during a dispute one Memorial Day over the name of a private Eastside cemetery. One family, the Simmons, claimed ownership of the cemetery land on the basis of sentiment (and little else) because the family matriarch was the first of many family members to be buried there, after the end of the Civil War. The rival Burns family took issue with the ownership, as espoused by the Simmons relatives, by displaying a deed to the land occupied by the cemetery which had been in their possession for over fifty years (World, May 27, 1997).

In the spring of 1997, peaceful and patriotic East Tower City Memorial Day festivities ground to a halt as a Burns family member videotaped a Simmons daughter threatening that he would "burn in hell" should his claim to the land continue. Shortly after that confrontation, numerous Simmons devotees swarmed the cemetery at an appointed time, allegedly to decorate gravesites. A fracas began between several participants from both factions. Witnesses on the scene of the animated scuffle recalled seeing an individual knocked to the ground. Assailants yanked her hair from her scalp by the handful. The incident injured several combatants, resulting in criminal charges of public quarreling accompanied by an additional charge of assault. The amateur videotape was shared with news media displaying a blatantly provincial image of East Tower City residents across the nation (World, May 27, 1997).

The East Tower City schools, when compared to others in Crystal County, display conservative characteristics to the point of appearing reactionary in imitating 1950's

instructional scope and style. Higher education is readily available at a branch of Tower City Community College. One feature of the new campus is a state-of-the-art child development center (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

Diamond High School, a campus in a park setting, revisits the Art Deco era as a comparatively historic 1930's showplace. Judged by urban secondary school standards a microcosm of a typical 1990's high school, it serves only seven hundred students housed in a breathtaking facility built in a bygone architectural era. Faculty turnover at Diamond High is relatively low because many faculty members come "home to the Eastside" to teach where they went to school. Business-related and vocational technical training programs produce many graduates well qualified for the industrial workforce so prominent on the Eastside. The tightly knit Eastside community supports the school by a strong showing at sporting events, homecoming parades and contributions to the school foundation. For those living in East Tower City, more than a few refer to the culture of the locale as resembling small town America (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

Williams Middle School, located within two blocks of the high school, clearly resembles the legendary junior high school of the 1950's rather than an example of a modern middle school concept. The multi-story blonde brick building houses five hundred students, but lacks the attractive features of historic Tower City High School. The neighborhood combines residential and industrial influences ranging from a refinery, and adjacent rail yard, to ramshackle motels and single family dwellings (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

As secondary school years begin, extra-curricular activities reveal their importance to eastside constituents. The local school district does not officially offer

organized sports for this age group, but works collaboratively with a privately sponsored association to do so. Organized by lay coaches, teams compete as school entities. Middle school students who are graduates of Riverside Elementary School gain limited access to extra-curricular programs held at school. A few of the students from the Old East Tower vicinity who attend Williams School travel by bus to and from that location, but after a few weeks of a new academic year have passed, are often seen hanging out in the Old East Tower neighborhood. They fall prey to difficulty in school, compounded by their own erratic behavior patterns that exclude them from the Williams School environment by means of school suspensions (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

The most fortunate of the East Tower City dropouts eventually begin Alternative School programs, also requiring transportation away from their homes. Others who choose not to continue in school may find employment in the surrounding area or immediately across the Tower River in West Tower City (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

At both of the secondary schools, Diamond High School and Williams Middle School, the courses of study are highly departmentalized. The relatively small learning environment provides advantages for high challenge youngsters from the Old East Tower City neighborhood. A teaching assignment at Diamond High School is sought after because the community supports good teachers. Recently, the school faculty, staff, parents and administration completed transition to a block schedule modified exclusively for the needs of Diamond High School (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

Comments favorable to Diamond High School might not be repeated about Williams Middle School for a variety of reasons, such as the issue of student control.



Interest in implementation of an enriched, interdisciplinary curriculum integration has yet to truly evolve as an integral characteristic of the Williams Middle School program of instruction or staffing (Tower City Public Schools Profile. 1997).

There are five public elementary schools in East Tower City. Two additional schools are privately supported. Both are noted in the community for modern, attractive facilities and above average student achievement. One is a small, relatively reclusive parochial school called Saint Ann's. The other, plush urban Sun Country Day School features an expansive modern campus close to planned residential communities and golf courses. Sun Country Day School business manager, Alan Ward, provides visible leadership for the East Tower City Chamber of Commerce. Considering the prerequisites of transportation and tuition, it is rare that an Old East Tower City resident might qualify by logistical or fiscal means to attend either of these institutions (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

The remaining Eastside Elementary Schools are small, public, tradition minded representations of the rival historic East Tower City communities in which they are located. One facility features an open-concept architectural design, but does not necessarily feature a corresponding open-concept curriculum framework. Of the remaining Eastside Schools, the modern Russell School serves a high-challenge, highly mobile population from nearby public housing, as does Riverside Elementary School. In contrast to the industrial setting of Riverside Elementary School that owes allegiance to the Old East Tower City neighborhood, Russell Elementary School is located on a gently rolling hill in the heart of a peaceful residential addition called Fairview Farms (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

Anderson Elementary School, an Eastside contrast to Russell School, is a picture of red brick tradition. If your grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters or cousins attended school in this setting, you, too, were destined for its hallways and playgrounds. The informal norm of recruitment exists to perpetuate a legacy of strong attendance at this bastion of Eastside community pride. A former All State basketball star from Diamond High School, Dan Allen, is the principal of Anderson School where a “what was good enough before should be good enough for you,” mentality persists for generations of students (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

Although local sages of the Eastside Historical Society refrain from making candid references, rumors persisted of Ku Klux Klan activities that “attracted and temporarily pacified the young and rootless men needed for the refineries and oil fields” (Goble, 1997, p. 130). These hushed references shed an eerie light on the East Tower City of the past. Presently many minority groups populate the small geographic section of the city rather than the southern section that has been an historic minority stronghold. One of the reasons for such individualism was to remove the stereotypic element of racial identity from dominating their entire existence. This was an effort of extreme importance to those who reside there, especially if they are not native to Tower City, or recognizably “not from around here” (Goble, 1997).

The East riverbank area that surrounds Riverside Elementary has the highest minority representation of all of East Tower City, while featuring one of the lowest per capita income levels. To some, the economic features of the neighborhood reveal a highly concentrated pocket of poverty during Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. The purpose of the Urban Renewal effort at the time was to create inexpensive housing

for families who needed temporary quarters as they moved to more desirable permanent housing (Goble, 1997). Over the years, the families have been extremely transient, but fall short of capacity for upward mobility. Many of the families, some from out of state, who live in the Old East Tower city area have moved directly from homeless or domestic abuse shelters.

The local businesses and industries also provide a key to a unique identity. Several heavy industrial complexes dominate the East Tower City landscape, the air is sprinkled with their effluents and fenced grounds are covered with cylindrical storage tanks, particularly the Old East Tower City section. The Old Dominion Railroad tracks parallel the present main arterial, Northwest Boulevard, renamed from Sequoyah Boulevard, the previous landmark (Gomez, 1998). Drifters live under a highway overpass close to rail access. Ironically, opposition to building the state highway itself grew strong during the 1960's, fueled by fears that local businesses would be neglected when the streamlined roadway provided less congested travel to downtown Tower City (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

A closed convenience store across the street boasts plywood windows and inactive gas pumps because too many drivers helped themselves to fuel without payment. A massive welding and hardware supply and training center occupies much of the business zone. Other facilities include the local bank, law offices, bars, small churches, fast food and convenience stores, laundromats, small discount stores, doughnut shops and a frequently patronized pawn shop.

Bob's Barbecue Beef Restaurant's popularity often excludes Riverside Elementary School clientele from sampling its cuisine. Equally exclusive is another

popular gathering place featuring “down home” cooking in a historic railroad setting that features intricate working model train displays. Service clubs and the East Tower City Historical Society and Chamber of Commerce make their home there, symbolizing the importance of a bygone era. Around the corner in a scenic wooded section of town, closed Easthaven Elementary School provides engaging headquarters for City Park and Recreation activities. Downtown Tower City dominates the skyline of this area, in contrast to much of the small town atmosphere of the local surroundings (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

East Tower City features a festival complex including a floating amphitheater for outdoor concerts and parking facilities adjacent to the river. Used for holiday concerts, and outdoor carnivals, the Old East Tower City area is frequented by throngs of jovial visitors, especially youthful ones. Rarely do Old East Tower City residents of any age mention attending these events, even though they are located within easy walking distance of the grounds.

Local yachting crews launch their craft from a dock close by. When first built, this complex featured wooden play equipment, marketed as fireproof, which vandals soon burned to the ground (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

A medical facility housing a training center for physicians under the auspices of a regional four-year university captures a prominent corner of the East Tower City skyline. In addition, the modern complex offers a medical library, auditorium, medical examiner’s offices and athletic playing fields. The cafeteria provides a casual, yet popular meeting place for medical and other professionals the East Tower City community (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

A few blocks south of Riverside Elementary School, the senior citizens low-income high-rise apartment complex dots the landscape, its inhabitants rarely sighted on neighborhood streets. On Election Day, the local populace cast their ballots there. Recently, the guidelines for occupancy of this high-rise federally subsidized apartment complex have been revised to include a younger clientele, much to the displeasure of the original inhabitants, who swear that a criminal element has invaded their peaceful domain (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

Two charitable agencies closely border the school area, offering a variety of services for residents, from recreation and child care, training for handicapped workers, to discount clothing, furniture, arts and crafts activities or nutrition centers. No local grocery store is found for miles except for the local convenience stop. Although the availability of transportation to jobs, appointments, and shopping constitutes a daily struggle for area residents, a well-traveled arterial runs past the Riverside Elementary School grounds providing speedy access from plush suburbs to the brick, aluminum and steel downtown Tower City complex (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997).

The students who attend Riverside Elementary School seldom realize that they live along the banks of a well-known waterway, nor can they cite its name. Poverty and its ramifications, deprivation, social isolation and developmental delay (camouflaged by a high degree of streetwise sophistication) provide a cloudy, complicated, educational horizon for these “river rats.” Schools that serve children from low income, extremely transient backgrounds whose parents have low educational attainment share a considerable need for establishing trust. This neighborhood school represents an intersection of the children from welfare and working poor families and, as such,

represents a cultural crossroads in terms of whether educational opportunities exist as a key to an enhanced quality of living or as an early roadblock to lifelong satisfaction and productivity. Annually, area family income levels qualify over ninety percent of the total student population for the federally funded free and reduced lunch program at Riverside Elementary. Normal student participation in the breakfast program usually doubles or triples during the days at the end of each month when family pantry levels become depleted. From time to time, nutritional needs present only one kind of challenge to families who come to school with a multiplicity of academic and social risk factors (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

In context with the neighborhood school concept, all of the students live within close proximity to the school, exempting a need for bus transportation. The majority of the students, many of whom get themselves ready for school without adult supervision, walk to the school from three subsidized apartment complexes that surround it. One of these complexes, London Heights, belongs to the Tower City Housing Authority. A few Riverside Elementary School families reside in subsidized duplexes or in small family dwellings in the area (U. S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

Clearly established as the hub of the neighborhood, Riverside Elementary School is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, structures in the geographic area. Directly across the street from the school is a social service center that offers daycare, senior citizen nutrition services, and indoor and outdoor recreation programs for students. A City Park and Recreation Department swimming pool are popular summer pastimes. Football fields and basketball courts occupy an area nearby the pool, but baskets and backboards for the goals on the courts readily disappear (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Occasionally, sounds of the early morning hours in the Riverside Elementary School vicinity are punctuated by frantic law enforcement activity involving rousting sleepy area residents unfortunate enough to have outstanding arrest warrants. Arrests are commonly made for traffic violations, activity in drug trafficking, stolen cars, unlicensed firearms or other offenses. These sting operations remove an undesirable criminal element from the neighborhood, but disrupt the emotional stability of children who witness such events. Since the element of surprise is an intentional and critical factor in planning these shake downs, such days of reckoning with law enforcement are traumatic for all Riverside Elementary School students, parents, teachers, administrators and support staff. While neighborhood conditions improve, everyone interacting with students forgets self-interest and calms troubled waters, since parents or other relatives of students may be incarcerated when the operations end (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Transportation by car is difficult to maintain on meager monthly budgets. For those residents owning vehicles, maintenance is a costly item in addition to licensing and insurance fees. Mechanical breakdowns stretch pocketbooks as well as patience. Those residents who do not own an automobile often informally contract with other residents for rides, for errands, and appointment needs. The local metropolitan bus line offers transportation service that stops in the heart of the neighborhood. Most destinations require a mid-downtown transfer that involves additional time. Many area residents work in service-related vocations that involve weekend obligation without appropriately scheduled bus transportation. Many residents who are shift workers find metropolitan transportation unwieldy when it comes to graveyard shift requirements and other unconventional schedules involving entry-level employment. Transportation by cab is

unreliable at best, slow response time is a factor if calls result in any response at all (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

To the South of the Riverside Elementary School facility, the soaring, arched superstructure of a huge pedestrian bridge spans a busy street. The bridge, constructed in the 1960's to assure student safety, constitutes an area landmark that now spells low-income neighborhood because of deterioration in the form of glaring rust-red stains (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

During the 1930's, the school facility housed a junior high school, characterized by multiple freestanding buildings connected by a covered brick pedastal breezeway. Forming a square surrounding a center courtyard, the faded red brick walls speak volumes of local community history. Enormous oak trees and rambling grassy baseball and soccer fields grace the park-like grounds of this educational safe haven that Riverside Elementary students call their home away from home (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Time can pass slowly for riverbank residents. Change occurs incrementally, if at all. At the very suggestion of progress brought about by change, inner city problems can raise a modernization issue of immense proportion. For example, one East Tower City perennial political candidate, Larry Seawright, boasted proudly to Superintendent of Tower City Schools Dr. Aubry Winstead, that Eastsiders take pride in holding grudges against one another and rather enjoy the episodes of feuding connected to such situations (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

For Tower City citizens, and particularly for East Tower City residents, a preference for provincialism of thought and action rejects urban identity and its problems. As a result, it might well be difficult for an old guard resident of Tower City to visualize



a multiculturally populated public school within a stone's throw across the downtown river bridge from the city's most opulent shopping, exquisite museums, exclusive educational facilities, and elaborate residences (Goble, 1997).

In another context, the families whose children attend Riverside Elementary School do not represent a wide economic cross-section. The median family income is below \$25,000 annually (Southwest Chamber of Commerce, 1997). This factor severely narrows categorical prejudice based upon annual income levels, since the majority of the students' families receive multiple forms of government financial assistance. An observer could easily conclude that this locale is intentionally reserved for economic, social, and educational outcasts from surrounding communities (Goble, 1997).

For some children, living conditions are earmarked by little family room activity except a television that is constantly blaring. For others, violent domestic disputes or drug-related activity have become an all too common occurrences. These conditions contribute to a multi-generational cycle of social, emotional and educational deprivation related to previous school failure by adult residents of the Riverside Elementary School geographical attendance area (Gregory Interview, 6/1//98).

Presumably, a decision of where to dwell and how to access the best learning environments for children are priorities for typical parents. Unfortunately, for East Tower City single parents, priorities for school success are merely pipe dreams, crowded out of existence by social and economic struggles, which quickly and thoroughly cloud a child's need for stability and rich experiential variety as a prerequisite for productive school achievement (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Riverside Elementary School displays dramatic complexity of economic status,

diversity of population, and contrast of educational opportunity. Because of social and - economic disadvantages of families in the immediate vicinity, leaders of Riverside Elementary School and the surrounding East Tower City community find themselves staring in the face of approaching disaster when predicting educational success for stakeholders. The cohesion in the immediate East Tower City community as well as involvement of the Tower City community at large could prove beneficial to efforts targeting improvement of schooling. Engaging the community in developing a school curriculum specifically addressing student needs could provide answers to the tough questions presented by future needs in the Riverside Elementary School saga (Gregory Interview, 6/1//8).

### **Transition Times**

During the fall of 1991, discussions about a need for improvements at Riverside Elementary School began in concert with similar needs at four other high challenge elementary schools on the city's southside. Many erroneous community observers assumed that an unsatisfactory level of student achievement on state mandated achievement tests prompted intervention. Discussion about a need for change became seeds for district decisions to provide a fiscal framework for these schools. The Tower City School District officials, advised by High Challenge Task Force committee members of the Tower City Board of Education, redistributed Chapter I federal funding to provide for changes in resource allocation at each of the five sites. Legislative changes in provisions for federal aid to schools with free and reduced lunch enrollment above seventy-five percent provided enhanced funding for the entire school. In concert with such intervention, a commitment to site-based decisions as a mechanism for local school

improvement became evident, and required by federal guidelines (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

As a result of this format, each school was asked to convene a School Planning Advisory Committee comprised of a cross-section of community stakeholders whose role was to initiate appropriate changes unique to each site. Requirements for Planning Committee representatives generated leadership from parents, teachers, support personnel, librarians, administrators, social workers and other representatives from the surrounding community. A consultant from district offices facilitated the planning sessions at the request of then Principal Becker. Informal dinners offering parenting education tips as well as child care were offered several evenings during the months of January and February, 1992, to stimulate interest in the new project, to begin in the fall of 1992. During the parenting sessions, ideas for improved home-school relationships were discussed as a part of the overall plan for improving the new Riverside Elementary School concept. Clearly, a new school concept began to emerge from within the brick and mortar framework of a seventy-five year old relic (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

As a result of this Chapter I Schoolwide Design district mandate, each teacher, teacher assistant, counselor, administrative and support position was declared vacant for the 1992-1993 academic year. Creating these vacancies provided a comfortable release for those staff members who no longer wished to stay at Riverside Elementary or who were thought to be less effective than others teachers might prove to be in such a high challenge setting. Uncomfortable were those teachers who wished to remain, who were not asked to do so because of a systemic denial that their teaching practices contributed to a vicious cycle of school failure for students from low income homes (Roland Interview,

4/10/98).

One early intervention suggested to the committee from the outset was the possibility of full day kindergarten classes for the purpose of improved early childhood education and socialization. The need for early language development and pro-social skill development at Riverside Elementary School warranted the extra measure as early in the school experiential profile as possible (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

In addition to design changes coming from the district in the form of enhanced federal funding, Riverside Elementary School was in the midst of rocky changes of its own during the 1991-1992 school year. Andy Hayes, a veteran white male principal was asked to depart from school leadership and retire as of November, 1991, as a result of staff complaints involving sexual harassment. A traditional authoritarian leader, Principal Hayes had become very confident that he would be selected as the Chapter I Schoolwide Design Principal once the time came (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

A one time United States Army sergeant, Principal Hayes often worked on the weekends as a security guard at a restaurant in north Tower City. At the time of his replacement, rumors infiltrated the neighborhood that he kept a firearm on the school premises to ward off any threat of violence. In addition, tension existed between Principal Hayes and central administrators because thousands of dollars had been stockpiled in school funds, earmarked for purchase and installation of air conditioning for the Riverside Elementary School building. Rather than amassing funding, the Tower City Schools Area Superintendent, Dr. Guy Dennison, referred to board policies that required that such funding be exhausted within the year that they were generated in order to benefit students presently attending the school. The funding issue became less

contentious when, in the fall of 1991, an air conditioning bond issue brought voter approval to provide essential funding (Roland Interview, 4/10/98)).

Principal Hayes, a long-time East Tower City resident and close associate of the Eastside Board of Education member, Dan Miller, left his post an embittered retiree because of actions of the Riverside Elementary School staff and his district supervisors. He continued to live in East Tower City, near another public elementary school. His pastime became one of constant campaign against Tower City School District bond issues. As new appropriation issues were proposed for voter approval, Mr. Hayes erected enormous signs in the front yard of his home urging neighbors to turn down each bond issue proposal made by his enemies still in district employ. Earlier attempts to serve as a change agent for school improvement for youngsters growing up in the East Tower City community were distorted, if not destroyed, by a desire for revenge against district administration and the Tower City Board of Education (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

His replacement, Interim Principal Gordon Falconer, was actually a Teacher Consultant on Special Assignment, assigned by Area Superintendent Dennison. Fresh from the classroom, Riverside Elementary proved to be his very first administrative post, one for which he was qualified, but did not desire to pursue professionally. Mr. Falconer disliked the heavy burden placed on his shoulders as the role of strong disciplinarian emerged. Mr. Falconer became very adept at maintaining his popularity with the staff, since he saw this as an important goal prior to the long-term school improvement project (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Another concern for Mr. Falconer developed as Larry Seawright, Riverside Elementary School graduate, Eastside resident and perennial, yet unsuccessful politician,

paid frequent and seemingly endless visits to the school office. He coupled his visits with a veritable blitz of complaint letters to Mr. Falconer and to district offices about his objection to the appearance of temporary classroom trailers placed on the premises by the district for classroom space. Mr. Seawright promoted a plan requiring leasing of existing building space adjoining the school that would require considerable remodeling prior to use. Plagued by long sessions with Mr. Seawright in his office, Mr. Falconer resented the time he spent in attempting to placate a single, extremely vocal patron of the school while other more pressing instructional and disciplinary duties competed for his attention (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Mr. Seawright, a self-proclaimed political activist, was fond of boasting of a local park project that recently had been completed near the expressway. He was fond of telling Mr. Falconer and others on the school staff and in the neighborhood that he had forced Tower City officials to build the park through dogged persistence. Mr. Seawright, claiming to be on a first name basis with city and park officials, insisted that through his efforts as an Eastside “champion of the people,” Tower City Hall officials reluctantly gave underprivileged residents their due in creating the park, playground equipment, and benches (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Dr. Steven Becker, a veteran white male principal, arrived in January of 1992. With his popular leadership, planning and implementation for the Chapter I Schoolwide Design became a real process for school change. Previously, Dr. Becker’s leadership style was known to be rather traditional, not unlike that of Mr. Hayes. An observer might speculate that in spite of appropriate interview questions for the selection of effective urban educators, the hidden criteria for administrative selection remained as an issue of

student sorting and control (Spring, 1995) rather than for institutional resiliency. Just as a casting director's decisions comprise the most critical decision of a dramatic production, in early 1992 the Tower School District's choice for school leadership addressed influences of student control rather than of substantive change (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

One cause for Dr. Becker's disenchantment was a classroom incident involving a classroom management intervention which resulted in media attention generated by none other than Larry Seawright, political activist and staunch Riverside Elementary School critic. The intervention by veteran teacher Martha Lindsay was intended to assist a six year old student Kyle Thomas to stay in his assigned classroom seat to insure instructional time on task. Thorough discussion as to the reasoning and practice involved in the intervention had occurred with Kyle as well as with parent Jane Thomas prior to its implementation. Martha Lindsay placed a length of masking tape across Kyle's thighs in order to give him a visual cue to lengthen the amount of time that he was able to stay seated and focused on the learning task (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

One April morning, Mr. Seawright visited Mrs. Lindsay's classroom in order to inquire about the methodology used that he found highly objectionable. Before Mrs. Lindsay could stop him, Larry Seawright removed Kyle Fanning from the classroom without authorization, whisking him directly across the street to waiting Channel 7 News troubleshooter reporter Dan Barnes who, also without authorization, proceeded to interview Kyle about his treatment at the hands of his teacher. When parent Tonya Fanning learned of the circumstances involving the interview, she threatened to file criminal charges against Mr. Seawright, Mr. Barnes, and the corresponding news

organization involved if the segment involving her son was aired by Channel 7 that evening. Rather than suffer legal repercussions, the station and reporter Barnes complied with her parent mandate, sparing all participants an exposure to public humiliation. The Tower City School District filed a restraining order against Mr. Seawright banning further visits or similar campus activity. Dr. Becker's court order generated satisfaction, but the demeaning incident had caused him to appear powerless at the hands of Larry Seawright. Teacher Martha Lindsay retired later that spring in direct response to the heavy-handed public portrayal of her classroom management practices (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

During the spring of 1992, two sets of new play equipment were successfully installed south and east of the building on the grounds. As anticipated for students, these generated new excitement during noon recess. The foresighted committee of planners had chosen equipment that was appropriate for the psychomotor and affective developmental growth stages of Riverside Elementary School clientele. At the same time, the interior of the building gained a facelift of sorts. Fresh paint in the hallways and entrances gave the old walls a vitality that had been sorely needed for a number of years. The French blue enamel trim on doorways and baseboards contrasted beautifully with the color chosen for the walls. Over time, members of the paint crew dispatched by district maintenance officials became well acquainted with students and teachers, genuinely savoring the attention they received as instigators of a visual transformation for the school, which had begun a substantial organizational transformation of its own (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).



## **Community Partners Perspective**

A setting like Riverside Elementary School combines a number of forces for renewal, especially those that contribute to a unique institutional identity. The insights of community partners, local historians, board of education members, administrators, parents, teachers, and counselors expand the notion of a school as a distinctive institutional setting that prioritizes learning (Sergiovanni, 1996).

### **Lenora Gregory**

The identity of schools as distinctive learning institutions is supported in comments by Lenora Gregory, M.S.W., presently chief executive officer of East Side Social Services, one of the agencies of extended services to the Riverside Elementary neighborhood. Lenora Gregory's career in social work began as a neighborhood caseworker in East Tower City apartment complexes surrounding Riverside Elementary School. Her vivid memories of outreach services include coaching a girls' softball team made up of area residents with practices held on the school diamond.

Social Services hired me 25 years ago to do outreach at Riverside and the surrounding neighborhood and in the school, dealing with the new population that was developing and growing in the neighborhood from public housing and subsidized housing. The problems then were nothing in comparison to the problems today. Actually the neighborhood 25 years ago was predominantly white and the next group was Native American and then Spanish as I recall. Then maybe there was one black family in the whole school. I know now it has changed dramatically from that and the surrounding neighborhood. There was a fairly strong residential neighborhood that also attended Riverside School and

some parents that would add lots of leadership and also came from the surrounding neighborhoods. There was lots of concern about all these poverty families that were now part of the school, but there was a greater sense of a broader community around even Riverside from the neighborhood, the public housing and the subsidized housing. I don't know if I have created some of that in my memory because I worked with all sectors, but it is a part of my now cumulative memory not being so segmented as it is today (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

As a community partner in the schoolwide change initiative, Lenora Gregory summarized her attempts at inter-agency collaboration involving a school setting. She related that because of institutionalized rules and endemic behaviors, efforts in school partnerships have been challenging. "So we are constantly mediating the rules that everybody has in a school building because the schools have so much culture and institutional boundaries attached that sort of permeate the system more than other institutions do" (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Lenora Gregory recalls that before 1992, Riverside School was attempting to work in isolation in order to address student needs even though it was considered by many to be the hub of the local community. Her experiences performing her role as a social service agency executive taught her that providing neighborhood family services would be futile if they could not begin to partner with the school. The concept of school based social services was also suggested by her review of professional literature at the time.

From 1992 on I think some mental health support agencies...we started to be

much more aware through research and conferences... how much school failure at an early level is going to impact families and children for the rest of their lives and suddenly started realizing, from the basis of literature, the family services agencies needed to have a much closer partnership with schools...really started to believe that that foundation was set then and that the school was sort of having to work in isolation. We are out here in isolation and that maybe together we could come up with new strategies and new ways to really try to enhance the well being of children on into the future (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

With the school still considered the hub of that neighborhood, the local agencies recognized Riverside Elementary to be the one place they could go in order to support family needs in a comprehensive manner. Lenora Gregory suggests that the nature of the change initiatives she has seen as a community partner always take a longer time than envisioned before the realization grows that a whole new collaborative order is in place (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

When we started this program in school, what we had to come to understand, is that when we are in your school or any school, we are guests and there is this sort of fine line of where school begins and where our program begins. It is a very powerful force when you are inside a school that is sometimes even hard to define. You might be in another agency...your boundaries might be wider than when you are in a school because a school community has that tight, systemic cultural way of being and so you want to pass with that system and join with that system and sort of forge a new partnership. So what has probably been the most interesting is watching not how difficult the process is, but how cumbersome the

process is. It just doesn't happen overnight because everybody is wanting it to happen and I might have this great vision, and in my mind have to translate it down in the system to sort of make a synergy happen or something (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Lenora Gregory, whose beliefs parallel Ben Davenport's, attests to tremendous demands for social services and to the needs for school based programs. She stated:

I know from our agency's perspective that we feel that what we were doing with the families outside of the school for these very at risk families is going to be useless if we cannot partner with the school and it took years of evolving for us to really understand that. The literature helps us to understand there is so much alienation with at risk children's parents and toward school, so much apathy, so much disengagement that you can just sort of watch the lifestyle of school failure emerge in front of your eyes and know that counseling is going to be connected to how parents felt about their school and how the child felt about school and all the parties sort of engaged and felt very committed to making that happen (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Lenora Gregory further outlined her beliefs about schooling to be a continuum of efforts designed to teach and support children, including the challenge involved in meeting individual and family emotional and developmental needs. "I think we are all constantly struggling. We are trying to address that issue and sometimes it comes out in odd ways" (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

### **Ben Davenport**

A second community worker, journalist and historian, Ben Davenport, addressed

social and educational challenges present in the East Tower neighborhood:

Because of the transitional nature coupled with the geometric increase on subsidized and public housing in the area, usual parent resources take on a different character. You have people who come into the situation strung out, emotionally stressed, distressed, out of family situations that have been difficult, out of a whole variety of reasons which have resulted in them becoming residents in that particular type of housing. All of that has to be met somehow...put on hold or dealt with or resolved in some way before you can even get the attention of children, but especially with the parents who are having to deal with so many conflicting demands on themselves (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Ben Davenport is well known for his historical tours of the East Tower City community. He now works for the East Tower City Chamber of Commerce. A founder of the local historical society, he recalls the urban renewal projects of the 1960's as critical events. Ben Davenport watched a transitional apartment community supplant previous urban blight throughout Old East Tower City except for Riverside Elementary School and Brookwood Baptist Church (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

So we saw a pattern begin to emerge in terms of the real development of the area. Much of it was redeveloped with single family and duplex housing, but because of the broader history of Tower City in the past ten years, the owners of that property found that they needed to move or relocate. There was not a sufficient market for purchase by an owner occupant. We saw many of those begin to become rental properties because of the downturn in the housing market and an over supply in apartment dwellings. Even two or three complexes which had

been intended and initially operating as regular market rate complexes became subsidized to survive. It was difficult times. As of about five years ago, I believe that ninety-five percent of the housing units in that area were rental units and with the notable exception of Seaport, virtually every other one in the area had become subsidized by virtual necessity (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Ben Davenport discussed the distinctive needs of the Riverside Elementary School community as follows, “To try to practice the business of the school as though this were 1960 doesn’t work” (Davenport Interview, p. 4). “The hard part is trying to keep these pieces together and our frustration is that there are too many things to get done” (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

Ben Davenport expressed his belief in family systems integration for the improvement of school achievement for children.

In that East Tower City area you had a very close net in what had become a multi-generational community of families...extended families. The church helped the subscription school and also initiated some employment and training programs. They still have to this day what they call the Old Men’s Bathroom because so many of the older areas grew up so rapidly with shotgun type housing, didn’t have indoor plumbing and people didn’t have a place to take a bath, so they would go to the church on the way to or from work on the trolley lines to bathe and get clean. So the school system was very much interwoven as a part of this. Up until the late 60’s, early 70’s, neighborhood schools were the rule (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

## **Harry Robards**

Community partner Harry Robards coordinates child advocate and education concerns for the Tower City Chamber of Commerce. He attests to community needs:

There are lots of people that want to help with the issues of poor children, deserving children, and the deciding factor of that is the school. If the school isn't aware of that, then we are frustrated. At Riverside Elementary you have a sense of things going, and you have a sense of engagement. We have not come close to exploiting those resources that want to help. I think it ought to be someone's full time job at the district level and I think there ought to be really excellent training going on among the principals and particularly the principals who have the high proportion of economically stressed families, as the problems are not the same. Problems are much different at Riverside School than others. Don't use a cookie cutter. Some of the principals don't have a clue. It is troublesome to me when the school district has issued a mission statement and emphasized in it that two of the five or six items were working with the community and Early Childhood education. It was nobody's job to lead that effort. There was no voting against it. There was no accountability. These are our jobs...they are very important to us in our mission. We are not doing anything to cause it to happen. This the most frustrating thing. The eye-ear in the community and the help organizations offer is accessible to everyone. How do you get into this and get any direction at all? So they just give up trying and so then it is a matter of when you can get anything. And what the Riverside project managed to do is become one of maybe two or three schools in distressed areas in which people had any confidence that they

could interact. I don't think the headquarters brass gives the satisfaction that will help the community organizations. Principals had not been trained to be believers of that and headquarters certainly doesn't help anyone that is responsible for doing the training and doing the facilitating as well (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

Harry Robards summarized the change initiative at Riverside Elementary as one of immediate dramatic shift in the climate of the school, accompanied by expanded parental involvement at all levels. However, he contrasts school level initiatives with those across the entire Tower City system, citing frustration from attempts at system-wide development of school linked services

The way we look at it, people like Bonnie Anderson and I...we were sitting there and others in the community with a tool kit that we could offer a school location but there had to be a captain of the ship that could use those things and we had a captain of the ship that wasn't put off by outside involvement, understood the value of what we were trying to offer. I think a lot of schools make it very difficult to offer community services (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

He expands upon the role of educators in rising to serve an economically distressed population in conjunction with site based social services by attacking narrowness of thought and action on the part of educational leaders:

What we have done has been done in spite of the school administration either at the local school or headquarters. It is almost like school linked services is talking in Chinese. It is no one's job to really understand that and to execute it. I am not sure if people have been taught about it. Sometimes I am really shocked at the narrowness of education professionals. They have no idea. It is like their focus



is, I teach kids in a dress, or I run a school. I sometimes wonder if they even read the paper to understand. This is a total community and the narrowness of people is somewhat shocking to me. I came in and started studying and reading about school-linked services and made it my job to understand the range of things in what the program offered. Our coalition had people really working to understand the range of possibilities for school-linked services. The chamber understood. We want to really help those schools. Schools are saying ‘we need help’ and we are saying, ‘We are here to help.’ People like us and others really understood the range of possibilities and what was going on in other areas of the country in regard to school-linked services and I spent time to find a school that understands it and at least not be an inhibitor. I know things that happen to us in our program that are literally detrimental to our program, not helpful. Like going to the cafeteria every day and some principal says, ‘I am having a meeting here today in 5 minutes, so you are going to have to clear out.’ (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

### **Bonnie Anderson**

Community partner Bonnie Anderson agrees with Harry Robards, Ben Davenport and Lenora Gregory when discussing the effect of neighborhood events on school life. “What happens to the parents in the school will have a direct effect, not only on the school environment and on the kids in the school, not only on those kids, but on other kids in the neighborhood development” (Anderson Interview, p. 2). Citing development of the parent body as a component of school improvement, she expressed enthusiasm for creating a district forum for the districts and schools to work together (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Bonnie Anderson's memories as a participant in the Riverside Elementary School changes are strongly based on the relationships of four people who trusted each other. These activists hoped to generate additional parental involvement in the community. One activist came from the headquarters of the school district, one represented all social service agencies through Bonnie Anderson's office, one represented a local counseling agency, and the school principal represented the school site. Bonnie Anderson expressed her excitement following a meeting where these four individuals agreed to go out on a limb for a program to foster parental involvement at Riverside Elementary which looked good on paper, but had not seen local implementation. Her excitement at the program design for school centered change was not because parenting education was presented in a condescending manner that made parents feel stupid, but instead, empowered them with a shared power for leadership (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Involving parents as partners in school change became one component that generated lasting change in the school setting. It was really kind of a shared model for leadership, as it turned out, and it was a terrific step for Riverside to take because it really set the way the school worked. The idea is to bring the parents in, have them grow and develop and then use them to make changes in the school in a positive way to utilize resources...team parents and resources for themselves and for the kids. It is a win, win model. It was an example of not only did you get the Community Council and Social Services, you ended up getting a whole cadre of other groups. We were able to bring in a drug abuse agency because of relationships. We were able to bring in resources from various sources. We were able to get the word of FAST (Families and Schools Together)

spread throughout the community because of our connections in the community. We brought Riverside FAST parents to our board of directors and the number of people in FAST at this school is pretty terrific. Parenthetically I was invited to look at focus groups that were being done in Tower City Public Schools and what they wanted to do was get an idea of what parents want in schools, and here were people saying ‘You want FAST at your school.’ Here is this person living at 49<sup>th</sup> and Prairie talking about how you can engage parents in the public school system. It was incredible. It is just a model of the change that was happening in Riverside School (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Bonnie Anderson appreciates change collaboratives that move from personality bonding to common ground in decision-making. Bonnie saw shared ownership develop over time, becoming a present feature of the fabric of the school, neighborhood and surrounding area.

You move from personalities to a shared belief. That doesn’t mean that you agree altogether...but congruent up to a point. You are in a train going in the same direction. Where there is really shared ownership, I mean that it is somehow by osmosis. It is now a fabric of that school and that neighborhood and that housing community. It is ‘the way we do things here’...really a cultural change and that is really when you know you have success. Would these processes continue? Would they still be open? Would the community feel that there was a place that they could really hang their hats? Somehow people have been given the stamp of approval and those people are community members. It is hard to take that away (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Like Lenora Gregory, Bonnie Anderson suggests that schools become key players in alliance with the community in social service agencies, in the Riverside Elementary district, and across Tower City as a whole. From Bonnie Anderson's perspective, erratic control of educational change keeps stakeholders outside the education community from accessing the systems and assisting in providing advantages appropriate for students. She adds her frustration about the use of educational jargon, a factor in isolating schools from community influences as they seek to change.

We talked about nomenclature and I think the idea that nomenclature and change and always having the latest fashion in educational reform keeps people away from the information. It isolates the schools more and more so it is a real frustration and I don't understand it because I am not an educator, if that is endemic or if that is just a localized issue (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Bonnie Anderson shared her successful experiences with translating new methodology from one setting to another rather than directly trying to replicate change initiatives from one site to many sites. Her belief in school based change has to do with customizing change initiatives in concert with existing needs and resources available.

I have lots more questions about change. What happens next? What would be the best thing from our perspective to do? Would it be to continually invest in change at Riverside? We know that it is hard to translate for the rest of the system, at least make my island the best island it can be, or should the role then of the change agent be to come back to this and to internally hammer home and demand change elsewhere? I don't know what makes sense. I tend to believe, as an activist, that good principals work informally, and I am sad that maybe that is

where some of the top principals are missing the boat. We have got to stop putting our heads in the sand. The question then is what is next for a change agent? If you have had success, then what? What is the key needed to pre-determine? Maybe it would do better if there were other experiments still going on. Maybe it would help this experiment.

In another neighborhood I watched a change that was coming down from the top in another initiative and I watched principals who are well meaning and lovely people who had no clue why they were sitting around the table. They had no philosophy of change and I thought, 'This is not going to go.' I saw the other movement...it came down from above. It seemed to be isolated. It was not organically part of that community, that principal, that school, and there was no philosophy, there was no overriding value or thought and we sat in the meeting and we made a collective decision to not be part of that change because they didn't know where they were going. At Riverside we knew where we were going...we could ride that train together. We knew we couldn't lead a school to change and the other movement seemed very stiff and it was almost as if it were a change on paper. You have to have the relationship. It has to come first (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

Bonnie Anderson related her enthusiasm at the continuing relationship with participants in the Riverside Elementary initiative, noting that the Riverside changes seemed especially important from teachers' perspective. After six years, the connections provided by experiencing change suggest more than a casual connection, rather forming a unique bond. The success of the project was due to leadership reflective of shared values

that could then generate a common vision.

We clearly went through something important together. You can tell that when you run into somebody at the grocery store and the connection is not just something casual. We went through something together and that is very rare, very special (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

### **Tower City Board of Education Members' Perspective**

Tower City Board of Education members' awareness of the Riverside Elementary School initiative pays tribute to the sense of involvement and ownership so prevalent in the East Tower City community.

Whether a Board of Education member has a lengthy record of service or one of relatively short tenure, his or her perspective fosters the district policies that encourage or discourage change. The direction of these individual institutions dictates the overall progression or regression of district initiatives.

### **Don Donovan**

Board of Education member Don Donovan is a seasoned member of the Tower City Board of Education, presently the member with longest tenure. Like Bonnie Anderson, he believes that expanding the interest and involvement of the parent is a key factor in building school communities, especially as they address change initiatives.

The reason that kids succeed in private middle schools or in suburban middle schools other than the fact that they have good teachers is the fact that the parents are interested in them succeeding and the fact that they move them or want to move them was that they had some interest. If they were in their neighborhood middle schools and exhibited the same interest and involvement, I am convinced

we would have far better middle schools for all of our kids rather than for ones that we suck out of the system and put in particular little places (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

With a multi-faceted interest in education as an attorney, board member and parent, he views himself as an educator of sorts as he works with clients, jurists and judges. He summarizes his experiences as a board member: “In any event it is an interesting, sometimes terrifying and oftentimes frustrating experience for me, but there has been a lot of joy in it for me, too” (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Don Donovan’s motivation for board membership includes his desire for the school system to be “good for his own children (who attend schools in the affluent Northwest district of Tower City schools) and other students like them” (Donovan Interview, p. 1). Because Riverside Elementary is not a school in his district, he relies heavily on the principal, as a school leader, to provide information about the change initiative occurring there. Don Donovan did share, however, his perspective that principals are probably lead change agents because they have the overreaching look at schools. In addition, he shared a strong preference for institutional and systemwide change.

I tend to be the one who probably leans more toward institutional change rather than power up from bottom change, only because I think to go on the other side or grass roots change is only a small distance away from anarchy, so I tend to favor a little more structured change, not absolute shared decision-making” (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Don Donovan cites the mark of good change is that things work better in their

particular circumstances. Examples include schools with better test scores, less distraction or more support from the community.

Some people don't want to change in a school district, particularly one the size of Tower City Public Schools. There are some you have to encourage to change, others you have to require to change, add a few who absolutely regardless of the carrot or the stick refuse to change and I think those people, because of our system, sometimes stay with us until they either retire or get tired of seeing change happen around them and go somewhere else. That is fine. I think people who refuse to change are doing themselves and all the rest of us a great disservice, but I think for those who are willing to change and want to change, those who are willing to seek ideas from others and information from others are the ones who change most rapidly and most successfully (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Don Donovan and Bonnie Anderson agree that endemic needs exist for individual school communities.

We have to have more risk takers and I don't want risk takers of Evil Kneevil type, but if we don't take some risk, we are not going to accomplish anything. I appreciate principals who take risks and teachers who are willing to take risks, who are willing to look at the kids in their specific classes and want to teach them something. I am a lawyer, not an educator, but I want to see these things happen (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Don Donovan's continuing concerns include how to better deal with individual children who have difficulty in learning, as well as students whose needs are ignored, not by individual teachers, but by the system. This is not Lake Wobegon and all children are



not above average and we have to deal with individual children who have more or less difficulty learning” (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

**Lisa Lowrance**

Recently elected local school board representative Lisa Lowrance voiced her appreciation for the ways families are involved in making Riverside Elementary School a community.

From what I hear in the community, the whole atmosphere of the school has changed...the way the staff in general interacts with children and the community has really come a long way. It is very child-centered and family-centered. I hear so much about the way families are involved in making it an entire community situation. I think the staff, in general, has come a great distance in the last six years. Any time I come into the school I feel good things are going on. I think the children have pride in their school. I think there are very wonderful teaching techniques. Manners are wonderful. I feel students and teachers are very close-knit...sort of a family type unit (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

As a local resident and retired career teacher, she often interacts with teachers and patrons from the Riverside Elementary School neighborhood. Referring to the challenges presented in involving parents who often were apathetic or antagonistic when interacting with the school, Mrs. Lowrance alluded to the living environment that can produce such negative perspective.

I think one that school and community working together like your site council, positive things like that. I think that is one thing that has changed and has left them with an ownership in the school. I think it has been hard for the faculty to

go in that direction, but I think this faculty has opened up more to the families and going in and having home visits and things like that has helped to find out more about the families and understand where they are coming from (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

As an early childhood educator, Lisa Lowrance recognized the intensive professional development activities as one avenue for improving student achievement. She expresses the pride that she sees in Riverside Elementary School.

You can see at Riverside that the children are proud of what they are doing. I feel this when I come in the building. When you visit Riverside School you can see that it is a place that is child centered and they are trying to work with the children in the homes and have enhanced the appearance of the school. With the mobility of the area and the economics of the area they do a lot for these children and I am very proud. You can see professionalism here; you can see the way children respond (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

The improvements she noted have occurred in spite of serious illness and family tragedies involving several staff members over the six-year span of time of the project. “There has been a lot of tragedy. You can’t do anything about that. I think that is one thing that has an effect on the school” (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

Lisa Lowrance’s personal and professional ideals are reflected in a statement about changes of school culture: “I have really noticed a big difference at Riverside School and the one reason I can say this is because the first semester of my daughter’s teaching was here, and it was not a very happy experience, but I would not mind her being here now at all” (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

## **Central Office Administration Perspectives**

Central office personnel viewpoint is a critical component of the Riverside Elementary School transformation during the past six years. Featured are two of the most instrumental, Ellen Roland and Nicholas Rogers because they assisted in facilitating school-centered change at the outset of the process and continued in supportive roles throughout the six years of the study.

### **Ellen Roland**

Central office administrator Ellen Roland assisted with developing the initial framework for the Riverside Elementary schoolwide change initiative six years ago. Her work as Coordinator of Federal Funding Projects for the Tower City Public Schools, along with her alliances with several central office administrators and site principals, assisted the school change venture.

So we went and talked to Riverside Elementary School and explained the parameters of what a Title I schoolwide design would be and what they could do and the freedom it gave all schools. Even at Riverside Elementary they were very skeptical of people coming to them and saying ‘yes, we are going to empower you, yes, we are going to give you that freedom.’ The only parameters I will put on you are you must be within the legal guidelines, you must be within your budget, and be moral and ethical. Other than that, I don’t care, but you must raise student achievement. We went through about an hour or two with the staff...what this exciting new project would do (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

During spring 1992 visits to Riverside Elementary generated an unpleasant impression of the learning environment. At that time there were excellent reading and

math teachers assisting the regular staff in a pull out organizational format targeted for student remediation. Students involved in specialized teaching reflected gains in achievement. The rest of the Riverside Elementary student body demonstrated achievement which stagnated on an average below the twenty fifth Percentile on standardized norm-referenced testing.

The teachers were working real hard when we had what we call the pull out...Chapter I program. There were excellent reading and math teachers of high quality. I could see that the students in those two classrooms were getting high quality instruction and when we looked at those test gains, but the rest that did not qualify for Chapter I. They were not advancing at all... another reason we went to schoolwide...when we looked at what was happening outside the Chapter I classrooms in these real high poverty schools (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Upon discussing the schoolwide change initiative with teachers, they reflected some excitement at the declaration of positions to be vacant, extended contract opportunities, home visitations and an expanded school community partnership. The bulk of the curriculum and instruction was to be delegated to site personnel, parents and community stakeholders.

We were talking and we went through about an hour or two with the staff--what this exciting new project would do...that we were going to declare all positions vacant; that we were going to make them ten-month teachers and eleven-month principals...that they would have extended year and extended days and be mandated to do home visits to get more involvement in the school. (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

The story that most strongly reflects her observations is related to the reaction of the parties to be involved. Mrs. Roland related that the schools had a very limited vision of opportunities that could be presented by such a change initiative. She recalled one teacher who raised her hand during a planning session and said, “You mean we can decide if we are going to be platooned or self contained?” (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Teachers thought that they were to have tremendous freedom to decide at that particular point, but Ellen Roland suggested that the teacher’s comment demonstrated a limited perspective about actual options in curriculum design to be made available. In order to expand their awareness, Ellen Roland’s reply to the curriculum design question was, “Yes, we are hoping you will extend even past this” (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland related that for two or three years into the project participants were extremely skeptical with trust unfolding slowly.

To see those teachers who were wonderful teachers, but very traditional, who had never been given empowerment go from that question to now where we are practically non-graded, multi-age, fine arts, enrichment activities, is just amazing. We believe you are professionals, we trust your judgment’ (Roland Interview, 4/10/98). We couldn’t change the circumstances, but we could change how we addressed them (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland continued her observations concerning enrichment of the curriculum made creative and relevant which resulted in reducing the number of discipline referrals generated from classrooms. Ellen Roland summarized the present situation at Riverside Elementary School. “It is a school that I would send my own children to and that was one of my goals” (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland reflected about the important process involving central office officials as they approached the school change initiative in 1992. Initial planning sessions prior to site involvement began with talk about how we can really make a difference in trying something new and different and impressing upon the community our efforts to remove eighteen schools on the State Mandated Testing Low Performing list in 1990. As Ellen Roland recalled, during those days the district was relying on area superintendents and an assistant to the superintendent for leadership (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland believed the change initiative would not have even become considered without the energy provided for the project by one of the area superintendents. Many leaders at the district level were very skeptical of such a change initiative because of the efforts of a superintendent in Rose Town, a neighboring urban area, in which such an initiative was attempted through top down decision-making and met with subsequent failure. In contrast, Tower City administrators relied on curriculum design at the site level.

It was very, very important that all the top central office people agree on this philosophy. If we had not had their support, it would not have happened. Area Superintendent Sam Jefferson was the one who kept pushing me and I was saying, 'I know, but give me a year or two, Sam, I am doing this new job.' And he is saying, 'I don't have a year or two, the kids don't have a year or two...tell me everything we can do with Title I.' I gave Sam everything that I could find on Title I and we talked about schoolwide, and he said, 'Schoolwide is the way to go.' I said, 'I know, but I am really nervous about doing it. Rose Town had about

six schools and had a lot of difficulty getting it approved. They had six months before they could get the process approved.' He insisted we had to go schoolwide. I said, 'My one stipulation is that we do not do it like Rose Town, because it has been a top down decision. Then he and I went over to Bill Blanton, who was a very key, pivotal point, because he was over Federal Programs, as well as Assistant to the Superintendent, and Sam and I explained to him what school wide was, how we could use it and he was the person then that said, 'Okay, this is my area of expertise.' Blanton knew how to do site-based because he had done a lot of that with former superintendent Zachary Lane. Then it was decided...Sam started talking to Guy Dennison because I had said, 'Let's try one to see how it worked.' Sam said, 'okay,' and then Guy found out about it and he said, 'In my area I would like one, too.' The other area non-qualified because then you had to be seventy-five Percent disintegrated. So I said, "Let's do two.' When we went to the State Department and talked to them, they were very, very skeptical of us doing it because of the history at Rose Town and the horrible process. So he finally agreed on the two with strong reservations.

About that time I went on vacation...I needed a few days. When I came back, I had five schools instead of two. Never go on vacation with the big guys making the decisions. So in two weeks time we went from two to five schools and we talked about how can we really make a difference and say this is something new and different and impress on the community that we are trying, because at that time we had about eighteen schools on the low performing list. The State Superintendent was in our board meeting saying she was going to take over the

district. So she was walking the halls and that whole nine yards...it was not a pleasant situation. We thought we wanted to make an impact and in hindsight, I don't know whether that was a good thing to do or not...there are pros and cons, but then we declared all those positions vacant, from the principal to the custodian...eleven month principals, ten month teachers, mandated home visits, mandated different meetings that they had to go to.

We got a lot of press on it because this was something new and different that people hadn't done before. It did do what we wanted to...say that schools are not going to look the same as they did in the past. And it did let other agencies know that now the school would be the hub of that community and the agencies have become a part of that hub. That part was good. The unrest in our own organization, I am not sure was good.

The vision of Sam Jefferson and Bill Blanton and Guy Dennison was crucial in getting to this point. I don't know if we could do that again.

We want to push that focus down to the schools, saying we are going to give you the flexibility along with the money, but then you must take the responsibility of knowing what all this is about and try to understand what Title I and Chapter I are and what parameters are and then pull that into a true site based team. How do you work together--how do you work with parents so that they are an integral part of a community and agencies...an integral part of a site-based team?

Bill was very influential. Every time we were meeting Sam or Guy, whatever school it was, was there. Guy would keep saying, 'This is the best thing we have ever done for kids...you have got to keep it up.' Sam would do the same (Roland



Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland regretted the decision to restaff the handful of schools involved in the change initiative at the time because it generated fear and mistrust in the teaching ranks. The restaffing did, however, allow the use of a specialized interview instrument designed to identify teachers most qualified for urban assignment. According to Ellen's account, the central office personnel were well aware of need for support of the site during the restaffing and awarding of additional resources (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Ellen Roland remembered some confusion about the actual need for the change initiative as a result of high poverty levels in the school attendance area rather than low student performance alone. She recalled during 1992 that there was a lot of focus on low test score performance but related, "Don't focus on test scores, focus on what is best for the kids of this school and develop that" (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

In retrospect, Ellen Roland suggested a need for mutual benefit if more investment had been made in human beings and their feelings (Robards, p.10). During the course of the project several site and central office administrative changes have occurred creating potential disaster at some sites as a result of staff turnover. In addition, because of recent central office changes, Ellen Roland expressed a change in her level of involvement as well. "When we first started, I was a part of the team. I felt like I was an integral part of the team. Now in this particular arena of management style, I have actually no say so" (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

### **Nicholas Rogers**

Central office testing and evaluation administrator Nicholas Rogers believed, as did Ellen Roland, that consistency of practice plays a major role in school change

initiatives. Nicholas Rogers recognized the difficulty in improving student achievement at Riverside Elementary School because of social and economic considerations.

It is in a very deprived area, a very tough area. I am acquainted with all of the schools in Tower City and would put Riverside Elementary as one of the five or ten most difficult, as far as dealing with the clientele that we have. When I say tough, I should probably say more challenging from a social, parental and academic standpoint (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Nicholas Rogers recalled a sudden emphasis on academics during the initial months of the change initiative. As a result of the intervention over a number of years, he related that the test scores of kids at Riverside are much higher than he would expect (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Along with consistency of professional practice, of importance to Rogers was the demonstrated commitment of teachers as they experienced the benefits of a supportive teaching environment. “There wasn’t a feeling that the rug was pulled out from underneath them when things were not as successful as we wanted them to be” (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Nicholas Rogers’ observation of staff commitment continued in the form of utilizing previous test results and integrating additional areas of emphasis into the curriculum so that teachers made every effort to cover every aspect of test material. According to Nicholas Rogers, this strong teacher commitment matched by appropriate effort and ownership by students, teachers and principal makes a difference in enhancing student achievement.

I was very much excited to be able to come out and work with the teachers and

showing all of us how we could do better and I say all of us. I learned as much from the teachers as I think they learned from me on how to raise test scores, and when I say raise test scores, you have to know something first or test scores will not go up. So that is where we started, and the teachers bought into it and consequently we have been able to maintain the same program and the same commitment and I think consistency plays a major role (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

He noted open patterns of communication for involvement in decision-making.

One of the other things that I think is important to the relationship is to be able to sit down with the teachers at Riverside without the principal even being here and conduct a meeting that is very academic and professional. The presence of the principal doesn't seem to make any difference as far as what we are targeted on and to me that is another example of a change that wouldn't have existed prior to 1992 (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

According to Nicholas Rogers, consistency and commitment improved Riverside Elementary so that it became a nice place to be, but not an easy place to be. "Today there is an element of success and when you can demonstrate that, your work as a teacher and as a principal has met with success. I think that is a shot of adrenaline that keeps people going" (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

The most notable tendency in the two individual summaries from central office perspective is the high interpersonal trust level and professional respect for the abilities of the practitioners involved at Riverside School during the entirety of the project. Another attribute is the enthusiasm demonstrated in each instance for implementation of change

according to site level decisions. Rather than entertaining a loss of political or administrative power, these individuals chose to move as much influence to the site level advisory committee as was warranted by the dynamics of implementing the optimum changes involved in improving schooling at Riverside Elementary School.

### **Riverside Elementary School Parents' Perspectives**

Patrons of Riverside Elementary School offered the most salient insight into the depth and breadth of school-centered change from 1992 until 1998. Always passionate about establishing an enhanced curriculum and extended opportunities for learning, this group proved instrumental in maintaining the level of commitment advantageous to the change process during troubled adjustments as they became involved in the decision-making process. Their responses are poignant and direct, intense and enlightening.

#### **Tonya Fanning**

Patron Tonya Fanning is the mother of two boys who attend Riverside Elementary School. She has served the community as a parent, child care worker, shared decision-making committee member, PTA president and Tenant Association president. The mother of four boys, her family was devastated when one of her sons was shot and killed in 1994 on the street adjacent to the school in a neighborhood gang-related feud. As a community activist and spokesperson, she has seen many changes take place in the immediate neighborhood.

I saw where the community began to be on the uprise. I live in a low-income community and when I first came here, people were struggling...they had no direction, nor did the school. Before Jane Roberts came here the school was struggling for leadership. They didn't know which direction to take. Then when

Mrs. Roberts took the principalship here at Riverside, from day one I began to notice the improvement and the changes in the school. The faculty was aware of what was needed and was willing to work with her to accomplish the things that needed to be done. So, by that, many programs were pulled into the community, not only to help the children, but to help the parents of the children (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

One of the most observable components of improvement that she cites was in the student achievement scores, even though the initial growth was slight.

During these past six years at Riverside School I have seen many changes take place. I have watched children...the most important thing I noticed was the test scores. When they raised, we were able to get off the High Challenge list and I saw how the teachers worked hand in hand with students in the classroom where they were able to help each child develop. Even though they might not have been to the level where they should have been, there was an improvement (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

She remembers struggles in the school and community because of economic duress, coupled with lack of direction. Through her involvement at Riverside School, she began to see rewards as a result of community bonding on behalf of student needs.

Let me use my family as an example. I am a parent. I have two children who attended Riverside Elementary. I am not from Tower City. At that time I had just moved here and we didn't know anyone, so our only outlet to becoming familiar with Tower City...the first time I served was on the After School Care, because at that time, there was another program that was helping the community. The After

School Care was where working parents who couldn't pick children up after school was out...we supplied the After School Care for the parents of these children. That was one of the ways that I became involved with the school was After School Care, PTA, FAST and now I am the library assistant. It has helped the morale of my children a whole lot, more than I can say, because I just received a letter from Lance for Mother's Day and he told me that he is happy now...and I can tell from that the changes my family went through to where he is happy now and to me this is an accomplishment. I couldn't have done it by myself (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Intensive efforts of community stakeholders would have proved futile had not the children responded to new cohesiveness on the part of patrons, teachers and partners. Tonya's observation provides insight to additional resources and attention given on behalf of neighborhood children. "We have a bonding, through this bond, the children see what we do and they fall in line with the program" (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

One example of community outreach is a program called FAST, or Families and Schools Together. As in Lenora Gregory's perspective, Tonya could readily see how subtle attention to parenting techniques led to enhanced relationships for families as well as the school and the neighborhood.

The program particularly that I was really geared into was FAST, which was a program that really united the parents along with the children to become a part of the school. It got the parents not just to stand by and watch what the children were doing, but to actually get involved with the program--hands on experience, to be where the children are and what they are doing. Not only FAST services

were brought in, but chess games and plays put on. To me these would motivate any person. This helped me being a parent in this community. We did Institute for Aesthetic Education...got children to do plays and go on trips...things that children in this community would never have had the opportunity to do (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Another highlight is a school adoption program sponsored by a downtown Tower City Protestant 'superchurch' congregation. Under the auspices of this program, nurturing church volunteers agreed to meet weekly for lunch with students in need of companionship referred by classroom teachers: "Then we had the mentors program where we bring other families, mainly from TCUMC, where each person took a child's hand and actually led them and showed them another way of life that they would never have known" (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Tonya has a fascination with risk taking involved in program development, concluding that, "We have to find ideas, invent ideas, as to how to deal with these children in order for them to function. We haven't found the answer, but we are working on it" (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98). For Tonya the absolute reward has been in having the school as one variation of an extended family. "Me, not having anyone and coming to the school and participating in different things. The Riverside Elementary School staff became my family. That is one of the most rewarding adventures that I have ever done in my life" (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Another facet of enrichment certainly meets with Tonya's approval. "They wanted them [children] to see things to make them aware of what really existed and that there were not any monsters out there as had been proclaimed to them" (Fanning

Interview, 5/12/98). Affirming that dreams are what the future is made of, she confirmed that in spite of a multitude of struggles, death and serious sicknesses, participants just kept going, never intending to stop.

She believed that community efforts conveyed a sense of pride in the neighborhood as a result of an “East Tower City...This Is Where I Live” historic study provided for students. The study found that by generating a sense of history, children learned the distinctive features of living in East Tower City and that their existences are unique.

Low income apartment dwellers...I am one. I looked at myself. I had never lived in one of those before and I was not aware of what was coming. When I looked at TV, it was this crime happened in low-income...well, that kind of tied it down. So when we got into the program, the teachers made a T-shirt to help people out and give them a sense of pride. ‘This is where I live,’ then we began to get the sense of history and we found out the positive. The place is livable...whether it is low income or not, this is history. The children made a map and drawing of different things on the East Side of Tower City and teachers took them around to see things out here, and it is a sense of pride. This is where I live (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

### **Larry Seawright**

In contrast to Tonya Fanning’s local creative problem solving method, Larry Seawright, Riverside parent, East Side native and perennial political candidate, would like to look to suburban school districts for potential new problem solutions. He has unsuccessfully contested for Tower City offices of Mayor, City Council, Board of



Education and State Representative from the East Tower City District. As an East Side Tower City native, he is strongly convinced of the need for continuing traditions for the East Side Tower City community, but believes that suburban education presents numerous advantages over what is offered in the Riverside neighborhood. For instance, Mr. Seawright would enjoy the opportunity for students to participate in all night lock-ins at the local skating rink.

In Bright Ash schools it was just the schools itself. I have a brother who is now in his teens whose teachers every day meet the students at the door, give every single student a hug. The crime rate don't seem to be as high. I have a sister that is in the 6th grade this coming school year. The schools get with the community like the school has a skating rink out there...they have lock-ins where the kids go and skate all night long...locked in and not allowed to leave. There is less crime in the Bright Ash Schools than in the Tower City Schools. They get more involved with their students (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

He acknowledged that teachers care about Riverside students, but observed the general achievement level to have fallen from previous years.

Our test scores...I predicted they would fall. I could see that none of the kids were getting what they got in the past few years and I have even gone to our School Board councilor, Mrs. Lowrance, to see what she could do and she said there was nothing she could do. Sure enough, our school scores fell. The year before the scores went up and I knew they would drop just from watching what the teachers were doing. None of the teachers did as well last year as they had in the past. We still have many good teachers. They all seem to care about our kids.

I have watched other school districts, such as Bright Ash and we need to go to Bright Ash and Jones, maybe Ulysses, and see what they are doing and see if we can't improve our school some by what they are doing (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

As former participants of the extended day enrichment program, three of his six children are graduates of the Riverside Elementary School. Larry advocates extension of this program to run from after school dismissal into the evening hours on a regular basis.

They take them a few places. They have field trips and the local church gets involved ...they need to give the kids something to really do after school. This is all before school and they are home by 6:00 o'clock. They go out to eat and that is a good deal, but I would like to see our students more involved where they could go out and skate all night. You don't have to worry about guns and drugs...you know, where they can't leave because there is a police officer at the front door. Lock-ins at Bright Ash. This has gone on for years. I see my sister...I keep up with what she does...I have a brother, who is starting kindergarten this year, so I keep up with my siblings (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

One of the direct advantages for students that Larry champions is the awards and student recognition program. He says, "In the past it appears to help the kids and does a great deal for parents, too" (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98). Additional benefits to the Riverside neighborhood include a four-year old preschool program, free and reduced child-care, as well as student recognition.

The Awards Program, even though I think it slacked off some this past year also. But in the past it appears to help the kids and does a great deal for the parents too.

We need to do more this coming year, I think, and in coming years. It did slack off some (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

Larry remarks that additional homework might provide a direct link to improvement in student achievement but relays some frustration when students need additional assistance with homework assignments from time to time. In summary, Mr. Seawright supports more challenging educational programs that invite student participation.

Just the curriculum needs to change a little this year. As much as I dislike some of the homework, it is a little farfetched...they had to have a little help...they had none last year from any of the teachers. There was very little homework. Some students probably did good, but they are not challenged enough. Something needs to be done (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

### **Cinda Dawson**

Cinda Dawson is a Riverside elementary school parent, former PTA president, long time Shared Decision-Making Council member, presently handicapped employee of Ability Resources Services. She and her Seeing Eye dog, Shalimar, are often seen on the streets of the Riverside community. Mrs. Dawson single handedly conducted a phone and letter writing campaign to insure that a neighborhood pedestrian bridge, one that she uses on a daily basis, could be remodeled during the spring of 1998 by the city of East Tower City. When asked about a description of changes during the past 6 years, her reply expressed the importance of community ownership.

Before 1992 there was no open door policy... now you feel as if you have that second home to go to or somebody to talk to about anything. Before 1992 I

hardly ever came to school at all. There was no need to. No one contacted you or asked you to help out with anything. Previously, you know, you just wanted to be a part of things and when you would come up to school, it was just all business (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98).

She reflects on personal growth as well as her attendance at district wide and local school meetings that dealt with current issues pertaining to PTA and Shared Decision-making Council membership.

The office staff has done quite a lot. I know that they helped with the coming together of everything. Different people in the community helped, too. A number of parents in the beginning like Martha and Sandra Ryan came and even I was president of P.T.A. for two years. Sandy helped me quite a bit and I had a fun time. I tried to make every effort. One year we had a fun festival, I guess you would call it, and came here and were selling hot dogs and had games and the students really enjoyed it. Every year I have been on the Site Based Management Committee and we have tried to do things that would benefit the students and help them learn...Like 'Riverside Elementary...You Have A Hand in It'. We have allocated money for picnics and get-togethers and Halloween get-togethers. I just remember activities mainly. I think that is for the betterment of the school all around. It is like a family oriented school now instead of all business. That is the best I can describe it. There is much more watching out for any situation a child may be in...teachers zoom in on it right quick and are more aware of what is going on. They take more time with the students and they have more hands-on activities. They have more art. The art field has gotten broader. They decorate

the halls with different ideas. The speech teacher used to dress up as different characters and Mrs. Edwards did too, and Mr. Powers for the reading project. We have done FAST group and we came and drew these lines and tried to see what we could do in the family to make it better and try to get the children involved and help each other. Then we, as parents, had our own group and discussed how to help our children grow and become better citizens. All my work here was a volunteer position. I worked with Mona Morgan and sat in on city meetings, school meetings. There was a great deal of interesting material. I met a lot of teachers and administrators and just from when my older child came here I never thought I would be doing that. So just all these different things started when he was in the fourth grade because he would come home and say, "Well, we did that and we did art projects and we did science and he and his father talked about the different science things he learned. I never did hear much about school and it was always the same thing before Ms. Roberts came (Dawson Interview, 6/17/98).

Cinda had previously never thought that she would be tackling such tasks as a patron and community leader. She believes the change initiative will continue to be a successful one should the school and community work as partners with the obvious perspective of children's needs as a basis for action (Dawson Interview, 6/17/98).

Patrons commenting on the Riverside Elementary School change process especially appreciated the extension of learning opportunities from traditional settings within four classroom walls to outdoor classrooms, museum architecture, and concert excursions to Celebration Feasts at local restaurants designed for community socialization. In their own manner, each found a way to reflect the increased enthusiasm

for schooling, certainly reveling in the increase in standardized student achievement measures. Each representative learned the importance of community involvement in providing adult leadership for the school and the immediate Riverside Elementary and East Tower City neighborhoods.

### **Riverside Teachers' and Counselor's Perspectives**

Other than students, Riverside Elementary School teachers and counselor display the most intimate accommodations for change involving school transformation. Well aware of their pivotal role, these risk takers chose trust and collegiality as avenues for improvement of schooling. Declaring themselves as an integral part of this learning organization, many provided creative insight to their tasks at the time and to their explanation of the crucial events pertinent to the overall changes for the project to provide meaning and understanding for all participants.

#### **Kendra Bruno**

Kendra Bruno began her teaching career in the Early Childhood Department during the beginning months of the Riverside change initiative. She also holds a degree in Art and now teaches in the Early Childhood Multi-Age Inclusion Center, developed at Riverside Elementary. When asked to reflect on the past 6 years in her profession, she stated, "When we first started here, you couldn't get a parent in here. Now you can't get the parents out of here. There was no trust between us and the community and now we have a lot of trust" (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Kendra Bruno sees herself as possessing not only skills of a classroom teacher, but skills of a team teacher with advanced collegial capability.

I became a team teacher. I think that teaming has made me a stronger teacher, not

afraid to try several new things each and every day to meet the needs of all the children, having that moral support and back up and team effort that has been the biggest change for me and that is why I am able to go forward (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

She views the trial and error and interactive nature of team teaching as a lifeline for professional support in enhancing her beginning teaching experiences from ones of mere survival in the classroom to efforts which improve student achievement.

I think if our team can continue on and maybe made more multi-age placement and children being able to be placed in the beginning basic grouping until their needs are met and they are able to be successful. I look forward to maybe being able to do that next (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

The type of bonding that Kendra Bruno acknowledges sustains her belief in the change initiative project at Riverside Elementary School. “We know it is a safe place to try anything in order to get through to the kids. We try, we fail, and we are safe enough to try again” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Kendra Bruno believes that responsibility for the changes so evident at Riverside Elementary School belongs to the parents, the teachers, the children, the administration and the whole staff of the school. She explains the bonding of the teaching staff as having moved from the status of strangers to a present family. “... that the teaching staff has been allowed to change to best benefit the children” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

To her, the change processes are highly personalized in nature. “Possibly the biggest way that we were allowed to change was within ourselves. We were given the freedom to discover what was best for the children and go in that direction and we were

not mandated to do certain things” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Kendra Bruno related that it is possible for a team community to become distorted when members become vulnerable because they lose sight of team goals. She speaks of her frustrations during those occurrences when her teammates isolated themselves, retreating to teaching from the textbook excessively, losing the vision at one time unilaterally shared.

Our team has had a lot of problems...lack of communication. Some people on our team lost the vision and it has been very frustrating because they wanted to stay in their little groove, they wanted to open their book and teach from the textbook and they lost what we were doing here. That has been the most frustrating thing. They have been afraid to try new things, but there has been a change next year...we are back on the right track for next year. The most frustrating was people...just lost sight of where we were going (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

For Kendra Bruno, self and professional renewal combined forces for exciting challenges in her early childhood setting. “We keep going forward. We keep trying new things and when things get stale, we change them. We are not set in a groove. We are forced to be out of our comfort zone all of the time to better benefit the children” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

### **Leila Kendrick**

Kendra Bruno's colleague, Leila Kendrick, began teaching kindergarten at Riverside Elementary School in 1992 after previously having taught in a middle school learning disability setting. Coming from the ranks as a welfare recipient herself, she



readily organizes school and community service endeavors.

Leila Kendrick believes the beginning years of the initiative were spent in gaining trust. She appreciates making strides in relationship building and respect, working with others to build trust incrementally.

That is something we have done bit by bit over the past 6 years and that is probably the most descriptive, especially when you are working with a population with so many issues. You have to gain respect and work with everyone and make every little contact you can, so I think one of the main things when we first came, the parents didn't value education as much. They possibly had some real negative interactions with schools and social workers and they were intimidated and standoffish and they didn't know if they could trust us or not. I think the relationship improved with the parents over the years...that is one of the main factors. I really think we are like onions in a project like this. You have to take it off a layer at a time and every year we have redone the mission statement and we re-evaluated and thought we have done this really good, but do we want to keep doing this or do something else...like taking off layers of an onion. It is getting to the heart of the thing (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

Like Kendra Bruno, Leila Kendrick believes the process of school renewal to be self-evident.

I think we have had a whole set of kids go all the way through with us and we are starting with the... siblings and even with their children now. We have some of those that are children that were leaving Riverside when we first started. Whether or not the person was intimidated by the school's figures when we first came here,

I really don't think they are any more and I think if they have had race issues, what we have done stands and what they have seen is a lot of caring and a lot of hard work. I have some specific incidents I can tell you about later...this year I had one of the neatest.

This is one of the most important things that has happened to me since I have been at Riverside. One little boy whose parents came into the office at the beginning of the year and they were upset with me because I had taken something out of his hand. They have had many siblings. You know, the mother with sisters with parents who had lots of kids come through our school with lots of arguments and fights...what they wanted to do was to fight, and be able to tell their kid, 'We are not going to listen to that white lady and we are not going to do what they say, and we are just going to move on to someone else.' But it didn't work out that way and what happened...the rule I made in class is if you bring something to school and you take it out during lesson time, either you put it away or I take it till the end of the day, which I feel is very fair.

There are teachers who don't give those things back as readily as I do. One day he brought this big wad of play money and the kids thought it was great and he did what I told him to. I was worried, but I told him, 'That's great, you did a great job.' The next day he brought the same wad of money back and started acting out right in the middle of the lesson. I told him, 'After I gave you a chance to take it home and leave it and you didn't...give it to me.' He didn't give it to me. He said very loudly, the first time that year that he had ever tried to fight. He said, 'No, I won't!' So I went over to him and took it out of his hand

and put it in my desk and we went on with our lessons. He told his dad, 'She snatched on me, and she hurt me.' That wasn't the truth. We talked with the parents as we worked through what the real issue was. You know we needed to have a meeting of the minds. They hadn't come for conferences; they hadn't come any other time except to gripe. They had been late consistently; they had picked him up early almost every day. I told them that attendance was very important and that he had 'a good mind and I wanted him to get a good education, but unless he is here, he can't do that.' I think the parents expected that after this confrontation, I would be hateful to them and him. I acted as if it never happened. I told him that he was great. He stayed that day and I was glad he was in my class. He gained a lot of respect for me through that interaction and in the spring and I always greeted the parents politely. I always took time to talk to them if they had time...I was very positive with them. Later, in the spring his mom came to get him early again which I didn't like, and the Dad was at the door and he looked angry. I thought, 'Oh boy, what has happened now?' He said, 'Mrs. Kendrick, would you mind stepping out here and speaking to me?' I said, 'I have a class here.' He said, 'It will just take a minute'...So Mom stood there and just kind of watched the class and he grabbed my hand and he shook it two or three times and said, 'I want you to know you have really meant a lot to me and I want to apologize for the way I acted in the fall. We are so proud that you are his teacher. He loves school so much and it has really meant a lot to our family and I just want to thank you for what you have done'...a very proud black man that may never have apologized to a white person before in his whole life...I really felt

a change in him and I thought that both he and I will forever be changed by this moment. It might make a big difference for the rest of the children and for the child's children when he grows up. I just felt a little bonding there that if I had used other tactics there or words or gone down to their level, it wouldn't have worked out and it would have been just one hurt upon another (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

Leila Kendrick credits the FAST Program with building relationships and assisting with communication between families and school. When speaking of potential rewards through the FAST Program, she looks at the response of the learner in terms of excitement and new levels of accomplishment.

I think whenever you work with parents, particularly parents that have problems to deal with and abuse and that kind of thing, you have to start out believing no matter what the situation looks like, the parent loves that child and wants the best for that child, whether or not it appears that they do. Their voices are rough and their manners are rough and whether they are doing the right thing or the wrong thing, they are probably doing the best they can. If we knew the amount of stuff that was in their life, we would probably understand why they are behaving the way that they are. It doesn't mean we have to get down to their level or compromise our beliefs if we always start out with that belief no matter what the situation looks like, that the parents are doing the best that they can and that we, rather than attacking, we would say, 'Talk to me about that situation,' and listen much more than we talk, I think we will be able to value that person and do the best job that we can (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98)

She stressed the importance of sharing a mutual history and in building friendships across personal and professional boundaries. Leila admits that her years of involvement have been physically and emotionally taxing, but that the expansion of learning far outweighs the disadvantages.

We all have lots of success stories, but I think the relationship and always being positive and never letting petty, immature things interfere with the way we accept children...that is one of the major things in the change in our school. I think personally just the amount of time spent. It has been hard for my little children to be away from them as much as I have been. I am trying to kind of keep what I am doing, but spend more time with my own children if you can do that. I think the time involved. I think we had done it in the beginning the way it should be done and as the years went on, we have been able to do a little less in that those relationships are there now and they feed on each other, so every experience you have now can play off the ones before. So the amount of time, it has been a very high stress job, emotionally and physically. It is a hard job, but I love it and except for that, there really hasn't been a down side...just emotionally and physically taxing (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

Leila Kendrick's perspective in regards to change in the Riverside Elementary community is thought provoking.

I think the parents have been advocates for us to bring about change in the community. They have begun to feel better about themselves and to understand that education really is important. I know when I was a young parent on welfare rolls myself...I got my education. I went to a class and they taught us what

successful parents do. They value education, get the kids to school on time and read to their children. Those were things that I had never been told parents were supposed to do and I had to learn it. I think these parents have learned it (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

### **Zoë Dillon**

Special Education teacher Zoë Dillon projects her feelings from six years ago until the present as moving from a Viet Nam siege mentality to tranquility. She spent her first years in a self-contained special education setting, but presently works in an early childhood multi-age inclusion setting. Zoë Dillon teaches with Kendra Bruno, who is an early childhood specialist, and together they have worked to evolve their setting into one, which focuses on multi-age theory and practice.

Zoë Dillon's transition from isolation to community emphasizes the importance of open exchange of ideas and the need for community identity for teachers as well as students and parents.

I had a very tough year the first year, having to make changes, and I felt like in the very beginning that I was in isolation. I had always been in a class and had always strived to interact with other teachers. You have to work hard with your kids and your own personality in building school climate. After six years, I think the biggest thing I feel is that we are community. Not only are the teachers together for the most part, but the kids, I think the older they get, they seem to understand where they are going. The biggest thing is community (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Zoë Dillon exudes confidence and excitement as it relates to her role at Riverside

Elementary. “I guess the ability to be enthusiastic, once I believe in something, I am extremely enthusiastic. I think I have added to the motivation with the kids” (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Zoë Dillon appreciates a leadership style that calls for her ideas within a decision-making framework. “The principal was like a mentor, showing the possibilities. Without saying, ‘This is what we are going to do,’ she led us to open-minded solutions. It was, ‘What do you think?’ We are all leaders in a way” (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Without confining teaching to four classroom walls, Zoë Dillon observed that out of chaos came cooperation. Her team teaching efforts have helped her to learn twice as much as the children with whom she has been involved. She would not want to return to an isolated classroom after having experienced team teaching. “I appreciate this school environment for showing me there is a life beyond one classroom. We are all working with kids. We could knock down the walls and be one big school” (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Perhaps most importantly Zoë Dillon believes that hope can be instilled in some of our parents coping with dire circumstances as teachers interact with them on a regular basis about their child’s learning experience.

If you hug a parent and you feel the electric current, they say, ‘Wow, my kids have passed,’ ...and sometimes that is all they have in a twelve- hour day and you want to instill that hope in parents. If because you are excited the kid is doing well...that has probably been the hardest for me, being enthused about working with the child, for this is a long time thing (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

I have to discuss things with parents and have home visits and they stop by to pick

up their kids and we talk about the child and how they are doing. If we have them for the second year, they are more comfortable because they don't have to reinvest in a brand new future and so there is more success. Sometimes, not always, because there have been a lot of changes with parents moving, but the parents that stay are the parents that we seem to have more of a commitment to. The multi-age does do away with lack of trust...we do sort of commit with these parents. We are both on the same road (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Zoë Dillon particularly enjoys having children for more than one school year, as provided by multi-age and special education setting because it fills a profound teaching and learning relationship.

Not only are the teachers together on the most part but the kids I think the older they get they seem to understand where they are going. In our particular setting we are very accepting of all kids and I have worked a long time in TCPS and the team teachers that I work with and some other teachers have total acceptance of all kids, and that to me is a significant change. Having a name change like the Rockets kind of pulled everybody together and we are on the same road, not on twenty different paths (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

### **Willa Kennard**

Veteran teacher, Willa Kennard, is an intermediate level special education teacher with an early childhood specialist degree. She now coordinates a child care program for the Tower City District, which allows continuous contact with Riverside Elementary School activities. Her account of the project involving changes at Riverside School included the statement,



Unless you have an atmosphere of security and comfort, people won't do it. Change doesn't take place by giving a mandate or rule or law. It only comes from the ability to experience life, make mistakes, and you have got to see what is better (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

From her experience working with the children and in the program, this educator saw continuous evaluation assist to make instruction better for children and for the staff. For Willa Kennard, being included in activities and decision-making improved the situation for her program and for the children involved. Knowing that conditions were improving day by day for Willa Kennard led to self and system renewal, a link which she believes to be elusive, but necessary (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98). She speaks about the growth in relationships as being one key to her satisfaction and productivity in the setting, but she attests to not only the relationships themselves, but to their depth (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

For Willa Kennard, being included was of importance, in addition to her sense of involvement.

Most of the time you think that the principal makes the decisions, but then I had a vast selection of people I worked with to solve that problem, including the custodian. So it was a mutual support group. Even the parents and children were involved in that, you know, so it was more an attitude than a personality that permeated the entire school (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Willa Kennard realized one drawback apparent in such school environment. She cites that it takes more time to build relationships and to work collegially than some are willing to give to the situation.

Not everybody gets it. That grieves my heart. A community that will say that a school is our family. People know that they have to work with each other to make it work and they are learning that and it is a process of learning and not, 'This is the way it is.' It takes time...six years is a beginning (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Professionally, Willa Kennard has moved from working in the local schools to the District, State and now National level. She recalls that her ability to make a mistake without disastrous professional penalty was critical to her professional learning.

I appreciated being able to ask for help and knowing that I wouldn't be judged because of my shortcoming. Instead I was honored for my strengths...let me grow more and approach the area where I wasn't quite as good. So professionally I have had to grow, and my knowledge back here hasn't become a negative experience or I guess I wouldn't be where I am now (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

In response to change at personal and professional levels, Willa Kennard responded that:

Change is a personal thing. How do you separate that personal thing? The personal confidence and self-esteem that comes from knowing that you can touch the life of a community. Some people have a small cry. Let me touch the life of a child. To know we can touch the life a community and never be forgotten. I come back today and I get a hug and, 'Please come back and visit and when you come back, do I get to see you?' The depth of the relationship, the friendship, it is about life and growth. It isn't about a job. So it is important to have a personal

life and a professional life, but the integrity of the two bond together (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Ideally Willa Kennard would appreciate seeing far more monetary rewards for teachers and other staff in settings like Riverside Elementary School. She believes that sometimes programs and the individuals associated with such work do not receive the prestige they deserve. In some circles the pay generated warrants prestige. Everyone sees what a difference the program makes but she feels that salaries should be commensurate for such an incredible effort.

I would like to pay my teachers more... I talked to somebody who worked for a Budweiser Beer Company and they talked about winning a district award, and you know what happened? They sent him to the best hotel, they got to go to an expensive college, they got jackets. Teachers get a plaque on the wall and that is beautiful. Did anybody follow these people around with a video camera and give them a video of their whole vacation? I want that for my teachers. I want that for educators. I want them to see how important it is. It hurts me that it isn't (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

### **Dawn Sommers**

Dawn Sommers is a twenty-year classroom teacher, assigned to duties as instructional coordinator for reading, language arts and social studies. An avid jogger, she coordinates the extended day Riverside Elementary Fitness Star activities. She acknowledges the Riverside Elementary School change initiative to be a serious one, with real implications for the future of education.

Her exposure to professional research assists in reinforcing her to challenge

herself, yet refines her efforts within what she labels as a dynamic teaching environment.

For me, being an old dog, it has been a real refreshing experience for me and I think you reach a point in your career where you either burn out or you seek opportunities that force you to change and challenge. The positive atmosphere here and the focus on positive has had a profound effect on me too as a human being...I am able to now if I am feeling bad in my own life, to put that aside and I don't know that you always can be that way. It is a serious project and it has the real implications for our future and that is why I like being there and it is the longest I have ever stayed, and I am not sure I am ready to leave yet. I feel like I need some change in my life, but not yet. It is not just that...it is a real project, real things happen and for me...it has saved me and it will for a while longer. I have been able to move around and work with different people. I have had a lot of exposure to research. I have had a lot of exposure to training...TRIBES. Of course this is what I already do and it helps me refine what I do. Also what we are doing at that school will have long range effects on our children. They may not always respond the way we would like them to, but it is going to be bouncing around in their heads for a long time and that is basically it. The resiliency training...I have really been exposed to an incredible amount of research and implementation that I find useful daily and it has changed me as a teacher (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

For Dawn, a combination of guidance through exposure to professional literature, coupled with the freedom to experiment with unique teaching techniques and the encouragement of her efforts, have become vital to her professional welfare.

...I think the success of the school is that our people are given opportunities one year and they don't have to do it the next year. We can try something and try something else the next year. We can move around, we can try materials that we want to try. We are given a lot of professional freedom in our classrooms and because it was a unique group that works well (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

She acknowledges the teaching environment at Riverside Elementary School to be one that is rigorous and which guides staff efforts even though monitored and adjusted through the years.

The vision that we have had in generating support for our children and for our staff through monitoring, through grant money, allowing us to do what we really want to do, supporting us in that constantly, asking us to update, monitor, to look at what the latest research is. Our efforts vary from year to year, but there are strengths that everybody brings to it. This is a special group of committed people no matter what aspects, no matter what kind of job they have (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

Mrs. Sommers believes that high expectations for learning are a critical element in projects that seek to improve student achievement. There is a need to constantly address this element of high student expectations.

We have such high expectations for our kids and they have trouble living up to this and we have trouble accepting it. That is when it is hard to control yourself and you know this kid knows the right thing to do and they just choose not to and that happens so much at our school. The emotional, the prejudice and anger we deal with...the anger in the community. The thanklessness we see so much and it

seems so easy to solve it, but it takes years and years. I think that is probably very exhausting emotionally (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

For Dawn Sommers the community partners interaction and relationship building involved in the initiative generates hope for neighborhood children. She believes that self sacrifice and servitude involved in community donation of time and guidance through mentoring programs in addition to appropriate instructional practice will ultimately make the difference in these children's lives.

Absolutely rewarding...it is probably the best environment I have ever worked in because of the input we have and from so many different levels, and I always feel like I am the teacher and I feel like they are to support me and I feel like I have developed a lot of relationships there...through the children that enhance the children's relationship with me. These other adult mentors for instance. You think I have been teaching school for twenty-three years and I know so many teachers who are so burned out by that time, and I am anything but that because I have been in this environment that is refreshing and renewing and real (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

### **Hallie Lindner**

Hallie Lindner is a middle aged Native American intermediate level language arts teacher. She began her work in education as a Title I teacher assistant and through her professional pursuit, now holds a Masters Degree in Education. She chairs the Riverside School Site Decision-Making Council. For Hallie the enrichment model of curriculum is a critical factor in the improvement of student achievement. "For me, I have always thought that our approach to extended learning through enhancement and enrichment,

rather than remediation, is probably the star of the whole program” (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

One of Hallie Lindner’s current projects is to assist her team with professional renewal:

Personally -- we started out as a process and my cycle in the process right now is to renew and rework and re-evaluate what I am doing well and what I am not. I am really working with my team right now to renew our focus and see how we can improve those parts we feel weakest on (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Hallie Lindner stated that it is easy to become professionally comfortable, by continuing to do things you like to do which do not necessarily meet the current needs of students you have today as compared to those you had six years ago. As a part of professional renewal, she suggested that there is an overall need for the staff to work on connections. She believes her team takes each other for granted a lot more than they used to. “You cannot eliminate the importance of how we are meeting the needs of the parent population and hopefully through that process, it will improve our own energy as teachers and staff” (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

In overall terms the Riverside Elementary change initiative has made a dramatic shift since the beginning of the project.

We had a much more family oriented population than we do now. We have a highly stressed mobile population now that we didn’t have when we first came. The students are coming with a lot more serious needs academically, emotionally, socially. We have more children who are unable to get along with other children and their parents are unable to get along with the staff. It is a lot harder to contact

parents than it used to be. In other words, I think we are still providing a lot of enhanced programs and when we are able to communicate with parents, they are impressed with that and it really seems to improve their feeling and attitude about the school. What we are doing is surprisingly stable, considering we are in a six-year focus (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Hallie Lindner acknowledged the staff to be one of high creativity from the outset.

From the very beginning I think most of the people who came to this school were looking for a change in innovation in school design and curriculum. I think they are the kind of people who are usually up on research and want to help to find new ways to enhance the learning. I think this whole building is full of people who are creating new and better ways to teach (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Hallie Lindner believed, when addressing high challenge needs, that there should be a combination of capable staff and visionary leadership. “You have got to have visionaries to make it happen, to let people reach out to make it happen. It has been a stretching experience for everyone and I have seen people that I couldn’t think could make it who did miraculous things” (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Even though she believes the staff as a whole is pre-disposed to the implementation of innovation, she believes there are strong personal aspects associated with change.

Well, I don’t think anybody can create change for me better than I can create change for myself. On the other hand, my changes are going to influence others and I am always very concerned whether my attitude or changes or my thinking on changes is in the best interests of everyone...the kids and the other teachers



and where that fits in with them” (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98). As for future needs, Hallie knows that the project must provide for a continuing need for community planning, creativity and a variety of teaching content (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

### **Adele Nichols**

Adele Nichols has taught at Riverside Elementary for twenty years. She is an intermediate grade math teacher involved in multi level education. In addition to her teaching credentials, she has earned school counseling credentials. Those in the school and surrounding community universally respect her for her dedication. She performs duties of teacher-in-charge in the absence of the principal and serves as her informal advisor.

I think having that Site Decision...before nobody had any say so...has really helped a lot. I like the school community...at first I think we had a lot of competition. Then we finally realized we needed to get along. Everybody finally got in there and picked up the slack and helped everybody across the board (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Her comment involving the school change initiative at Riverside Elementary provided insight.

It has become completely kid oriented, where before it was the opposite. Everything revolved around the office. Now everything revolves around the children and I think the parents now are encouraged to come up and take part and we actively go and seek them, whereas before we just took care of everything up here (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Alluding to student satisfaction, she believed the kids are happier than they were previously, taking advantage of learning opportunities like conflict resolution for example:

Adele enjoys the transition of leadership style from previous days to shared decision-making. She remarked, "The guidance and the planning at that council really helps, as does announcing meetings on the bulletin board so that concerns can be brought to someone on the council. I think we need to know who our representatives are to submit things to. We are like the tree branches or like the leaves of the tree" (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Adele has a special interest in the professional development pertaining to leadership skills. "I think some of the people that were not leaders, really stepped in and took a leadership part; people that you least expect will grab a hunch of kids to do things" (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Adele would encourage greater consistency and organization within the after school portion of the curriculum, as well as comprehensive planning for field trips. Extended day enrichment holds particular significance for Adele, as she states that more learning occurs outside the classroom than within those confines.

I think the extended time right from the beginning, right off the bat, was a key to our success and the closeness to the kids. We learn so much more outside the classroom than we do in the classroom. I saw changes...I think we made a little bit of a step backwards through larger classes that we couldn't help, that it took a little bit more individual attention. It is against our research. Every organization has setbacks. I know that first year we had eighty consistently every week after

school in some activity. I would like to see everybody do one hour every week...Helen and Kathy have really worked. I counted on the calendar and there are sixteen Thursdays in the first semester...say twenty...only thirty-six hours on Wednesdays. I think we need to evaluate it (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Acknowledging the close ties within the Riverside Elementary teaching corps, Adele is intent upon concentration needed to get new faculty members securely oriented.

I really like the closeness and the bonding of the teachers here. Everybody cares. I think the kids deep down feel that and I think the staff all feel it. We are a pretty cordial group, but we need to make sure we listen to them and their ideas. It has a lot to do with us thinking, 'This is my baby' (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

One of Adele's frustrations is with a detailed essential skills checklist to be included with student profiles to be completed as a form of parent communication. Adele expresses a preference for a form of communication tool that better summarizes skills. "I know what each child can do and I still have reservations about marking those" (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

### **Isabel Martinez**

A teammate of Adele Nichols, Isabel Martinez, performs as an intermediate level instructional coordinator and creative arts teacher. She holds teaching certification from outside the region, has earned administrative certification and maintains a family farm when not involved in the classroom. In addressing school change over the six-year duration of the initiative, Isabel observed:

I think the most obvious change is demographic in the last six years. The racial composition of the student body has shifted. I believe the framework of cultural

values has shifted somewhat. I think that is the first thing that strikes me.

The second thing is that I see people doing what they do better. I see people, including myself, who have really taken some raw talent and honed it into a skill and now they can shortcut and think back and build on it in ways they couldn't do six years ago. As far as dealing with parents and kids, they have more skills. I see a decline of energy. I think we came in gung ho and have evened out now to a more consistent level. I hope that we are moving toward more and more integration as far as the curriculum and even the integration of talent and focus. We came together as a wide variety of people and everybody formed their own little personal agenda and had reasons for wanting to be in the program. The longer we work together the more these reasons merge and become one (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Isabel relates that teachers new to the initiative oriented themselves to their new setting much as research shows new teachers must do:

I am getting better at it. The first time out, you always wonder about what am I doing, why am I doing it? The second time you repeat the action, you worry less about yourself and more about who is receiving it. How are the kids doing with this? You already feel confident about what you are teaching and whatever principles you are wanting to pack along and I feel fairly confident with that. Now I am ready to be more concerned with the receiver (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

She relates well to the team teaching setting, knowing that she could develop her preferred professional skills, finding that she could relax a little bit when she wasn't

responsible for the total instructional package. In a team teaching setting, she mentions the importance of trusting other colleagues to perform the instructional tasks she had agreed to surrender. She views the existing curriculum at Riverside Elementary School to be more reflective of student, rather than teacher needs (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Student mobility was incredibly difficult for Isabel to address. She addressed the loss of relationships as,

I don't know about rich rewards. You invest heavily in children only to have them leave...sometimes overnight. That is difficult. That is not easy for anybody. I really feel that in the bureaucracy from the top...they are not willing to understand what we are doing out here or who we are doing it with. They really don't have a handle on what makes up our community, what kind of challenges children that we are teaching, working with for children who do not have a place to stay or their parents may have been cut off from assistance and take the least desirable job society has to offer and work very odd hours into the night often. The child may go from one setting to another or transfer at 4:00 a.m. Children are grieving over a lot of things and I grieve for the children...probably too much personally (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Other areas of difficulty for Isabel included demands of paper work including district report cards. "Paperwork can get you down. The report cards that the district has chosen can get you down" (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

When speaking of rewards, Isabel did not mention monetary rewards seeing instead the calling associated with intrinsic value. Isabel related very positively to shared decision- making saying,

I also like having a voice in what is happening. Every other situation where I worked I have been dictated to, have been told, 'This is how it is. You will produce and this is how you will produce.' I am not really crazy about being told how to do my job. I am pretty good in my job, but I don't like being told how to do it. I have found leadership that says, 'This is the class; how do you express yourself? How will you get better with this?' not, 'How are you going to get there?' but, 'How are you going to help us get there?' and that is very powerful. I am not sure I could go back to the other way. That is a very personal professional thing (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

She felt connected with representatives of a larger community, most significantly the church that has adopted the school, which Isabel finds to be profoundly supportive.

By coming and talking to us and working with our kids, the skills that they bring and the fact that I just know there are people from the larger community that care about our kids and are involved in their lives, not because they are high energy people, but because they simply love and care about them. That has made a huge impact on the program. Even though it is a nice thing to do socially, now I see people more willing to invest emotionally at a deeper level than perhaps when we started (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Isabel questioned the value placed on innovation and creativity at the district level. She placed great emphasis on her creative efforts and those of her teammates in the local setting.

On the other hand I have been a big fish in a small pond and I would rather be a small fish in a big pond because this at least lets me be creative. So whatever we

are doing, you let us do it and in a smaller place we probably would not be allowed to do what we are doing because of the school people, not just in the community, but people who are in charge. We have got to make changes to reach kids and the changes in education are erratic. I have been in education long enough to see some of these things come full circle, a couple of times. No one person or method or policy or procedure fits all, but we do not reward creative people and innovative people. I think we need to celebrate our differences a little more. I think we have a tendency to not support each other. This work is very fulfilling, but also very demanding (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

### **Carla Shelby**

The impetus for Carla Shelby's arrival at the Riverside Elementary School campus was a sense of need. Carla is a forty-year old African-American school counselor and an experienced classroom teacher. She coordinates site-based social services for the entire project. Her remarks about the beginning of the project are memorable.

When I first came to Riverside School years ago, I saw a neighborhood where parents and children were very isolated. They had been disappointed in some educational needs that had not been met. We began to work very hard to meet some of these needs. We now know that these needs change every year, sometimes every nine weeks, but we went all the way out for it. I was amazed that the teachers were willing to go way out for the students and that is one thing that to this day still amazes me (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Carla opens doors to the community for site-based social services and agency

providers in the city to come directly to the people by way of Riverside Elementary School to help them with their social, emotional, health and economic concerns. According to Carla's perspective, the school isn't just to educate the children, but to help them with their needs, including everyday problems with their families:

Conditions change...most of the parents who were here when we came here are no longer here...moved on to better things. There is great mobility here. A lot of the new parents don't know exactly where the administrator and teachers have brought the school to...they expect these things because they think they have always been here, but they haven't. I am talking about social services offered and the caring and empathy the staff provides and shows. How the school has opened its doors to the community here and pupils that they know we will listen to them and they know that we care because the doors have been opened to other social services and agencies in the city to come in here to the people and help them with their needs, and they have found out the school is not just to educate the children but to help them with their needs...every day problems and with their families (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

At the end of six-year duration of the project, Carla is assisted by a collaborative of over thirty-two agencies involved in service coordination using the school as headquarters. She has determined that administrative support reflective of care, training and love for the parents and children in the community is a crucial factor in the efforts of the change initiative.

We have people who go into the homes, people who help with utilities, with clothing, food and overall that helps not only our students but helps to educate



them. One of the ladies who works with one of the agencies...works in the building now...said when she first came here she just liked it...it was so easy. She didn't really believe it--it took her a year. Now she talks to people who don't believe it and she tells them they need to believe it and that there are so many needs out there that can be helped by social agencies (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Carla credits an unusually supportive cadre of skilled teachers as paramount in building community trust. As a result of additional social services on site, she completes many family referrals by transferring to other agencies, employing more of her time in direct action with children in guidance activity:

When a teacher comes in and says so and so must have had a rough time last night, I can take time and sit down with the kid and talk to him and find out exactly what is going on and take him back to the classroom. The teachers will wonder why the child didn't tell them and they say, 'I thought you wouldn't listen,' But the teachers are in there dealing with twenty-one kids. I say to tell your teacher if you need to talk with them. So I am playing that role now and I am enjoying it...but I never know when there will be a crisis and I have to meet with a parent and fill out a referral form for them to meet with the social service agency. I draw a lot of maps to help cut through the red tape (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

In her dual role as educator and counselor, Mrs. Shelby acknowledges that professional growth has been a powerful and pervasive influence in this setting. "On my job I have grown. I come here every day and do everything I can with the power I have to help these people. I don't turn my back on them. If it is 3:30 p.m., I stay here and help

so when I go home, I can be relaxed” (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Striving to maintain a healthy personal and professional balance between her school and family life, Carla recognized family harmony to be instrumental in her professional identity. As for her beginning years as a newly certified counselor at Riverside Elementary School, Carla made the following discovery: “We were working on building that trust. I found out that all I needed to do was just be myself and not be judgmental toward the parents, but listen to their problems” (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

In each situation she encounters, Carla attributes her background and skills as a classroom teacher for her success in relating to children, teachers and parents, as a friend and confidant. Now as before, she is a key influence in supporting those with very challenging problems of everyday life in the halls, classrooms, playgrounds and cafeteria at Riverside Elementary School:

Professionally I think I have grown that way because I have listened to so many other counselors in the school system who think they can change people and so many times I tell the teachers, ‘I will take her with me and talk to her and find out what is bothering her and let you know, but I am not a therapist, I am a school guidance counselor and we will try to get it resolved so she can have a better day in school’ (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Reaching optimum levels of school achievement has surpassed becoming a professional dream. It now borders on a compulsive drive for Riverside Elementary School teachers and counselor. Seeing themselves as much more than recipients of new professional practice, these change agents continually invent new interpretations of schooling and devise extraordinary patterns of school organization, renewing this unique

institution (Sergiovanni, 1997).

### **The Principal's Perspective**

Administrative leadership blends perception, thought, action and aptitude during times of change. Balancing the challenge of managing the process of change corresponds with meeting the leadership demands of the role of change agent (Senge, 1995).

Traditional teaching styles are the hallmark of East Tower City schools. At Riverside Elementary School, pencil-paper recall and recognition tasks provided the mechanism for instruction. At the end of the day, Riverside Elementary School teachers are encouraged by the white male principal to depart quickly from the vicinity in order to assure their safety rather than to work in classrooms. Remedial summer school classes are held for those from area schools whose promotion to the next grade level is contingent upon attendance. Use of technology as a pathway to student publishing, mastering basic skills or as a basis for enrichment or research projects is not evident (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

Unequivocal support for traditional instruction in East Tower City schools is displayed in countless examples. School honor rolls are published weekly in the local East Tower City News. Other types of school news are not often covered. As an unspoken rule, teachers and administrators not originally from the Eastside are not as readily appointed or accepted unless recognition of special expertise precedes the assignment. Dictum requires that the Diamond High School principal be a graduate of Diamond High School in order to generate the loyalty of students, parents and staff in the feeder area. Until the early 1980's, no women administrators were appointed to Eastside assignments, since their abilities were perceived to be less than suitable in addressing

disciplinary issues. Only a handful of students originally from the Eastside choose to attend specialized elementary or secondary level magnet school programs that are popular in other regions of Tower City (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997).

Goal-oriented behavior is also a missing feature of many Old East Tower City residents who, on the average, found achievement in school an elusive experience. Instead, socially motivated role orientation constitutes the quality of educational attainment. Most of the parents employed locally work in service professions, often at entry or minimally skilled levels such as laborers, fast food attendants, housekeepers, child care attendants or convenience store clerks. If not employed, others attend local community colleges or training institutes with financing provided by the federal or state government. The rate of teenage pregnancy in the area is the highest in the state, if not the nation. Many of the parents of Riverside Elementary students who stay in the area also attended school locally, abandoned the pursuit and choose to remain in the area because of the low cost of housing, especially for young families. The school and its immediate surroundings provide a key to their continuing identity and economic survival as East Tower City residents (U. S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

Multiple types of needs exist for adults as well as for children within the East Tower City population. Because of the multiple needs of many of the adults in the Riverside Elementary School neighborhood, twenty-six percent of whom have not earned a high school diploma, the outlook for school success for the school population might be termed bleak, or at best, highly challenging. Teenage pregnancy is compounded by multi-generational cycles of below average school achievement, accompanied by exploding numbers of families living in abject poverty, one step removed from shelters or

homelessness. Social and educational visibility ceases to remain an option for the children who attend Riverside Elementary School (U. S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

The multicultural aspects of the Riverside Elementary School population provide a key to understanding its potential for educational change. When we use a lens of ethnic diversity with which to analyze activity, little evidence suggests that there is a strong majority group that is called upon to demonstrate acceptable behavior. As such, from a membership of approximately three hundred twenty-five students, African-American and Caucasian groups are almost equally represented, followed by Native-American, Asian and Hispanics. This diversity of cultural groups lends itself to a certain amount of individual freedom. Where the socialization patterns are strongly norm-referent, behavior based upon group identity alone is the usual result. Educationally, students are role-oriented, rather than goal oriented. Strong ethnic identity is a feature of the individuals who comprise the groups who frequent the Riverside Elementary School hallways. In essence, no one cultural group owns this turf, which allows individuals the latitude to explore a variety of experiences (U.S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

Just as parenting practices in many homes range from harsh to inconsistent ineffective or nonexistent, school discipline policies and procedures are implemented in an authoritarian fashion. Alternative consequences to corporal punishment have yet to fully develop, until recently eliminated by the district. Many of the cognitive skill development techniques involve mundane, recall and recognition activity in contrast to emphasis on creative projects or those involving higher level thinking skills. If problems develop, counseling for disciplinary concerns rather than brainstorming for solutions to problems are the more likely alternatives. The school curricula lacks meaning for

students and authenticity for teachers, constituting neither a socially invigorating environment or an intellectually stimulating series of experiences for either group. The setting provides a fertile ground for generating cohesion between espoused belief about best teaching practices for youngsters who are potentially low achievers, and the existing classroom teaching practices for such a group (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Of the households headed by a single mother with children under the age of eighteen, eighty percent have incomes under poverty level. Of these, sixty-one percent with school age children are in the labor force. Of those having children under the age of six, fifty-three percent are in the labor force, but often cannot avail themselves of affordable and developmentally appropriate child-care programs. For instance, the day care facility run by the social service agency across the street from Riverside Elementary School is a historically well patronized neighborhood provider of child care. Upon close inspection, these services remind the observer more of a kiddy warehouse than a center for nurturing developmentally appropriate activity (U.S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

In this cycle of poverty, children's needs for early development and expressive language skills is often not a priority. Educationally speaking, early neurological stimulation is as rare for infants as is the medical provision for extensive prenatal health care for their young mothers. Limited contact and discussion with adults can inhibit good speech forms and human expression such as reading and writing. Early access to interactive educational games, toys and printed materials suitable for young children, an advantage which increases development of reading comprehension skills, is often a rarity with families who dwell in area subsidized apartment and rental housing (U. S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

Schools with such a grim demeanor often exhibit little curriculum enrichment, favoring rigid student control instead. Bound in a cycle developed for the sake of the remediation of student weakness, accelerated or research-based techniques, and student-generated learning are hardly a topic for dialogue. Student interest inventories as a basis for work/study projects do not exist as a characteristic of the diagnostic and prescriptive teaching process (Rogers Interview, 6/1/98).

School-community relations reveal some elements of mistrust between school patrons and school staff especially with respect to ethnicity. School experiences of parents are not remembered as particularly positive ones. It is easy to assume the reasons for dissatisfaction to have been as a result of practices involving racial prejudice or other forms of social and economic rejection. Another deterrent to trust between school and community is the proximity of the school to its constituency and the emotional and organizational baggage, the most immediate, most identifiable form of government (U. S. Census '90 Update, 1990).

Prejudice along economic lines is subtle and constitutes a far more blatant threat to fulfillment of student achievement than does racial prejudice. As social sorting mechanisms rather than institutions for fulfilling student potential, Spring, (1995) reports that schools like Riverside Elementary, and others like it, prove to be easily misunderstood in importance to the local communities they serve. In this respect, the Riverside Elementary School population represents a multi-dimensional framework for learning which roughly corresponds to the emerging global culture (Spring, 1995).

The power of discovery allows those within a learning community to achieve excellence without competing for perfection (Sarason, 1995). Given the high challenge

student and community needs, as long as the district agenda for the Riverside Elementary School project remained in the hands of traditional leadership, the implications for substantive change would be destined for failure (Sarason, 1995).

During February, March and April of 1992, Dr. Becker contemplated a perfect model for the Riverside Elementary School initiative while meeting with the Title I School Planning Committee. District leaders required that the funds previously accrued for the air conditioning project be invested in good quality playground equipment for the grounds. This extensive project involved selection of developmentally appropriate modules, one made of steel and another wood structure, both installed during April of 1992. The equipment installation was steered by a skilled committee of staff and community members. Chaired by teacher-in-charge Adele Nichols, the committee consulted with experts involved in installation and maintenance of good quality equipment. As a result of their untiring efforts, the school featured better equipment for student play rather than for authentic student learning (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

In keeping with a student control agenda, Dr. Becker encouraged the existing Riverside Elementary staff to brainstorm about a school-wide discipline plan to be implemented during the fall of 1992. These guidelines, completed without input of any newly appointed staff members, proved to be an exercise in frustration for all involved without providing meaningful intervention. A behaviorally based point system adopted by the existing faculty equated ratings for student behaviors and required massive documentation. Meanwhile, it provided little tangible benefit in the form of behavioral intervention, resulting only in a focus on punitive measures for negative “acting out” behaviors. Such an effort, undertaken by the third site administrator to be assigned to the



school site during the 1991-1992 school year, proved to be a time consuming distraction, offering little if any improvement in the instructional climate of Riverside Elementary School (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

During the spring months, the rate of student suspensions rose to between five and ten percent of the student membership. Disruptive behavior, particularly during the afternoon, became quite common. Dr. Becker began to suffer from the return of a previous stress-related health problem, causing his absence from campus for long hours of the day if not entire days or weeks. His attention was diverted from the critical timeline for new staffing and curriculum design. Other matters of importance to schooling, such as student suspensions, were left unattended. Counselor Judy Morgan and Teacher-in-Charge Adele Nichols stretched their time and capabilities in order to assist the staff with duties traditionally accorded to the school principal. In spite of their best efforts, planning for curriculum design, instructional supervision and interviews for new staff lagged behind (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

During the spring of 1992, consideration of the new project presented many teacher options for the school and for the district. Planning called for a renewal of professional commitment for all staff, but for the first time featured contract options, a departure from conventional nine-month periods of annual employment. These attractive options took the form of both extensions of the school day and of the traditional school calendar, depending upon choices at the five individual schools in the Chapter I Schoolwide Initiative. Second, professional development strategies for each site were to be used to address specific training needs for the local school, a change from district-wide professional development offerings. Many teachers were enticed by the departure

from conventional practices used throughout the district while others were threatened by the thought of being considered “risk takers”. In contrast to the traditional cellular classroom organization of previous years at Riverside Elementary School, team teaching became an innovative option introduced during spring planning sessions with teachers. As a final consideration, a specific opportunity developed for early childhood specialists with the addition of full day kindergarten classes as a foundation for school readiness. Others interested in the project relished the thought of daily teacher plan time spent in teaching teams in order to implement an integrated curriculum at all levels. The possibility of enhanced funding for field trips and outdoor education provided a thrust for teaching aficionados who never find satisfactory funding levels for these forms of pedagogy (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Another area of emphasis, encouraged by federal funding, included intensive effort in parental involvement. These strategies included holding orientation meetings in recreation centers at the apartment complexes in order to gain parent affiliation. Other interventions included Back-to-School Rallies on the grounds of the school to earn the trust of community stakeholders. The core idea behind such overtures was to socialize with the school patrons prior to introducing academic topics, a measure that can often present a threat to participants in schools which serve low-income neighborhoods.

As parent meetings were planned and notices circulated, the needs of the participants were also to be projected in advance, producing such considerations as childcare and transportation. Planners also considered designating a special day for Fall Orientation, called “Meet Your Teacher Day,” designed so that students could conference briefly with their new teacher prior to the official start of the calendar year. Parental

involvement, indicated to be one of the most important correlates to improved student achievement, occupied a specific budget line item provided by a federal funding package stimulating schoolwide intervention. A minimum percentage of the total allocation of funding was to be expended solely for the purpose of cultivating and maintaining the interest and involvement of the parent community as important school stakeholders. In order for these improvements to be successfully engineered family by family, an approach to rebuilding relationships within the school community needed to occur. Continuous school renewal had become a focal point, vital to the future outlook for student success at Riverside Elementary School (Roland Interview, 4/10/98; Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

At the Tower City district offices, Dr. Becker's inattention to numerous administrative deadlines, especially those associated with such a project as a schoolwide design, began to signal an alarm. Several teachers interested in transferring to Riverside Elementary School from other sites began to seek employment elsewhere because Dr. Becker had failed to finalize teaching assignments and transfer arrangements. As they began to drift away, those Riverside Elementary teachers selected to return to the school in the fall began to foresee a need to address staffing decisions. Their impression of the administrative posture during March and April of 1992 was one of good intentions somehow frozen in time, restricted by circumstance (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Meanwhile, Dr. Becker's health continued to deteriorate as documented by written releases from his physician and by his sporadic presence in the school office or at professional meetings. Late in April, he announced his intentions to retire, based on health-related factors. Dr. Becker's overdue yearly staff evaluations, planning meetings,

staffing interviews and budgetary projections went without process or substance. Perhaps his desire to implement a perfect project rather than an excellent one impacted his ability to make a difference in such an ambitious project. He now challenged other participants, particularly those in a potential leadership role, to carve their notch in this school improvement initiative. This endeavor, hazy in format and fraught with its own inertia, obviously required bold transformation of lasting substance and vitality (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

District officials analyzed their options about next steps required for reintegrating a once promising project now almost hopelessly entangled in indecision. The importance of implementation of the schoolwide design caused them to reject the option of finishing the school year without the appointment of a new project administrator, to be the fourth leader at this site during the academic year. Oddly enough, one of the female candidates, Jane Roberts, had suggested during the interview process that Riverside Elementary School was an attractive option for her because of its unique qualities, neighborhood configuration, and ethnic distribution that she considered amenable to her administrative style and experience (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Jane's arrival at the Riverside Elementary School was notable. At the outset of the announcement of the Schoolwide Design principals in December of 1991, she had been appointed to the helm of southside Fitzgerald School. The population of Fitzgerald School was of African-American representation with school leadership provided by an African-American male, Fred Dorsett. Although Jane Roberts had successful teaching and administrative experience in similar populations, she knew that Fred had applied for the Fitzgerald administrative post and would express his distress via community

supporters if not reappointed for this important project. With marked reservation, Jane agreed to the appointment at Fitzgerald School (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

As anticipated, a negative community reaction, especially from African-American supporters of Dorsett's, began to charge the district phone lines, even though Jane Roberts as a white female, had a reliable track record of student achievement in schools of predominantly minority representation. A series of community sessions ensued, focusing on future staff configuration of Fitzgerald School and Jane Roberts' intentions, qualifications and experience. Respected minority educators and community leaders from the southside of Tower City were in attendance in order to lend credence to her appointment (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Jane Roberts was also questioning the appointment herself, especially since she appeared to be headed for an embattled appointment right out of the starting blocks. Rumors circulating in the Tower City district teacher information pipeline identified some of the Fitzgerald teaching staff as the source of the unsatisfactory reaction to Roberts' leadership because of the responsibilities they feared she might impose. District leaders suggested that she keep a low profile while they ran interference on the situation. Articles in the Tower City Times began to exploit the controversy of a community divided over an appointment to school leadership involving a post of untold potential and complicated with a troubled past. In the midst of the furor, Jane Roberts disappeared from Tower City for a short vacation on her own volition in order to visit a family friend on the coast, adhering to recommendations of district officials.

Upon Jane Roberts' return from the coast, she learned that the situation had resolved itself in favor of the resident Fitzgerald principal, Mr. Dorsett and his

supporters. Actually, this turn of events contributed to the relief of Jane Roberts, who, contrary to district preferences, had been unable to visualize herself in a Fitzgerald School leadership role. Jane Roberts' disgruntled supporters maintained a concern about the future of improving student achievement at Fitzgerald School, while Jane Roberts maintained that her leadership would have been superseded by a needless firestorm. Both remained in their original assignments for the duration of the winter and early spring months and the controversy quickly faded.

As events at Riverside Elementary School escalated to crisis proportions late in April, district officials again had to evaluate Jane Roberts' potential as a catalyst needed for substantive school change. This time, however, one month before the end of the academic school year, their leadership dilemma emerged in terms of the mandate for a decisive troubleshooter at Riverside Elementary School (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Because of the critical events at Riverside Elementary School during the months preceding her assignment to the principalship, there was a prevailing sense of relief once the assignment was finalized during April. Jane Roberts found it difficult to make such a hasty departure from the students she had served for six years at her original assignment. In addition, she had great difficulty departing from a group of school alumni whose loyalties she had cultivated over the years in order to benefit the school in the form of a private foundation. Some teachers applying for the project at Riverside Elementary School were not entirely surprised to hear the announcement of her year end transfer (Roland Interview, 4/10/98; Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Moving furniture, materials and supplies required long hours over one weekend to contribute to a smooth transition, given the circumstances. Much to his credit, Dr.

Becker donated some storage modules customized for his needs in the Riverside Elementary School office to Jane Roberts. Perhaps he perceived the need to compensate for the emergency situation, now in Jane Roberts' hands to resolve. Additionally he understood that this transition of leadership was to provide a supreme test of her administrative prowess in creating a process for change for the Riverside Elementary School community within a delayed time frame (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Upon Dr. Becker's departure, he handed Jane Roberts the keys to the Riverside Elementary School building. She noticed that they were held with a distinctive "I Make a Difference" key holder. She offered to remove the keys from a holder that she assumed he valued and might wish to use. With a terse response to her inquiry, Dr. Becker exclaimed, "No, you make the difference, now!" turned on his heel, and departed from the premises for the last time.

One of the initial challenges she faced was the need to stabilize and maximize stakeholder trust within the community. During the first week of May, attention to social and emotional factors for students, parents, teachers and support staff became a paramount effort. Internally resolute, she intentionally did not ask anyone to perform a task that she was not willing to perform herself, or was not to be witnessed performing by stakeholders of the Riverside Elementary School community.

A high level of personal visibility elicited trustful responses from Jane Roberts' new acquaintances as she involved students, teachers, parents, and support staff in decisions that seemed of a relatively minor dimension. Recognizing student achievement during the morning daily announcements generated attention to growth in cognitive skills, even in the waning days of the semester. In order to access information and to

gain additional visibility, Jane Roberts opened the principal's office door to the main hallway, a move previously unprecedented. Eating lunch with students also assisted the beginnings of important new interpersonal relationships with the community.

A spring PTA meeting became an event of significance when Jane Roberts was able to encourage a community audience to remain calm and quiet while students performed the culminating portion of a project. Visitors to the school interjected that during previous performances, audiences had been so noisy that it was impossible to hear the presentation (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

To smooth previously troubled waters, Jane Roberts convinced parent and political candidate, Larry Seawright, Dr. Becker's persistent nemesis, to write his complaints down on paper rather than holding frequent personal discussions that monopolized her time. As a result, she was able to discuss the issues briefly with him after time to consider his ideas. She decided never to conference with him in her office, convincing him to make the most of the opportunity to chat in the hallways on the way to a destination, a practice that satisfied his need for her attention. If only Superintendent Winstead, Dr. Becker or Mr. Falconer could have successfully introduced a similar maneuver designed to consolidate time spent in discussing Larry Seawright's ideas for school improvement!

After two weeks time, Jane Roberts' supervisor, Guy Dennison, stopped by to assess the conditions at Riverside Elementary School, stating, as he slid into the office chair, "What a relief it is to have your help. At last I can foresee a peaceful end to a chaotic school year here." Teachers responded to Jane Roberts' presence in a tongue in cheek fashion, erecting a sign at her parking place stating that she had won the "Principal



of the Month Award” for Riverside Elementary School. Their use of humor directed at the school’s unusual amount of administrative turnover, completely failed to trigger Dr. Dennison’s appreciation at the central office (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

One school climate factor perplexed Jane Roberts from the outset. Teachers seemed surprised when she directed them to take supplies requested from storage when the need presented itself. Upon inquiring about their hesitancy, she was informed that the carpeted storage room had been declared “off limits” to them by Principal Hayes. Apparently, this small room adjacent to the office had, at one time, housed a sofa and microwave oven, serving as an informal break room for office personnel only (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Further conversations revealed that teachers were also forbidden to enter the carpeted area behind the front office counter. Background comments, made in retrospect by teaching and support staff, assisted Jane Roberts in discovering that physical turf and tightly constrained boundaries had been important. Just as with realizing student potential, expanding teacher resources, professional development, and support became critical factors in attempts to improve Riverside Elementary School (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

The task of determining elements of pervasive change in a school centered change initiative is a nearly insurmountable one. As Jane Roberts watched the project evolve, there were experiences that signaled supreme challenges. As a veteran principal, Jane Roberts was no stranger to a school of potentially high challenge status. Even so, intuition and exposure to professional research proved to be invaluable tools. Jane Roberts believed the following factors in her character and qualifications proved

important in molding the improvements in the new Riverside Elementary School (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

A primary factor was Jane Roberts' self sufficiency in bringing several years' experience from a similar school to the Riverside Elementary setting. Sensitivity to the needs of children whose families fall far below poverty income levels has been an earmark of her career in contrast to many high challenge assignments used as steppingstones. As such, Jane Roberts serves the Tower City Public Schools as an administrative troubleshooter for those students whose disadvantages outweigh their opportunities and for whom an enriched, child-centered curricula, skillfully designed and energetically delivered, can spell the difference between a bright or dismal future.

Riverside School has basic urban characteristics much like setting in a much larger metropolitan area, to its multi-cultural ethnic distribution, and its extremely high student mobility and demographics. An important feature of the Riverside Elementary School change initiative is that Jane Roberts arrived at Riverside School in May of 1992, the fourth administrator at this site in one year, by rights of her own choosing. The personal and professional potential for the children along the East bank of the Tower River presented untold excitement for her (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

The second factor, less easily determined, is the visualization of a successful project that Jane Roberts enjoyed from the outset, even though her assignment to the project came during times of duress with the district. Without a sense of ultimate success in the project, coupled with the excitement of bringing things along to fruition, Jane Roberts might have become indecisive, disillusioned or bitter when occasional inevitable setbacks would occur. It can be said that Jane Roberts felt as though the project was part

of a “rising tide that lifts all ships.” She still maintains this undaunted perspective even now that the project is a maturing one (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Jane Roberts possesses a sense of humor that is unparalleled when addressing prevailing human needs, which often surround her at every turn. Her persistence, perseverance, and enduring sense of humor provides an inordinate balance for her when addressing various degrees of human pathos, particularly as it relates to addressing future needs of disadvantaged students. This insightful attribute often sparks empathy that might otherwise prove to be emotionally unbearable. There are times that family and co-workers alike refer to Jane Roberts as an intensely driven individual, focused on children’s needs at the expense of other causes.

An additional factor is Jane Roberts’ personal and professional habit of continuous learning, perhaps enhanced by her strong identity and continual involvement with the performing arts. At the outset of the Riverside Elementary School change initiative, Jane Roberts began a unique course of formal study in a research-oriented advanced degree program.

A fifth element would be Jane Roberts’ commitment to the philosophy and practice of open education that demonstrates a commitment to educational settings as evolving, rather than static in nature. Committing to the observation that there is no one solution to any problem, Jane Roberts is no stranger to creative problem solving.

Exposure to professions of social work and mental health has also been evident in this project, as Jane Roberts grew up in a family that enjoyed participating in those helping professions, so much so that social work or psychology might have been her profession, rather than education. The six-year duration of the project has provided many

opportunities for her compassionate leadership as a result of unfortunate family situations, illnesses and violent tragedies involving patrons and staff (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

The seventh factor linked to leadership skills is enjoyment of public speaking at school and community events. As such, the Riverside initiative and its implications for leadership training have provided an opportunity for Jane Roberts to train others in building collaborative structures. Collaborative structures provide vitality of services to Riverside Elementary families and may have evolved from Jane Roberts' community activist profile. Jane Roberts' ability to successfully involve resources, both monetary and human, is another extension of the collaborative capability warranted by such a concept (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

The eighth factor of leadership as applied to Jane Roberts' professional expertise might be her curricular background featuring all categories of special education, gifted and talented theory and practice and the related field of fine arts instruction and performance.

As a ninth consideration, Jane Roberts has involved herself with religious and community organizations. This involvement, along with deep spiritual foundation of belief in a supreme being, spawns a capability in which organizational knowledge and human relation skills would be a requirement for the demands of a high challenge leadership assignment (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

The tenth factor is that Jane Roberts considers the availability and use of a research based interview instrument designed to target teachers adept in urban teaching assignments to have been a distinct advantage in the school change initiative at Riverside

Elementary School (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Perhaps most importantly, Jane Roberts was professionally well prepared for this opportunity because she knew her own capabilities and shortcomings at the outset. The principal's personal knowledge has served her well during the project. As long as she could surround herself with detail thinkers in order to provide building blocks for a cohesive and meaningful structure and balance her creative spontaneity, a successful approach to the challenges of the Riverside Elementary School project could readily be forged (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

The planning committee has created an environment that is bustling with creativity, innovation, community involvement and enthusiasm. The school features original solutions that foster collaborative relationships, provide expanded opportunities for the children, and increased levels of achievement, family and community support and a real-life model of school community involvement in an elementary school that previously had been on the low performing and high challenge lists since 1990. In just four years students moved off the state designated lists (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Numerous community resources contribute to the changes necessary in this school so that children's achievement can match their potential. Community networks provide advocacy on behalf of students. Staff enthusiasm and "can do" attitude overrun most of the administrative roadblocks that the school district bureaucracy erects. Teaching teams absolutely never stop trying to improve the situation for the children (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

The school culture changed through the curriculum, including not only the standard course material, but also teaching styles, and the addition of an enriched after

school program. Teaching at Riverside Elementary School is orchestrated through the building of relationships. The school day includes ongoing cross-age teaching activities, encourages peer mentoring, and multi-age cooperative and collaborative learning. The collaborative leadership skills involved in such a project include initiating, defining and supporting achievements (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Revitalizing school climate includes building on student successes as they strive for even higher achievements. The school has received a Tower City Area United Way Venture Grant, again in partnership with several agencies, to enhance child care provider training, provide information and referral services to families, expand the Parents as Teachers services, and begin an enriched preschool program (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

Site-based management is thriving at Riverside Elementary School. While much of the progress at Riverside Elementary School is due to the effective collaboration with community programs and social services, these partnerships would not be successful without the teacher empowerment that shared decisions generate. The planning process, performed by all the stakeholders, helps to identify student needs, brainstorm possible solutions, and to undertake implementation of new programs. Sharing power leads to enhanced business community partnerships that provide training opportunities appropriate to the needs of a learning community (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Principal Jane Roberts exhibits continual enthusiasm, and has a sincere "can do" attitude. She solicits input from the staff, allows new ideas to be implemented, fosters a real sense of teamwork, shares credit for successes, and recognizes failure only for its lessons in future planning employs strategic planning. The next goal is always being addressed (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

As a Title One school, Riverside Elementary School receives about one thousand dollars extra per child. In addition to HB 1017 class size mandates, the school received five additional classroom teachers through Title One funding. The Title One funding also provided computer hardware for the computerized individualized learning system, while Computer Curriculum Corporation loaned the software (Tower City Public Schools Profile, 1997). The relationship with the Tower City Children's Coalition led to a Founder's of Doctors' Hospital grant to provide a marquee, critical to community communication, and expansion of computer equipment, which supports highly motivating individualized instruction (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

The staff of Riverside Elementary School meet monthly with representatives of their community "partners" to plan additional services, expansion of programs, and to brainstorm solutions to existing problems. The teachers, office support staff, parent volunteers and community leaders work with the principal to design an educational atmosphere most conducive to children's success in the classroom. Current projects include bringing the City-County Bookmobile on-site for the adult community at the same time that the Tower City Public Schools Parent Resource Bus comes, coupled with free books from the Tower City Book Bank and a preschool story hour. The school staff has succeeded in acquiring an Indian Pupil Educator after an absence of many years, and in establishing a four-year old preschool on the site. They worked with Tower City Technology Center to receive a United Way grant to enhance child-care provider training. Counselors and social workers have been working with the Community Service Council to train parent volunteers in information and referral (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

The present atmosphere at the school has become one of vigorous activity based on child and community needs. These change factors introduced by story of the Riverside School initiative include administrative skills that emphasize both management and leadership. With strong administrative support for innovative techniques, a high level of concern for the families of the children, and very high expectations, this decentralized change initiative has been accomplished without specific school district mandates. Because it makes sense in light of neighborhood needs, the changes overseen by the Riverside Elementary School community team should prove fruitful for schooling in East Tower City for years to come (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).



## Chapter V

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### Overview

The previous chapters outlined the purpose of the research study, provided a review of the existing literature and the methodology that guided the study, and presented the data. This chapter presents an analysis of the data concerning the research questions, common themes that emerged, anomalies that appeared, and related findings identified by the research.

In a 1996 publication, Leadership for the Schoolhouse, Sergiovanni envisions our schools as institutions that maintain their integrity and character by becoming unique in their purposes, structures and ways of doing things. He contrasts schools as institutions with other organizations, as does Phillip Selznick (1957). According to Sergiovanni, schools must be understood as institutional communities rather than formal organizations in order to enhance relationships and ideas, bond people together and tie them to a set of shared values. Selznick (1957) states, “In this way the organization as a unique entity takes on value. As a vehicle of group integrity, it becomes in some degree an end in itself. This process of being infused in value is part of what we mean by institutionalization. As it occurs, organization management becomes institutional leadership” (pp. 138-139).

As described by Selznick (1957) and Sergiovanni (1996), schools shed their generic organizational shells and become distinctive communities that exude integrity and competence.

The common thematic insights of community partners, local historians, board of

education members, administrators, parents, teachers, and counselors derived from long interviews with each participant expanded the notion of Riverside Elementary School as a distinctive institutional setting that prioritizes learning (Sergiovanni, 1996). Several participants referred to many of the same notions when asked about their interpretation of changes experienced during the six years of the Riverside Elementary School initiative. These Common Themes included governance, community, interpersonal relationships, renewal, and perseverance and gratification.

### **Common Themes**

#### **Governance**

The theme of school governance emerged from participant interviews. Respondents discussed mediating the rules, particularly as they applied to regenerating collaborative arrangements with community partners (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98), site-specific approaches (Robards Interview, 6/1/98), teacher autonomy (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98), and shared decision-making (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Lenora Gregory, a veteran social service agency worker and administrator, echoed Sergiovanni when she discussed schools as exuding a particular and unique culture. Having discovered that partnership with the school was a key notion in assisting families in the Riverside Elementary School neighborhood, Lenora Gregory experienced extreme administrative challenges requiring remediation of the rules in organizational transactions. She concluded that partnerships are stressful and time consuming but continued to value their contributions in the Riverside Elementary School initiative. After 25 years of involvement in the neighborhood, Lenora Gregory observed that daily struggles exist when striving to meet countless human needs, more serious today than in

the past (Gregory Interview, 6/13/98).

Retired businessman and community activist, Harry Robards determined that confidence in approaching community problems as partners would develop as collaborative approaches continued to grow. He encouraged solutions to be implemented and developed in a site- specific manner, since like Sergiovanni (1996), he believed the needs of each site to be distinctive and unique. “Don’t use a cookie cutter,” he stated (Robards Interview, 6/1/98). Harry Robards had become incensed by behaviors of school leaders whom he considered to be narrowly focused and self-centered. Harry Robards expressed anger and frustration, questioning why these leaders failed to see the big picture of Tower City as an interdependent community where help in the form of collaboration might be readily available for schools serving families with disadvantaged children (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

Other respondents noted issues important in avoiding burn out in teachers, especially as they achieve veteran, or expert status. These were teacher autonomy and access to decision-making (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98). Isabelle Martinez commented about classroom teachers’ needs. During the six years, Isabelle Martinez grew more confident as her teaching team became a more cohesive unit, suggesting that the skill level of her classroom teaching stabilized at a much higher level. Isabelle Martinez valued access to decision-making as constituting a major shift from the previous cultural values at Riverside Elementary School. Professing personal grief when called upon to share the daily challenges of life experienced by students, Isabelle Martinez suggested that the interpersonal connections generated by her participation combined social, emotional and moral perspectives (Martinez Interview 5/6/98).

Ellen Roland cited more involvement in the school by participants at all levels as a factor in raising student achievement. Support of the central office administration, especially during beginning stages of design and implementation, was a critical component of the Riverside Elementary School venture. From the framework approved at the district level, shared decision-making by participants at the school site generated the style and unique characteristics of the project. As a central office administrator, Ellen Roland could readily see that trust was built at Riverside Elementary School as a result of teacher and parent empowerment. Ellen Roland recalled the unrest generated when the feelings of individuals were compromised as a result of declaring every position vacant in order to accomplish new staffing of teacher positions (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Early childhood teacher, Kendra Bruno, believed that trust factors assisted in building a collegial concept of professionalism at Riverside Elementary School. She enjoyed the risk taking embraced by the team effort in the improvement of student achievement since teachers believed they were allowed, not mandated, to make changes. Kendra Bruno found it exciting to function out of her comfort zone in order to benefit children, but referred to high levels of frustration when teammates would lose sight of “where we were going,” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

### **Community**

The notion of community as it relates to the Riverside Elementary School setting was mentioned several times referring to heritage and pride, destiny, sense of place, and time (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98), ownership and involvement (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98), partnerships (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98), diversity (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98), team-teaching (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98), and inter-agency collaboration

(Anderson Interview, 6/3/98). The cohesive school community provided a strong sense of ownership and involvement. East Tower City elementary, middle and high school activities particularly, were a mainstay of local identity. One prevalent slogan, “the East Side is not the least side,” reflected an abundance of pride in the local community and its potential. The concept of East Side pride was quick to generate energy and involvement for residents of Old East Tower City, New Castle, or similar communities contributing to the quality of life in East Tower City (Davenport Interview, 6/1/98).

The importance of partnerships in the design of schools dedicated to the improvement of student achievement was a frequent phrase as was the celebration of diversity (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98; Anderson Interview, 6/3/98). Social service provider, Bonnie Anderson, suggested, like Harry Robards, that change at specific sites cannot resemble a “one size fits all” mentality. She adapted ideas, rather than copying entire templates in order to realize change in the school community. Bonnie Anderson reiterated the notion that schools must be equipped to respond to events that might influence the surrounding neighborhood. A strong advocate of parental involvement, Bonnie Anderson referred to parent empowerment in decision-making as a device for unifying the community. Bonnie Anderson suggested that developing bonds leads to building shared values and beliefs and, encourages and supports such a process (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

The community encourages the celebration of diversity (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98; Martinez Interview, 5/6/98). Cultural diversity (mentioned by Isabelle Martinez and Zoë Dillon) in the neighborhood contributed to the need for a variety of patterns of socialization and creative academic experiences within the classroom walls and in the

school setting. Isabelle Martinez shared in celebrating the diversity of culture that helped to build and maintain as a part of the Riverside Elementary change initiative (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Special educator, Zoë Dillon, believed that team teaching promoted a sense of community in place of teacher isolation, building cooperation from chaos. She believed that if one big school had to be created by knocking down walls, these participants could demonstrate an understanding of where they were going, because of a mentoring style of leadership present at Riverside Elementary School. Zoë Dillon elaborated on two additional factors as ones of importance to her, the first was the existence of hope for the future as a practical outlook for everyday living, and the acceptance of all participants as learners within the school setting (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Intra-agency collaborative school-based services provided for the multiple needs of families and contributed to improvement in student achievement (Robards Interview, 6/1/98; Anderson Interview, 6/3/98; Gregory Interview, 6/11/98). Respondents cited that creating a reflection of the school in the surrounding community expedited parental involvement and ownership as an important aspect of improving student achievement (Dawson Interview, 6/1/6/98). The contrast between Tower City Board of Education members and the awareness of the Riverside Elementary School initiative paid tribute to the sense of involvement and ownership so prevalent in the East Tower City community. Lisa Lowrance knew the characteristics of each school community, as did Don Donovan in the segment of Tower City that he frequented. Lisa Lowrance shared a sense of community pride in the changes that directly addressed student welfare and teacher capacity at Riverside Elementary School. As a retired educator, she sought the benefits

brought to an East Tower City instructional setting from a personal frame of reference, her daughter's troubled initial teaching experiences. Lisa Lowrance subscribed to the attributes that describe the school as, "same building, new school" (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98). Roland expressed this as an awareness and sensitivity in considering human needs (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

Interpersonal Relationships was a third theme. Time and attention spent in building and maintaining social, emotional and moral commitments emerged as respondents mentioned the notion of interpersonal relationships experienced in the Riverside Elementary school change initiative (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Special educator Willa Kennard enjoyed the security, comfort, and sense of inclusion demonstrated by the depth of relationships and mutually supportive culture. Willa Kennard suggested that one requirement for this change initiative was the amount of time required to build relationships, to maintain them appropriately, and to work collegially in order to meet long range goals. Some participants were reluctant to give the amount of time required by such an effort (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Enhancing trust level through helping relationships fostered growth for individual and group participants in the process of learning. Leila Kendrick suggested that trust built incrementally as interpersonal relationships grew toward a "meeting of the minds" (Kendrick Interview, 6/24/94). Leila Kendrick observed that building a bond resulted from sharing a mutual history and common experiences, she shared her observations that teachers felt better about themselves and demonstrated a better understanding of the importance of their role in the change initiative. Because of the dynamics of positive

interrelationships, Leila Kendrick related that she thought herself in a hard job, “but I love it,” speaking about efforts in the face of adversity (Kendrick Interview, (6/24/98). A Tower City central office administrator regretted the initial stages of the selection of new staff at Riverside Elementary:

But the decision to declare all positions vacant did cause a lot of hard feelings and mistrust too... So whether anybody would ever want to do that again because of the mistrust. It took 2 or 3 years for people to trust me ... for people who were new coming on to Title I because they were afraid that they also were going...every time we went out and said we were going to be Title I schoolwide, their first question would be, ‘Are we going to lose our job?’ So it caused a lot of fear and mistrust and anxiety among the staff that maybe we could have handled another way if we had thought it through, but it certainly did make an impact (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Building a pattern of interaction with children, their parents, and the community at large lead to a close-knit, or bonded school culture, in the opinion of Lisa Lowrance, Tower City Board of Education member. Lisa Lowrance believed that parental involvement built ownership in the school and improved education for area children. She cited teachers and other participants who took pride in their involvement in the face of challenges because of the excitement generated by the learners. Lisa Lowrance admitted that a series of tragedies unfolded at Riverside Elementary School which seemed to have deepened the relationship between those involved with the school (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

For Adele Nichols, the growth of interpersonal relationships demonstrated by



involvement in extracurricular activities was also of importance in the cultural life of Riverside Elementary School (Nichols Interview 5/28/98). Participants mentioned the importance of extra-curricular activities in forging relationships with one another. Decision-making by parents, teachers and partners in the school planning council added to the leadership development opportunities available to teachers. Adele Nichols observed the cohesion resulting from common bonds, experiences and growth in the depth of relationships as individual participants and team members worked to improve student achievement (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98). Larry Seawright especially admired extended day and evening opportunities for students because he believed such programs to be a factor in building student achievement (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98).

Emotional rigor, was another commonality (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98) as was the concept of family in developing relationships. Parent Cinda Dawson watched the formulation of a family-oriented school as parent involvement activities unfolded at Riverside Elementary. Cinda Dawson recalled early excitement when she, as well as her children, participated in experiences beyond the norm as a result of their involvement in the life of the school and community. She expressed gratitude for the personal growth afforded her as she assumed positions of leadership during the years of the change initiative (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98).

### **Renewal**

Respondents referred to understanding a conceptual map of the change process (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98). Self improvement and system renewal occurred simultaneously. Counselor Carla Shelby believed that her balanced personal and professional life provided a purpose, meaning and understanding, allowing her to fulfill a

unique level of commitment to the Riverside Elementary School change initiative. As an expert involved in trust building which took place during the change initiative, Carla Shelby subscribed to the idea that change is a personal and individual process supported by listening and relating to each person, rather than judging them or changing them. Carla Shelby interpreted the administrative support she experienced during this change initiative as a powerful and pervasive influence in resolving day to day distractions which might have limited involvement and ownership (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Customizing changes appropriate to a specific school site, as compared with adopting pre-conceived notions for school-centered change, was a concept mentioned by respondents (Robards Interview, 6/1/98). Others mentioned grassroots vs. systemic change, predisposition for change, and need for a change agent (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98; Lindner Interview, 4/13/98; Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Tower City Board of Education member Don Donovan believed that endemic needs exist for each school community, but touted systemic change over grass roots change because the latter bordered on anarchy. A predisposition for change is important for school centered or district wide change, suggested Don Donovan, because risk takers possessing a true desire to put forth the effort involved in mapping changes will be most successful in those endeavors (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Hallie Lindner said, "No one can change me like I can change myself" (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98). Hallie Lindner suggested that the outcome of community planning, creativity, problem solving, a variety of teaching approaches, and content yielded a surprising amount of stability for ongoing change. Terming the professional growth experienced as a participant as a "stretching experience," Hallie Lindner pointed with

pride to the relationship with students developed, afforded by the extension of the regular school day (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

As a Riverside Elementary School parent, Tonya Fanning realized that an emphasis on academic skills provided the transition for an improved school culture. Tonya Fanning attested to a regeneration of community bonding on behalf of student needs with assistance for parents. Tonya Fanning enjoyed newfound interpersonal relationships between participants, resulting in an upsurge of community pride (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

### **Perseverance and Gratification**

Respondents spoke about perseverance in the face of adversity (Lowrance Interview, 6/30 98), enduring paperwork (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98), and gratification by continuing traditional forms of student recognition (Seawright Interview, 6/17/98). Parent Tonya Fanning witnessed persistence in the face of struggle on behalf of key participants so that students and parents might enjoy learning experiences. Tonya Fanning recalled that the risk taking involved in engineering exceptional learning experiences seemed to be a daily occurrence rather than an atypical one (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

The importance of professional respect and high interpersonal trust generated the kind of supportive teaching environment necessary for school improvement. Nicholas Rogers cited the exceptional level of teacher commitment as an essential factor leading to ownership of the change process. He also professed that open patterns of communication and decision-making were clearly evident in his observation of the change initiative in East Tower City. Nicholas Rogers cited his belief in continuous improvement and also

stated that consistency of professional practice became an absolute necessity for the Riverside Elementary School participants, especially during times of change (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

Like Nicholas Rogers, veteran teacher Dawn Sommers, believed that the relationships formed reflected a unique commitment of professionals who volunteered to work in the project. Dawn Sommers suggested that the rigorous demands involved in classroom teaching sometimes resulted in emotional exhaustion, often offset by realizing the long range effects and importance of the contributions being made to improving education for Riverside Elementary School students. She appreciated the resource of professional research used in the project along with the autonomy afforded teachers as they applied new ideas and changed teaching techniques to benefit students (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

Teacher Willa Kennard related that a day to day investment in professional development led to renewal of self and of the system. Reminding the researcher that change for her was a highly personal process, change combined with other factors to her advantage, especially when she and other participants enjoyed access to decision-making. Willa Kennard compared the camaraderie of the participants in the Riverside Elementary change initiative to that of family living (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98). Reminding the researcher that the level of emotional investment may at times take an extreme toll on teachers, Isabelle Martinez offered that at times the tangible rewards associated with her effort were inadequate (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Of all the community influences brought to bear, familiarity with local schools proved essential in creating schools as unique entities (Sergiovanni, 1996). Whether

articulated by social workers, Board of Education members, child advocates, local historians, teachers, administrators, or Main Street businessmen, a picture of a responsive, resilient school community that featured optimum school achievement and the welfare of children and their families as a paramount concern emerged.

### **Findings**

An examination of common themes that emerged from participant interviews in light of the questions posed in Chapter I provides meaning and understanding of the school-centered changes at Riverside Elementary School. In many instances, using Senge's (1995) Principles develops an explanation of how improvement in schooling can occur as a result of the change process.

#### **To What Degree and in What Way(s) is Senge's (1995) Principle of Team Learning and Continuous Improvement Useful in Explaining Change in Riverside Elementary School?**

Team Learning and Continuous Improvement was the most prevalent of Senge's elements recognized and referred to by participants. Transcripts of interviews, categorized according to elements using Senge's (1995) concepts of self-renewing thought (mental models) and interaction (dialogue) provided a vehicle for understanding the personalization of change so often missing in formulating enduring change.

For veteran teachers, the capacity for improvement of schooling by preventing burn out was expressed by Dawn Sommers:

You reach a point in your career where you either burn out, or you seek opportunities that force you to change and challenge. Of course, this is what I already do and it helps me refine what I do. I have been given lots of literature

and it is a very dynamic environment (Sommers, 4/25/98). And then practicing and not just to enhance my experience but if I am not refining and trying things...you think I have been teaching school for twenty-three years...and I know so many teachers who are so burned out, by that time, and I am anything but that because I have been in this environment that is refreshing and renewing and real (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

On the other hand, supporting teachers during their first year of experience and those new to the Riverside Elementary School environment prevents teacher burnout and also improves schooling (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Comments made by beginning teacher Kendra Bruno referred to collegial and technical support required in the teaching profession: “We know it is a safe place to try anything to get through to the kids. We try, we fail, and we are safe enough to try again” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Many experienced teachers expressed satisfaction as a part of a team that involved group effort in the improvement of schooling at Riverside Elementary School (Senge, 1995). One participant compared the team teaching process to constantly peeling off layers of an onion. Best practices evolved through evaluating instruction, revising mission statements, and addressing school climate needs. “It is getting to the heart of the thing” (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

Taking responsibility for meeting the evolving needs presented by the student population at Riverside Elementary, counselor Carla Shelby responded with admiration for participants as they engaged in team learning and related improvements in schooling:

These needs change every year, sometimes every nine weeks, but we went all the way out for it...that is one thing that has amazed me and to this day still amazes

me (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

The relationships involved in team learning and continuous improvement were founded on trust and mutual ownership with community partners as expressed by Bonnie Anderson. “So it was all relationship based. It was getting together four people who all trusted one another” (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98). Individual participants expressed their changing roles in team settings as contributing to a robust, interdependent learning environment and to professional self-renewal (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98). Others suggested that individual capacity for change influenced the capability of others (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Kendra Bruno expanded on the notion that schools like Riverside Elementary that offer the team teaching experience were distinctly more rewarding than traditional settings:

I became a team teacher. I think that teaming has made me a stronger teacher, not afraid to try several new things each and every day and trying to meet the needs of all the children, having the moral support and back up and team effort...that has been the biggest change for me and that is why I am able to go forward (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Willa Kennard suggested that Continuous Improvement, like team teaching, fosters a motivating atmosphere and professional reward. “People know they have to work with each other to make it work and they are learning that and it is a process of learning and not, ‘This is the way it is.’ It takes time...six years is a beginning...knowing that the best comes from all of us achieving together” (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Tonya Fanning, a single parent of two boys attending Riverside Elementary School concluded that her expanding role as a child care worker, parent representative for Families and Schools Together, PTA officer to employee in the school library helped the morale of her children (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98). She also found the continuous improvement efforts to be of significance, “We have to find ideas, invent ideas, as to how to deal with these children” (Fanning Interview, 5/2/98).

For six years a central office administrator observed the participants at Riverside Elementary School as they engineered and re-engineered answers to enduring questions such as how to determine what it means to work collegially (Roland Interview, 4/10/98). Tower City Board of Education Member Lisa Lowrance summarized team learning and continuous improvement by relating to her daughter’s initial teaching experiences at Riverside Elementary School prior to the 1992 change initiative:

I have really noticed a big difference in Riverside Elementary School and the one reason I can say this is because the first semester of my daughter’s teaching was here, and it was not a very happy experience...but I would not mind her being here now at all (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

As they participated as community partners, teachers, counselor, central office administrator, parent, or member of the Tower City Board of Education, Team Learning and Continuous Improvement offered clear advantages and positive interaction for Riverside Elementary School stakeholders in addressing the demands presented by school improvement.

Team Learning and Continuous Improvement integrate continual professional practice and performance in a creative, low-risk setting. Senge’s (1995) Principle of



Adaptive and Generative Learning is closely related to Team Learning and Continuous Improvement because it encourages situational coping behaviors, embraces creativity, and strengthens the capacity for change.

The essence of the adaptive world is the freedom it allows for experimentation. To entertain the notion of adaptive and generative learning, Senge (1995) introduced two types of regular and intensive professional practice: practicing dialogue and creating simulation, which Senge calls learning laboratories (1995, p. 259). Suggested ground rules for practice sessions include elimination of assumptions, collegial behavior and continuous inquiry. These factors contribute to a new language for describing organizational complexity in terms of dynamics rather than in terms of detail. Other advantages include reduction of departmentalized thinking and encouragement of integrated solutions to problems.

The first notion related to Team Learning and Continuous Improvement is Creativity and Risk Taking. Who are the natural leaders of learning organizations? They are participants who are actively engaged in a learning dynamic:

Practicing a discipline is different than emulating “a model.” All too often, new management innovations are described in terms of the “best practices” of so-called leading firms. While interesting, I believe such descriptions can often do more harm than good, leading to piecemeal copying and playing catch-up. I do not believe great organizations have ever been built by trying to emulate another, any more than individual greatness is achieved by trying to copy another “great person” (Senge, 1995, p. 11).

Senge endorses new learning organizations that generate openness to a new wave

of experimentation and advancement. Activities involving creativity and risk taking take place in unique settings rather than ones featuring duplication or templates. The most productive learning usually occurs when participants combine the skills of advocacy and inquiry. When inquiry and advocacy are combined, the goal is not to win an argument but to formulate the best argument. By using a high level of inquiry and advocacy we can usually find flaws in our views before risks are taken. Patience, perseverance and implementation then can replace instantaneous implementation so common in politically motivated initiatives (Senge, 1995, p.11).

Hallie Lindner saw creativity and risk-taking as an approach that provides meaning and understanding of the efforts toward continuous improvement touted by Senge (1995):

The strength of this staff is that it is made up of high risk-takers. Most of the staff is willing to try new things and are constantly expanding whatever they need to do. I have to have new ways to look at things, new ways to try things, new research studies to try out, and I think we are at that point, six years, and I think it is crucial that we relook at our program and see what we can do to better meet the needs of the students right now. I think it is easy to continually do something you like to do and not necessarily meet the needs of the students you have today as compared to those 6 years ago (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

In the second of Senge's elements related to Team Learning and Continuous Improvement, called Building Capacity for Change, Senge (1995) describes a three stage process: (1) developing new cognitive capacities, (2) experimentation based on new behaviors, (suggesting that new actions will become difficult to maintain under stress),

and (3) new action values and operating assumptions well adapted into individual styles and maintained under stress (Senge, 1995, p.370).

A poignant example of building capacity for change at Riverside Elementary School came from patron Cinda Dawson:

We have done FAST group and we came and drew these lines and tried to see what we could do in the family to make it better and try to get the children involved and help each other. Then we, as parents, had our own group and discussed how to help our children grow and become better citizens (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98).

Another observation about stakeholders came from Cinda Dawson in her praise of the resiliency demonstrated by parents in building change capacity. "I think the parents have been advocates for us to bring about the change in the community. They have begun to feel better about themselves and to understand that education really is important" (Kendrick Interview, 6/17/98).

Another observation of capacity building came from teacher Isabel Martinez:

This was a nice thing to do socially. Now I see people more willing to invest emotionally into our program at a deeper level than perhaps we started...people becoming involved more, even from group sponsors by corporate places...from people who are not only willing to donate things, but donate the time and their emotions into that. I see people from the community reaching toward us (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

The third of Senge's elements related to Team Learning and Continuous Improvement is called Collegial Environment. Establishing a collegial environment does

not mean that participants share the same views. The extraordinary power of seeing others as colleagues develops from their diversity of viewpoints. It is easy to feel reciprocity when everyone agrees. When there are conflicts in viewpoint, the process becomes more difficult but the pay off is one of greater magnitude. “Choosing to view adversaries as colleagues with different views has the greatest benefit” (Senge, 1995, p. 245). Isabel Martinez elaborates on her collegial experiences:

When I came here, I got on a team of teachers and I was allowed to develop my own personal skills and passions and could relax a little bit, knowing that I was not responsible for spelling and health ed. totally. It allowed me to become a better teacher and allowed the kids to see somebody who really passionately cared about something, involving themselves with them as opposed to, ‘this is my teacher, she does all things.’ That is one change which I feel I really like, trusting other people to take care of parts of the curriculum that I am not directly into. I like working with other professionals. I like to see kids have the opportunity to succeed and not be cooped up or restricted by personality or by subject matter (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

**To What Degree and in What Way(s) is Senge’s (1995) Principle of Creative Tension useful in Explaining Change in Riverside Elementary School?**

Creative Tension connects the understanding of current reality with a vision of a desirable future. Senge postulates that Creative Tension and Systems Thinking are closely linked (1995, p. 231).

Creative Tension connects the understanding of current reality with a vision of a desirable future. Three related principles support Creative Tension as influential

elements in a learning organization. Building Shared Vision continuously blends intrinsic and extrinsic change forces. Shared Vision invites people's best efforts. It involves commitment to a larger purpose. In the presence of such greatness, pettiness erodes, and in the absence of a larger purpose, bitterness spreads (Senge, 1995). Risk taking and experimentation are encouraged when a vision is shared. This concept is based on an individual's own set of caring in terms of personal values, concerns and aspirations. This strong sense of personal direction bonds with a shared commitment in terms of thinking and behavior, creating a powerful synergy for reaching common goals. As to the top down or grass roots basis for existence, Senge writes, "The origin of the vision is much less important than the process whereby it comes to be shared. It is not truly a shared vision until it connects with the personal visions of people throughout the organization" (1995, p. 214).

When visions originate in the middle or bottom of an organization, the process of discussion is somewhat the same as when they come from the top. The final decision and implementation of the vision, especially if it has implications for the entire organization, may take a longer time if the ideas are not trickling down from the top of the mountain. One highly successful chief executive officer stated, "My job, fundamentally, is listening to what the organization is trying to say, and then making sure that it is forcefully articulated" (Senge, 1995, p. 218).

Riverside Elementary spokesperson Zoë Dillon addresses the importance of shared vision:

Our community is a different setting. Novas, Binaries and Tri-Stars, and feeling like you have a small identity, not just a classroom, but a group. Having a name

change like the Rockets kind of pulled everybody together and we are on the same road, not on twenty different paths. The assemblies and the nature of the assemblies and the nature of the groupings and having PALS, I feel like we have come full circle. The biggest thing is community (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Parent Tonya Fanning articulates the advantages for all stakeholders, particularly students, “So it was a mutual support group. Even the parents and children were involved in it, you know, so it was more an attitude than a person that permeated the entire school. It was relationship building” (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

Teacher Adele Nichols explains the importance of having a stake in shaping current reality as she explains her active role in building a shared vision during the Riverside Elementary School change initiative:

I think having that Site Decision...before nobody had any say so...has really helped a lot. I like the school community...at first I think we had a lot of competition. Then we finally realized we needed to get along. Everybody finally got in there and picked up the slack and helped everybody across the board (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

The second of Senge’s principles related to Creative Tension, Charting Strategic Tools, mediates opposing values by mapping, processing, framing, conceptualizing, sequencing, waving, and synergizing change initiatives. Charting Strategic Tools provides ways to know what is most important to the organization and what is not important, what variables to employ and which to pay less heed. Strategic tools can be used for illustrations for planning, which can help groups or teams develop shared understanding of their organizational capabilities. These illustrations contribute

important concepts that compliment meaningful change and makes individuals, teams and organizations more able to see and act systematically rather than from a linear perspective (Senge, 1995, pp.378-390).

Strategic tools assisted Carla Shelby, Riverside Elementary School counselor, to cope with the Tower City Schools and Social Services bureaucratic maze. “I draw a lot of maps to help cut through the red tape” (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98). The transition from a self-contained instructional setting to an inclusive team teaching setting required using strategic tools to generate appropriate modifications for students in Zoë Dillon’s classroom:

I think everybody had ideas on things that were successful and we modified them. Where I am located is definitely different...modification, getting to interact with other teachers, and some teachers have a different kind of voice than I have and at first I didn’t understand because I had always worked with a certain kind of level of volume which was perfect for eight kids in my room, but if you have twenty or twenty-five kids in your room, you need a different voice. See, I learned something. It could be their learning styles were very good for what they do and you learn from that. I feel as if I have learned twice as much as the kids (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

The third of Senge’s principles related to Creative Tension (Leader as Designer, Teacher, Steward), explains planning as a process of learning rather than as decision-making. A modified view of leadership in learning organizations targets subtle, yet important, tasks. Complimenting this concept of a learning organization, leaders become designers, stewards and teachers. Leaders are responsible for the type of organizational

learning that is to occur for participants, build their capacity to interpret complexity, determine vision and refine mental models. Rather than rearranging organizational structures, leaders of learning organizations fulfill the job description of organizational architect in integrating organizational functions (Senge, 1995).

Willa Kendrick articulated the designer role as interpreted by the Riverside Elementary School principal, Jane Roberts, from a teacher perspective, “Most of the time the principal makes the decisions, but when I had a problem, I had a vast selection of people I worked with” (Kendrick Interview, 6/25/98). Cinda Dawson, Riverside Elementary School parent, saw changes in the administrative practices:

Before 1992 there was no open door policy. Then it was very commendable because you feel as if you have the second home to go to or somebody to talk to about anything and before Ms. Roberts came to us, I hardly ever came up there at all. There was no need to (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98).

Leaders in learning organizations focus on purpose and system structure and teach others throughout the organization to be able to do likewise. Senge elaborates, “Leaders in learning organizations have the ability to conceptualize their strategic insight so that they become public knowledge, open to challenge and further improvement” (1995, p. 356)

“Ms. Roberts was like a mentor showing the possibilities” (Shelby, 3/14/98), related counselor Carla Shelby when asked to reflect on leadership occurring at Riverside Elementary soon after her arrival. Partner Bonnie Anderson suggested that a leader-as-teacher style existed at Riverside School:

It was not parenting in that funny didactic way that makes parents feel stupid



rather than empowered. It was really kind of a shared model for leadership, and as it turned out, it was a terrific step for Riverside to take because it really set the way the school worked (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

A third component of leadership is leader as steward. A leader naturally visualizes an organization as an opportunity for bringing learning and change into society. The leader who is motivated as a steward provides a single, meaningful set of ideas that integrate all aspects of the leader's work and the work of the organization (Senge. 1995, p.356).

From the veteran teacher perspective, Dawn Sommers shared this insight about stewardship as it relates to leadership:

I attribute a lot of it to our principal's vision...the vision that she has had in generating support for our children and our staff through mentorship, through grant money, encouraging us to go out to find grant monies, to do what we really want to do...supporting us in that, constantly asking us to update, monitor, adjust, look at what the latest research is. It is more, I think, really everybody at the school...it varies from year to year but there are strengths that everybody brings to it and there is a special group of committed people, no matter what aspect, no matter what kind of job they have. I see that people are allowed to pursue their own interests in the academic vision...are given a lot of freedom to try things out...given a lot of encouragement (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

**To What Degree and in What Way(s) is Senge's (1995) Principle of Systems Thinking Useful in Explaining Change in Riverside Elementary School?**

Systems Thinking represents the integration of thinking and acting at all levels;

maintaining intuitive overview of high leverage change processes rather than symptomatic analysis of day to day events. The integrative function of Systems thinking generates meaning and understanding in change for participants in schooling so that actual shifts in belief and behavior occur in deference to simply “taking in information” (Senge, 1995, p. 13).

Many great ‘charismatic’ leaders, despite having a deep sense of purpose and vision, manage almost exclusively at the level of events. Such leaders deal in visions and crisis and little in between. They foster a lofty sense of purpose and mission. They create tremendous energy and enthusiasm but, under their leadership, an organization careens from crisis to crisis. Eventually the world-view of people in organizations becomes dominated reactions to events. People experience being jerked continually from one crisis to another; they have no control over their time, let alone their destiny. Eventually, this will breed deep cynicism about the vision and about visions in general. The soil within which a vision must take root...the basis that we can influence our future becomes poisoned. Such ‘visionary crisis managers’ often become tragic managers (Senge, 1995, p.355).

Special Education teacher Zoë Dillon referred to daily interaction suggesting that:

We all have a lot of input. I think we have all evolved and I think teaching is not just in four walls...it is going down the halls, in the gym, in the library...all kinds of exchanges... how we treat one another on the playground and the fact that we are all going the same way. We understand I think what our goals are. We might have a little different way of getting to them. I appreciate the school environment

for showing me that there is a life beyond the classroom. We all are working with kids. We could knock down the walls and be one big school (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Community partner Lenora Gregory related that efforts sponsored by social service agencies in the Riverside Elementary School community were futile unless agencies and the school developed an integrated approach to improve schooling by addressing social, emotional, economic and educational needs (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Parent Cindy Dawson compared the atmosphere at Riverside School to a family oriented, rather than business climate. She believed teachers to be responsive and flexible in meeting student needs (Dawson Interview, 6/16/98). Tower City Board of Education member echoed Cindy Dawson's concept of family orientation system:

The way the staff in general interacts with children and the community has really come a long, long way. It is very child-centered and family-centered. I hear so much about the way families are involved in making it a community situation. I feel they are very close knit...sort of a family-type unit (Lowrance Interview, 6/30/98).

Zoë Dillon addressed the topic of a family atmosphere saying:

When somebody started to talk, somebody added on...like a family. You kept saying, 'What do you think? Let me give you information about this. How would you go about it?' and all of a sudden we were all chatting and out of a chaos came cooperation and we all felt for each other...all went in one direction (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

Harry Robards, Riverside Elementary Community Partner expressed frustration at realizing an atmosphere conducive to Systems Thinking in educational settings:

What we have done has been done in spite of the school administration either at the local school or headquarters. It is almost like School-Linked Services is talking in Chinese. It is no one's job how to really understand that and how to execute it. I am not sure if people have been taught about it. Sometimes I am really shocked at the narrowness of education professionals. They have no idea. It is like their focus is, I teach kids in a dress, or I run a school. I sometimes wonder if they even read the paper to understand. This (Tower City) is a total community and I know I sound negative, but just the narrowness of people is somewhat shocking to me. At Riverside you have a sense of things going, you have a sense of engagement (Robards Interview, 6/1/98).

Special education teacher Willa Kennard summarizes the personal and professional connections experienced by teachers, parents, community partners and Tower City Board of Education members that served to generate Systems Thinking in the Riverside Elementary School change initiative:

The depth of a relationship, the friendships...it is about life and growth, it isn't about a job. So it is important to have a personal life and a professional life. But the integrity of the two bond together. You have to grow yourself and your system grows (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Use of Systems Thinking without the definition for problem solution by mental modeling loses credibility. The first principle related to Systems Thinking, Mental Models, includes balancing inquiry and advocacy, testing assumptions, defusing

retroactivity and recognizing gaps between espoused belief and best professional practice. These two ideas fit naturally because one exposes hidden assumptions and the other re-builds assumptions to reveal real causes of significant problems. To be useful to the learning organization, mental models assist in the recognition of long term patterns of change and the underlying factors producing those patterns. Just as linear patterns of thought dominate most cause and effect Mental Models used for critical decisions today, the learning organizations of the future will implement key decisions founded on shared understanding of interrelationships and underlying patterns of change (Senge, 1995).

An example of the usefulness of Mental Models in supporting the Riverside Elementary School changes as articulated by partner Bonnie Anderson:

You are involved in conversations with many people and in many different issues whether or not that was your intention for being there, which meant that there was an openness to change, that it was expected, that it was. It is just a model of the change that was happening in the school (Anderson Interview, 6/3/98).

The second of Senge's (1995) principles related to Systems Thinking is Building Shared Vision. Senge contends that vision portrays the picture of what we want to create. "Systems Thinking delineates how we have created what we presently have" (1995, p.231).

"The process of Building Shared Vision can be jeopardized if participants discern that they possess little or no control over the creation of their current organizational reality" (1995, p.231). If Systems Thinking fosters meaning and understanding of organizational potential and encourages participants to learn how existing policies and actions are creating their viewpoint, then generating change as opposed to reacting to

change becomes a valuable option. When supported by Systems Thinking, “creating the Shared Vision emerges as a meaningful, understandable, achievable goal” (1995, p. 231).

Teacher Adele Nichols addressed sharing the vision as an ongoing need. “I think we probably need to work on connections. We take each other for granted a little more than we used to...” (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98). Her colleague at Riverside Elementary School, Isabel Martinez, examined the importance of a unity of effort: “We came together, first as a wide variety of people ... everybody formed their own little personal agenda and had reasons for wanting to be in the program. The longer we worked together, the more these reasons merged and become common” (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Examining Senge’s (1995) Principles of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement provided essential understandings about school-centered change when combined with themes emerging from Riverside Elementary School participant interviews. In a distinctive manner, each of Senge’s (1995) Principles influenced elements of the change process and efforts to improve schooling in an elementary school setting.

#### **What Sources Explain the Anomalies not Explained by Senge’s (1995) Principles?**

Several of the participants voiced opinions about the feasibility of sweeping mandates, and the centralized or decentralized origin of changes, that might have been implemented with little emotional and technical support of stakeholders. Rather than occurring incrementally with opportunities for clarification, broad-based implementation of innovations without purposeful direction for shaping the new culture proves detrimental and destroys trust and future organizational capacity for change according to

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991, pp. 105-107).

Teacher Willa Kendrick stated reservations about mandated change:

Change...it is one of my favorite topics. It is one of the hardest things to do because it is so frightening. Unless you have an atmosphere of security comfort, people won't do it. Change doesn't take place by giving a rule or mandate or law. It only comes from the ability to experience life, make mistakes...and you have got to see what is better. You have got to learn and you have got to try. If you don't try, if you don't have the security to try and know that people will back you up when you make a mistake, you are not going to try (Kendrick Interview, 6/25/98).

Central office administrator Ellen Roland learned from a similar project in a neighboring city and the strategic design employed in past Tower City projects:

My one stipulation is that we do not do it like Canyon City, because it has been a top down decision. Their superintendent had said, 'You will be schoolwide and you will look like this' (Roland, 4/10/98). I don't think I would have declared all positions vacant. I think I might have made it voluntary, looking back, try to be more sensitive to human beings and their feelings. Yes, we achieved an impact, but it took two years to repair some of that impact. So that's one thing when they were talking about the Montgomery issue; that is one thing I cautioned them on that you create so many hard feelings. Typically when you create parameters and you line out how it is going to look, then you may, but if you don't, 'We will find a position in the district', seems to give people more of a feeling of control over what they are doing as against something imposed on them. I probably would

never do that again (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Tower City Board of Education member Don Donovan shared a belief in the personalized nature of successful change important in Fullan and Stiegelbauer's (1991) perspective:

Some people don't want to change in a school district, particularly one the size of Tower City. There are some you have to encourage to change, others you have to require to change, and a few who, absolutely regardless of the carrot or the stick, refuse to change, and I think those people because of our system, sometimes stay with us until they either retire or get tired of seeing change happen around them and go somewhere else. That is fine. I think people who refuse to change are doing themselves and all the rest of us a great disservice, but I think for those who are willing to change and want to change, from what I have seen, those who are willing to seek ideas from others and information from others are the ones who change most rapidly and most successfully (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Teacher Kendra Bruno identified with cultural changes at Riverside Elementary School rather than a singular mandate:

Possibly the biggest was the way that we were allowed to change within ourselves. We were given the freedom to discover what was best for the children and go in that direction and we were not mandated to do certain things (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

Teacher Willa Kennard repeated similar sentiments about the need for attention to individual and institutional development:

Or higher administration says, 'It is my way or the highway.' That hurts my



heart. It hurts the community and the children. They lose the most valuable thing in life...they lose the essence of the spirit because it is destroyed by that authoritarian attitude (Kennard Interview, 6/25/98).

Like those participants concerned about mandated change, other participants examined the centralized or decentralized origin of changes, influences which Fullan stated should be combined (Fullan, 1993). Fullan (1993) proposed that effective change must originate in decentralized as well as centralized fashion, but rarely becomes enduring from a top-down effort. Riverside Elementary teacher Dawn Sommers expressed that, "It is probably the best environment I have ever worked in because of the input we have and from so many different levels" (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

Hallie Lindner stated:

I thought it would be an opportunity for staff creativity, community planning, instead of an informal staff development day. It is difficult for our entire school to find common times when we can cross plan our big projects, when we can include the entire school, and I really had hope that the Wonderful Wednesdays would be more of that, rather than just formal times to do particular programs and things (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98).

Tower City Board of Education member Don Donovan added systemic change perspective:

However, I tend to be one who probably leans more toward institutional change rather than power up from bottom change, only because I think to go on the other side or grass roots change is only a small distance away from anarchy, so I tend to favor a little more structured change, but absolutely shared decision-making

(Donovan Interview, 5/28/98).

Central office administrator Ellen Roland offered that “It was very, very important that all the top central office people agree on this philosophy. If we had not had their support, it would not have happened” (Roland Interview, 4/10/98).

Three recurring themes prevalent in Goodlad’s (1984) research studies are useful in explaining the change initiative at Riverside Elementary School. The first theme identifies the individual school as the most viable unit of change. Goodlad’s (1984) study of schooling summarized this notion:

The power for improving each school lies with the principal, teachers, students and parents associated with it. The role of more remote authority and responsibility is to create supportive policy and provide the assistance needed to put this power to work (Goodlad, 1984, p.129).

Tower City Public Schools administrator Nicholas Rogers makes a similar suggestion:

The staff listened to what I had to say about test scores. They used the results and integrated them into the curriculum and we made every effort to cover any aspect that would be on the test so that the kids would at least be exposed to that material. They spent a lot of time buying into it and the fact that they were really committed to it (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

The positive thing with me is that the staff and principal at Riverside Elementary respond to these challenges in a very positive way and I think this is another element of success in their positive response to the negative issues that can come up. This made Riverside come out as a nice place to be. It is not an easy place to

be. Today there is an element of success and when you can demonstrate that your work as a teacher and as a principal has met with real success, I think that is a shot of adrenaline that keeps people going (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

A couple of years ago there was a bomb scare in the area of Riverside Elementary. After the bomb scare was over in the building, the teachers said, ‘we need to keep on testing if nothing was particularly unusual.’ The teachers bought into it, the kids bought into it, and the scores were as high as they have ever been. In fact, they were considerably above average, but to me this kind of commitment where the kids who thought it was important to the teachers and supported by the principal, who knew it was important, that makes a difference (Rogers Interview, 6/3/98).

A second assumption identified by Goodlad (1984) is an implicit curriculum of caring and relevance to students’ lives: “In our data, whether or not teachers were perceived to be concerned about students appeared to be significantly related to student satisfaction with their classes” (Goodlad, 1984, p. 111). Adele Nichols, as a key participant in the Riverside Elementary School change initiative stated, “I think the extended time right from the beginning, right off the bat, was a key to our success and the closeness to the kids” (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

Adele Nichols attests that unique experiences foster optimum learning and must not be confined to school hallways or four walls of a classroom. “We learn so much more outside the classroom than we do in the classroom. I saw changes” (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98). Goodlad (1984) would agree with her Riverside Elementary School conclusion:

We do not see in our descriptions, that much opportunity for students to become engaged with knowledge so as to employ their full range of intellectual abilities. And one wonders about the meaningfulness of whatever is acquired by students who sit listening or performing relatively repetitive exercises, year after year. Part of the brain, known as Mafoun's brain, is stimulated by novelty. It appears to me that students spending twelve years in the schools we studied would be likely to experience much novelty. Does part of the brain sleep, then? (Goodlad, 1984, p. 231).

Sergiovanni (1996) admits that using adopted business models in school can be troublesome, because ideas from business are often useless in helping us think through our problems, clarify the issues we face, and find solutions. Sergiovanni specifies a clear difference between adopting and learning. There is a difference between adopting and adapting as a result of that learning. And there is a difference between borrowing a theory from business and picking up some ideas that can help us to invent better, albeit unique, theories for the schoolhouse (Sergiovanni, 1996, p.19).

Analysis of the research data concerning common themes emerging from participant interviews combined with the research questions, anomalies that appeared and related findings, created essential understandings in regards to change as it occurred in the improvement of an elementary school setting. Riverside Elementary School participants identified common themes as they related their experiences in a school-centered change initiative that included governance, community, interpersonal relationships, renewal, and perseverance and gratification. In most instances, using Senge's (1995) *Principles of Team Learning and Continuous Improvement*, Creative

Tension and Systems Thinking fostered understanding of school-centered change.

Not all of the changes emerging from the Riverside Elementary school-centered initiative research contained themselves at the level of the school only. Three levels of change, including individual (personal), school, and cultural became evident. Although Senge's notions of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension and Team Learning and Continuous Improvement provide meaning for understanding at the level of school improvement, two additional levels of change, individual and cultural, require explanation from sources beyond Senge's themes as a result of this study.

The Individual (personal) improvement level was best interpreted in a variety of ways by the participants themselves rather than from outside sources. Subjectivity provided many types of interpretations as to the significance change, its degree and type of transformation for individual participants (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98; Martinez Interview, 5/6/98; Dawson Interview, 6/16/98; Sommers Interview, 4/25/98). Dawn Sommers referred to the positive atmosphere provided by her surroundings, that "have had a profound effect on me, too, as a human being" (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98). Carla Shelby noted that she had achieved a balance between her personal and professional life by carefully managing the time required for family responsibilities (Shelby Interview, 3/14/98).

Improvements to the second additional level connote the concept of school improvement as unique cultural events. Sergiovanni (1996) describes the most desirable cultural climate, which he terms "Gemeinschaft," to be unified by moral ties of relationship, place, time and understanding (1996, p. 49). Unlike prevalent corporate rules-based structures and climates, Sergiovanni (1996) adheres to the notion that change

occurs best in a de-institutionalized, or norms-based atmosphere (1996, p.169). Implementing this premise results in an increase in the capacity for teachers to practice their craft with competence accompanied by behaviors that portray their espoused beliefs (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 169). Change can then occur as a natural course of daily life instead of by sweeping, transient reform upheavals (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Isabel Martinez reflected the viewpoint of a teacher who became a mainstay of the revitalized Riverside Elementary School culture:

I really like the closeness and the bonding of the teachers here. They are not fake. Everybody cares. I think the kids deep down feel that and I think the staff all feel it. At the start of the program, I thought there was involvement from several groups and I felt there was an outreach...that is what it was...an outreach. They wanted to be their own entity and they wanted to have an influence, not really be involved. And I think there were several other groups like that who had the same idea. This was a nice thing to do socially. Now I see people more willing to invest emotionally into our program at a deeper level than perhaps we started...people becoming involved more, even from group sponsors by corporate places...from people who are not only willing to donate things, but donate the time and their emotions into that. I see people from the community reaching toward us...I think we kind of lost it for awhile and I see that coming back again. As I said, the demographics have changed and the parents and the families that we are working with are much more fragile than the families that we worked with before (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

In other instances, additional sources provided explanation of anomalies of the Riverside Elementary School change initiative. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) explained

the feasibility of mandated change, centralized and de-centralized implementation, and the need for personalization. Goodlad (1984) summarized responses indicating the individual school site as the most viable unit of change, and the impact that establishing a caring, relevant unique curriculum has on students' lives. Sergiovanni (1996) established the need for schools to demonstrate adaptive learning from corporate models for use in schools identified as unique settings and for creating rules-based or "Gemeinschaft" school cultures exuding moral ties of relationship, place, time and understanding

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

This study was designed to explain to what degree and in what way Senge's (1995) Principles of Creative Tension, Systems Thinking and Continuous Learning were useful in explaining change in Riverside Elementary School and what sources explained the anomalies. Described in this study are the perceptions of twenty participants in a school-centered change initiative that began in 1992 and continued through 1998.

This chapter presents the conclusions derived from the data by identifying emergent themes, the implications for future school-centered change initiatives, and recommendations for further research. The implications from these conclusions will extend the existing principles of school-centered change, substantially improve the efforts of leaders when viewed as change agents, and subsequently improve schooling.

### **Conclusions**

Each of the themes ties to a major finding of this explanatory case study regarding change implementation in an elementary school setting. The first theme, governance, addresses a need for creativity in facing the ambiguous demands of new settings (Sarason, 1995). A shift from rules-based reform to norms-based transitions (Sergiovanni, 1996), creates a setting where "mediating the rules," fosters the capacity for change and removes barriers to formulating unique collaborative settings (Gregory Interview, 6/11/98).

Senge's principle of Creative Tension explains this finding because participants must have some control over their organizational destiny in order to build a collective, creative vision of the ideal (Senge, 1995). Martinez shared that visions can die because



learners become discouraged when their version of the ideal is not incorporated into the dialogue of the learning organization because leaders may advocate only for their version of such an ideal (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

The second theme, community, relies on the concept of interdependence and integration of influence between centralized and de-centralized sources. Even though many decisions shaping the Riverside Elementary School change initiative were a result of shared decisions at the school site, without the initial impetus for improvement at the district level, the school community would have been excluded from the opportunity to regenerate (Sergiovanni, 1996). “It was very, very important that all the top central office people agree on this philosophy. If we had not had their support, it would not have happened (Roland Interview, 4/10/98). For the community efforts at renewal to succeed, Sergiovanni’s (1996) cultural level aspects of norms based change theory provide a framework for meaning and understanding of change dynamics at a larger level than individual or school aspects of change.

Systems Thinking explains such a multi-level phenomenon in reminding participants that they are a part of a bigger picture and in reminding leaders that they are obligated to articulate the meaning of the big picture. As they articulate the meaning of the vision, leaders should proceed carefully when it comes to delineating the details in order to allow dialogue and experimentation from many levels (Senge, 1995; Golarz, 1995).

The integration of human and fiscal support is particularly appropriate in the case of Riverside Elementary School, because it required support for individual participants, partners, and school stakeholders. Certainly the strong sense of ownership, unity, and

community pride in East Tower City contributed to the cohesion. Zoë Dillon summarizes this theme. “Having a name change like the Rockets kind of pulled everybody together and we are on the same road, not on twenty different paths (Dillon Interview, 4/4/98).

The third theme of interest, interpersonal relationships, conveys the concept of change as an ambiguous process requiring a high level of trust in order to support collaboration. This process requires a conception or map, without too much specificity or individuals and groups will fail to develop confidence necessary to meet unanticipated consequences. Adele Nichols thoughtfully expressed this theme. “I really like the closeness and the bonding of the teachers here” (Nichols Interview, 5/28/98).

According to Senge, (1995), Team Learning explains this in two ways: First, Team Learning allows diverse teams to combine their abilities in developing synergistic skill in a supportive setting. Second, Team Learning allows opportunities for dialogue and resilient approaches (Senge, p. 259).

The fourth theme for conclusion is renewal. If there are perceived or real threats prevalent in the learning environment, renewal is blocked. Teacher Isabel Martinez reflected this notion as her confidence grew. “I see people, including myself, who have really taken some raw talent and honed it into a skill and now they can shortcut and think back and build on it in ways they couldn’t do six years ago” (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98).

Senge’s (1995) Principle of Team Learning and Continuous Improvement explains professional renewal. As postulated by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), in order for learning institutions to change, individual change must be generated by meaning, understanding of roles, and technical and emotional support. When understood as an additional level of change for consideration, individual improvement depends upon the

outlook of the individual participant. As Isabel Martinez suggests, “It is a very personal, professional thing” (Martinez Interview, 5/6/98). Kendra Bruno relates much the same penchant for renewal. “We keep going forward. We keep trying new things and when things get stale, we change them. We are not set in a groove. We are forced to be out of our comfort zone all of the time to better benefit the children” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98).

The fifth theme encompasses perseverance and gratification. The organization’s capacity to recognize and adapt from its mistakes proves crucial, especially during initial discouraging times. As participants face adversity, the vision can spread based on clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment. As dialogue continues, enthusiasm can begin to build. Adversity can inspire personal and professional energy and commitment.

Leaders must carefully balance Creative Tension so that the vision does not seem out of reach as compared to current conditions. If participants experience what Kendra Bruno articulates, “The most frustrating was people...just lost sight of where we were going” (Bruno Interview, 6/24/98), they suffer relapses, regressing to previous, more comfortable practices. Hallie Lindner describes how Riverside Elementary School demands involve Senge’s Principle of Creative Tension. “You cannot eliminate the importance of how we are meeting the needs of the parent population and hopefully that process will improve our own energy as teachers and staff” (Lindner Interview, 4/13/98). Emerging visions can also erode because learners become overwhelmed by the demands of maintaining their current reality. In such a case leaders must find ways to streamline efforts in fighting crises and managing current reality, so that the ideal does not completely exceed one’s grasp (Senge, 1995).

An additional consideration in the fifth theme is gratification. Some of the unsurpassed rewards in the form of human relationships at Riverside Elementary were noted by Dawn Sommers, “Absolutely rewarding...it is probably the best environment I have ever worked in because of the input we have and from so many different levels” (Sommers Interview, 4/25/98).

Monetary rewards assisted in motivation and wellbeing during initial stages of the project, but soon become less apparent as intrinsically satisfying commitment and social, emotional and moral aspects become more important to participants. Ultimately, this aspect as explained by Senge’s Principle of Systems Thinking allows participants to “simplify their existence by stretching meaning beyond day-to-day events and details” (Senge, 1995, p. 5). Parent Tonya Fanning shares that in spite of a multitude of struggles, death and serious sicknesses, participants just kept going, never intending to stop. “The Riverside Elementary School staff became my family. That is one of the most rewarding adventures that I have ever done in my life” (Fanning Interview, 5/12/98).

### **Implications**

Drawing from findings and conclusions in regards to three distinctive levels of change, involving individual, school or cultural considerations, presents an important opportunity for the extension of discovery about the process of change. The review of literature and emergent themes about change often deal exclusively with only one level of analysis at a time, such as individual, school, or cultural.

For individual improvement, the role of an adaptive, generative learner needs to be reclaimed by education professionals as a key to their own and institutional renewal and vitality. Like other techniques selectively implemented from the business world,

Senge's (1995) and Sergiovanni's (1996) tenets require translation and adaptation of a skillful educational rather than holistic adoption.

If schools are recognized to be unique cultural entities by Sergiovanni, (1996), and Selznick (1957), it is appropriate that we more closely examine the unique properties of school leadership in invigorating educational settings as has been done by examining the teacher's world and introducing elements of Senge's Learning Organization (1995).

Rather than to look for compliance only in our educational settings, leaders of change initiatives should encourage creativity, combined with resources. Mandates for change should be used sparingly, if at all, because such coercion discourages the kind of lasting, meaningful initiatives that build capacity for change over the long term. Remuneration for change should also be approached carefully, but is useful in thwarting the discouragement of an initial Implementation Dip as described by Fullan and Stiegelbaur (1991).

For cultural aspects, encouraging social, emotional, and moral commitment to a "noble cause," which emphasizes pervasive improvement enriches organizational capacity for change as Sergiovanni suggests (1996).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Given that few studies have examined the change process at a particular site in depth, for an extended period of time, from multiple participant perspectives, and from three distinct levels of change, further research studies about school leadership and the implementation of change is warranted. The reason for this recommendation parallels the ideas of Sergiovanni (1996), Goodlad, (1984), and Selznick (1957), in pursuing the concept of schooling as a unique learning experience requiring unique leadership.

A continuation of the research effort presented in this study would be appropriate after ten years of change implementation, perhaps from other perspectives. If the same participants interviewed for this study were involved, their outlook might reflect a mature sense of what transpired in East Tower City from 1992 until 1998.

Board of Education member Don Donovan shared his fear that too much site-based implementation of change might result in anarchy or chaotic events in schools struggling to change (Donovan Interview, 5/28/98). Of interest to change agents and participants involved in change would be to determine exactly what role meaningful dialogue, mental models and values clarification play in avoiding a chaotic response to change.

Further study concerning individual participants involved in change efforts and their relationship to the learning organizations could better define critical roles and responsibilities as relevant change theory inspires continuous improvement in team professional practice and continuous improvement. For example, during change initiatives, what roles do a lead teachers, counselors, central office administrators, parents, community partners, and board of education members assume in escalating or de-escalating change factors? To what extent should the role of change agent be a singular or shared responsibility, assigned to whom and why?

Insight into school size, control issues and change also emerge as a focus of inquiry because it would be of interest to establish optimum sizes for specified types of change efforts. For example, does the size of a setting directly relate to the type and extent of change that can be successfully attempted?

As teachers from the “baby boomer” generation achieve veteran status, another

topic of interest to researchers might be to identify what other aspects of change theory reduce incidents of teacher burn out.

An additional area of inquiry might develop a comparison of how the district-level capacity for change might be built from the central office perspective as compared to efforts in school-centered change efforts. Such a perspective might reduce the tendency to suggest sweeping mandates as specific solutions in response to the need for institutional renewal.

### **Summary**

The analysis of data in Chapter V presented the conclusions, implications and recommendations devised from Peter Senge's principles (1995) explaining a school change initiative. Intensive interviews of twenty participants provided data for explanatory case study as did numerous other sources of information from multiple perspectives. Participant perspectives produced emergent themes that were then analyzed by the investigator. The themes generated findings discussing governance, community, interpersonal relationships, renewal, perseverance and gratification. Senge's principles (1995), of Systems Thinking, Creative Tension, Team Learning and Continuous Improvement influenced the meaning and understanding of school change. Other levels of change involve individual and cultural growth. These findings lead to the conclusions emulated in this chapter. The implications drawn from these conclusions have added to the body of knowledge about the school-centered change process, the nature of leadership when involved in a school culture as a change agent, and the subsequent effect of these principles on future efforts to improve schooling.

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## **APPENDICES**



**APPENDIX A**

**Project Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize Elizabeth L. McIlvain or associates or assistants of her choosing to perform the following procedure:

- A personal interview involving my general or specific experiences as a participant in a school-centered improvement project which began in 1992.
- The duration of the interview session shall not exceed 120 minutes.
- Aspects of my confidentiality as to content of interview is subject to internal and external protective measures as provided by the researcher.
- My participation occurs without present or future threat to my personal welfare and/or professional status.
- Information provided as a result of my insight about a school-centered school improvement process as provided in the interview process may improve educational institutions.
- This is done as part of an investigation entitled *An Explanatory Case Study Using Selected Principles of Senge (1995)*. The purpose of the procedure is: *to analyze the complexities of the change process in school-centered school improvement initiatives.*
- I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director. I may contact Elizabeth McIlvain, in person at (918) 595-2815; or (918) 481-1291 or leave a message at either number. I may also contact Gay Clarkson IRB Executive Secretary, 305 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, 74078.

**I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.**

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TIME:** \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m./p.m.)

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of Subject or person authorized to sign for Subject)

**I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.**

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TIME:** \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m./p.m.)

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_

(Project Director or her authorized representative)

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

#### **Grand Tour Question:**

1. Please describe how Riverside Elementary has changed during the past six years.

#### **Other Questions:**

2. Who was involved in making those changes?
3. How were these people involved?
4. What are your view/perceptions about these changes?
5. What aspects were most rewarding personally or professionally?
6. What aspects were least rewarding personally or professionally?

APPENDIX C

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

**Date:** March 23, 1998

**IRB #:** ED-98-097

**Proposal Title:** AN EXPLANATORY CASE STUDY USING SELECTED PRINCIPLES OF SENGE  
(1995)

**Principal Investigator(s):** L. Nan Restine, Elizabeth L. McIlvain

**Reviewed and Processed as:** Exempt

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):** Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT  
NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE  
APPROVAL PERIOD.

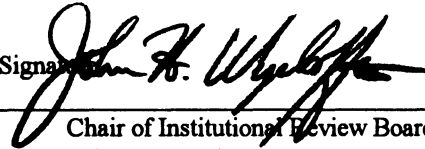
APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE CALENDAR YEAR  
PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE  
SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

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**Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval are as follows:**

Signature:   
Chair of Institutional Review Board  
cc: Elizabeth L. McIlvain

Date: March 24, 1998

## VITA

Elizabeth Rogers McIlvain

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: RIVERSIDE ELEMENTARY: AN EXPLANATORY CASE STUDY USING  
SELECTED PRINCIPLES OF SENGE (1995)

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Biographical:

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