

A CASE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL/TEACHER
RELATIONSHIPS IN BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY

By

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, Jerry and Alicia McDonald, and to my children, Andy, Katie, and Emily Bendick, a thousand thank you's. Your patience, empathy, encouragement, and flexibility have been prominent in the fulfillment of this milestone.

Thank you to all of my school friends as well. I value and appreciate all of the administrators and teachers, those near and far, who have cheered me on throughout these four years. What we have learned together will benefit me and, hopefully, you as we continue on in our service of children.

Finally, three cheers for the members of the Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City higher education cohort. We did it! We did it - I must acknowledge - with the nurturing support and confidence of a complement of fine instructors from the Stillwater campus, most important to me among those, Dr. Kelly Ward, my adviser.

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CHAPTER I

FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

“This is about people. It’s not about pencils, or paperclips, or staples. It’s teachers. My teachers!” the disgruntled principal moaned as the district’s personnel director, Dr. Adams, nodded with understanding.

“I know, Jess. I know how you feel about this; but with the latest legislative budget cuts, all of the middle schools have to staff at 140. Suburban is losing over 200 students; so they’ll have to lose eight teachers. Your situation is no different from any of our other schools,” answered Adams.

Across the table from Jess Edison¹ sat the principal of another of the district’s five middle schools, Sam Lance.

“I can lose five teachers, maybe six,” he offered matter-of-factly.

Across from them both, sat I.

I, actually the new school I had been assigned to staff and open, was the cause for the teacher reassignments from the other two principals’ schools.

Both are fine schools; both National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, recognized by the United States Secretary of Education as among the best in the nation. But as I observed the situation of each school over the several weeks of staff reorganization, I became aware of a difference.

¹ Jess Edison is a pseudonym for the name of the principal of Suburban Middle School, also a pseudonym. All of the names and locations used in this text have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Every time I spoke to Jess or one of his teachers that would soon be one of my teacher,, I sensed a hint of the difference.

Sam's teachers were leaving a school. Jess' teachers were leaving a relationship.

One afternoon, two of Sam's teachers dropped by my building to see "what they were getting into" with the move to the new middle school. Their guarded conversation suggested their reservations, yet hinted a certain comfortable resignation with the elements of the teacher contract that had sacrificed their former positions in spelling out the procedure for staffing a new school site.

"Sam called me in and told me I was least senior of the English teachers," shared one.

"Yeah," added the other. "He put a memo in everyone's mailbox quoting the section of the negotiated agreement that spells out teacher transfers to staff a new building. I knew I'd be gone with less than two years on staff," she concluded.

Reshuffling the staff at their school seemed to them like little more than counting and recounting the boxes of supplies on the shelf -- little more than pencils, paperclips, and staples.

By contrast, a teacher who visited me one afternoon about leaving Jess' school for a drama position at my school shared her concern for her soon-to-be former principal's dour disposition during recent days.

"He called me into his office today, and before he could talk, I said, 'Jess, I'm worried about you worrying about me. Just quit worrying. I'll be fine. This will all

work out for the best.' He's just so concerned about all of us who are having to leave," she related.²

Introduction

Worry, concern, empathy, investment ... all emotions spent by those bound by the webbed intricacies of relationships -- all emotions I sensed in the relationships between the principal of one local middle school and his teachers.

As a middle school principal in a suburban Oklahoma community, I have been assigned the task of opening the district's newest facility. Because of the serious and long-reaching outcomes of my steps and mis-steps as a building leader and because of the responsibility and expectations for creating an effective, successful school, I have become, more than ever, a student of the principalship. I have read and re-read, talked and re-talked, observed and re-observed. All this doing and re-doing has been a quest to uncover the secrets of school leadership, the secrets that hold the answers to ensuring that my school will be the best in all it can be. In the current literature, that *best in all it can be* is called "capacity" (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995, p. 2). In real life, it is called, as we say in Oklahoma, "a tall order." Over time, it has become clearer to me that Jess may have a good handle on that "tall order."

My suspicions were encouraged at the end of the last staffing reorganization meeting, when I followed the associate superintendent of personnel out of the conference. Exhausted by the tension of the exercise, I sighed and reflected, "This is really hard on Jess."

² The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

Dr. Adams nodded as she turned to remind me, “It’s all about relationships, Debbie, and that is what Jess and Suburban Middle School are all about.”

Of course, in a time when test scores are everything and a school’s “Performance Index” is printed on the front page of the *Daily Oklahoman*, it would seem that *results* are what it is all about. But who is to say that relationships, initiated and nurtured by a principal, are not what will get a building to those results - test results and all other data that suggest a school has an undeniable potential for building and increasing its capacity, understanding capacity in the context of the ability of the educational systems to ensure that all students meet more rigorous standards (O’Day, Goertz & Floden, 1996). *Studies of Education Reform: Systemic Reform* (O’Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1996) notes that a school’s capacity meets its potential at the intersection of teacher capacity and organizational capacity.

Thus, Dr. Adam’s comment to me on that day instigated what is to follow. To paraphrase Wolcott (1995), our conference that day and the comment of Dr. Adams that followed *instigated what I shall investigate*.

Problem Statement

The principal represented in the preceding vignette leads a suburban middle school, recognized in the October, 2002 issue of Oklahoma Today as one of the Top 10, highest ranked public schools in the state. Five of the top 10 schools, ranked on the basis of their Oklahoma Academic Performance Index (API) score, the state’s measure for success, represent suburban, white-collar populations. Two are urban magnet schools, and the remaining three are high performing rural schools. The question raised by the

inclusion of these particular schools at the exclusion of others like them leads to the problem of this research project. The problematic situation is that given similar circumstances, including similar socio-economic backgrounds, approximately similar racial and ethnic compositions, similar funding formulas, and like parental and family situations, why is that the five schools listed by Oklahoma Today have found success while dozens of other middle level schools in suburban areas are not listed. In many of the suburban Oklahoma communities, the same or nearly the same raw materials, reflected in the socio-economic pictures of the areas, exist; yet, only a few seem to have found the formula for designations such as “Top 10” or “National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence.” In short, why do some schools perform at exceptionally high levels while others like them fall short?

Another way of looking at the problem statement of this research is to view it from the lens that Creswell (1998) creates in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. He suggests, “The term *problem* may be a misnomer” (p. 94). He proposes instead that researchers might view this element of a research project as the “need for the study.”

Little argument could be offered with the need for seeking the formula of high performing schools. High performance is an admirable goal. Good results bear examination and duplication. This “need” was poignantly illustrated in early October, 2002, when the Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators (CCOSA) hosted a conference titled, “Improving Your School’s API.” Over 300 principals attended in the hopes of satisfying their “need” to learn how a few presenting principals led their schools to enviable performances. Thus, the CCOSA fall 2002 meeting illustrated the problem of this research: given similar raw materials and situations,

countless school administrators fail to lead their schools to minimum performance levels, while others not only meet minimum standards, but also continuously build their level of capacity for success, successes reflected by API scores and a variety of other measures.

Why is this so?

Purpose of the Study

In essence, CCOSA opened the door to the purpose for this study as it spotlighted a collection of mini-case studies, represented by the presenting principals, known to have created successful scenarios. While the fifteen or so minutes allotted to each principal to share their stories was enough to whet the appetite of the curious audience, it was not enough to provide the full story that would include the case study elements recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including the problem, the context, the issues, and the “lessons learned” of a high performing suburban middle school.

Educational research consistently asserts that one of the predominant elements of high achieving schools is a strong, competent leader (Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Useem, Christman, Godl, & Simon, 1997; Valentine, Trimble, & Whitaker, 1997). Numerous other studies both in out of the educational setting have highlighted specific factors associated with strong leadership. For example, studies describe effective leaders as those who practice and model integrity (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989), influence (Katz & Kahn, 1966) and stewardship (Greenleaf, 1977).

To these qualities, Bolman and Deal (1993) add that a relationship component is key to effective leader competencies, suggesting that a principal’s efficacy depends on the quality of his or her relationships with the entire school community. While this element is referenced by Bolman and Deal (1993), it is missing as a central focus in a

majority of the educational literature. The interpersonal skill of relationship building, with particular regard to those relationships initiated and nurtured by a principal with the school's teachers, begs examination as an influence in a school's propensity for continuously building its organizational capacity for success and effectiveness.

Thus, the purpose of this case study is to bring understanding to the phenomena of relationships, initiated and nurtured by a principal with the school's teachers, and to the role these relationships play in a school's ability to build its organizational capacity for success and effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Borrowing from Crotty (1998), my research approach follows a schema that unfolds in a logical sequence of thought to process. A backward look at how my sequence unfolds begins with the methods of case study that are common to qualitative research, including observations, interviews, artifacts, field notes, and documents (all of which are discussed in detail in the methodology section of this work). They are born of my theoretical perspective, interpretivism. The interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Given this definition of the interpretivist perspective, this study will seek to understand a particular school and its "lived experience" (Merriam, 1998, p. 4), including the people, their daily work, habits, motivations, relationships, successes and failures.

The work of social psychologist and pragmatist philosopher Mead summarized primarily in his posthumously compiled work, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) employs

interpretivism in my study via the lens of symbolic interactionism. Crotty (1998) describes symbolic interactionism in a fashion that speaks succinctly to an educational setting and culture. Crotty (1998) notes the following:

The world of the symbolic interactionist, like that of pragmatism as commonly conceived, is a peaceable and certainly growthful world. It is a world of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication, in and out of which we come to be persons and to live as persons. (p. 63)

In the community organization that is a middle school, growth is the ultimate goal. It is evidenced as a public goal in many schools' mission statements and as objectives in the professional development plans for the adults of the school community. Thus, it seeks to be a "growthful world." Other vital elements of schools, especially middle schools, are the interactions and communication tools they choose to engage. The element of intersubjectivity is a complex, multilayered, and interdisciplinary concept (Crossley, 1996). It is a view of the world that acknowledges a mutual confirmation and negotiation between different and independent perspectives, in the case of the middle school, the perspectives of the principal and the teachers. In a high performing middle school, one demonstration of the intersubjectivity is the honor that is given to each member of the group as an independent self, while at the same time honoring them as valued members of the whole faculty, grade level team, or a building committee. Key, too, is the definition each of them hold for themselves as both autonomous faculty members and as team members. Blumer (1969) described this element as one of several "root images" present in symbolic interactionism. He noted the following:

The human being is seen as an organism that not only responds to others on the symbolic level but as one that makes indications to others and interprets their indications. He can do this, as Mead has shown so emphatically, only by virtue of possessing a 'self.' (p. 12)

In the community held by a symbolic interactionist, the self as individual and the self as a member of the group are affirmed because as Mead (1934) says, "A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of the community into his own conduct" (p. 162). Important to symbolic interactionism, and my research, is the emphasis on the interpretations and meanings that people construct out of their role in the school community. Similar to the research of Blasé and Kirby (1992) who followed the work of Blumer (1969) and Tesch (1998), each teacher or member of the school faculty is viewed as a "social product who is influenced by external factors (e.g., policies, superordinate leadership) but who also is capable of maintaining distance and is able to initiate individual action" (p. 125).

Returning to the broader theory, three of Blumer's (1969) assumptions of symbolic interactionism work well with my look at relationships at school. They include the following:

- 1) 'that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them';
- 2) 'that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows';
- 3) 'that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.' (Crotty, 1998, p. 72)

The first assumption speaks to the actions of both the principal and the faculty members. The “things” that they act toward might include the academic team, the children, the curriculum, the daily bulletin, the relationships, or the language used to represent and present these entities. The second assumption involves the conversations, team meetings, evaluation conferences, affirmations, and incidences of meaningful physical gesture or touch between the “fellows” of the staff, all examples of social interactions. Finally, the third assumption recognizes the interpretive function that each school community member engages in when making meaning from the many symbols of the middle school existence. Collectively, these manifestations of the assumptions of symbolic interactionism shape this look at how school leaders construct relationships in the school community.

Finally, for the purposes of this paper, the epistemology that informs my theoretical perspective, interpretivism, is constructionism. Crotty (1998) explains that constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). This all seems particularly well suited for my research since “interactions between human beings” are the basis for building relationships and a collection of relationships is what builds a community, an organization that is deeply rooted in the “social context.”

Research Questions

As Arsenault and Anderson (1999) point out, a qualitative researcher approaches a situation seeking to understand a phenomenon. Lincoln and Denzin (1994) add that it is an attempt “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, [meanings] that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (p. 2). The phenomenon that has piqued my interest centers on relationships and the role they play in a school. The particular situation that has drawn my interest has presented itself in its natural setting at Suburban Middle School. Thus, a case study is the logical research method to employ, for it has as its purpose not only to describe, as is the case with all qualitative research, but also to explain. Stake (1995) would recognize this study as an “intrinsic” case study, one intended to provide a better understanding of one particular case, one that has captured the interest and curiosity of this researcher.

Guiding the case study are questions that will uncover major themes that can illuminate “how things are taking place and why” (Anderson, 1999, p. 154). Yin (1994) elaborates that these substantive questions, “how” and “why,” are of a navigational sort. They guide the investigator, serving to remind him/her of the direction and purpose of the inquiry.

With this background in mind, the questions that guide my research will be ones of an exploratory nature. They will seek to render interpretations of Suburban’s social and community organization by examining its cultural and historical underpinnings. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, I explore the lived experience of Suburban

Middle School, the people, their actions and interactions, and all that they value. The following research questions guide this inquiry.

- 1) What does a culture of relationships look like in a middle school setting?
- 2) What tools are employed to encourage interaction, community, and communication?
- 3) How do relationships encourage the qualities that enhance a school's ability to increase its capacity for success?
- 4) What is the impact of relationship building on a school's potential for building capacity?
- 5) What are the symbols and metaphors of this culture of relationships?

Significance of the Study

The insights garnered from this research contribute to the literature of leadership, middle school administration, and organizational effectiveness. While the purpose of this study is to understand the role of relationships in a middle school, the findings have the more specific potential to provide insight into the areas of leadership and school communities and direction for the practice of leadership within the school communities.

School administrators are often thrust into their roles with a jolt like that of a novice driver slamming into fourth gear straight out of first. Novice principals are usually initiated to the ranks of the assistantship, preceded by a year or two of graduate coursework. Personnel courses peppered with supervision and evaluation methods are part of the regime; however, unlike the internship period from student to student-teacher, there is little time for reflection and mentorship in the early stages of principaling.

Relationship building is a specific activity, one given little attention in the preparation of a school administrator. The findings that this study provides about the significance of relationships in a school setting have the potential to give meaningful direction to principals as they set about creating a vision, mission, and successful school setting. It should prove useful to both novice and experienced alike.

Limitations

A potentially significant limitation of this case study is that it focuses on only one school site. In an effort to minimize the effects of this possibility, I have taken every effort to triangulate my inquiries in order to present a significantly broad representation of responses from this one site. However, in my attempts to gather a vast and broad range of descriptive and conversational data, I have created another limitation.

As Stake (1996) notes, “Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing, and anyone’s telling” (p. 240). The results reported in the following research summary are a fraction of the information I gathered over the course of my “stay” at Suburban Middle School.

The length of time of my stay is another potential limitation. While this research was collected during the first six months of the 2002-2003 academic year, the days, hours, and minutes on site were chiseled out of the time demanded of the researcher as a working school administrator in another building in Suburban’s district.

The issue of my own position as an administrator in a sister school near Suburban might also have created some limiting factors. Throughout the exercise, I had to deal with the following possibilities: Would teachers trust me? Would they feel bound to

defend the community of Suburban at all costs? And my own notions and passions, would they color my inquiry? To this last question, I answer unapologetically, “Yes.” This would only be considered a limitation to the positivist, to one whose allegiance is firmly planted in the practices of quantitative research. For those, my “intrinsic case study” (Stake, 1996, p. 3) might seem limiting. For this researcher, it was not a limitation, but an invitation. I dealt with these issues by visiting the site frequently in order to establish trust between myself and my research subjects.

Familiarity could have been considered a limitation in this case study because I am familiar with the principal and many of the teachers at this research site. I once worked at this school. However, it is my previous intimacy with this setting that led me to my curiosity about the phenomenon of relationships. Again, however, my curiosity is explained in that this is an “intrinsic case study,” one that I study because I am keenly interested in this particular situation.

Organization of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters. Each chapter is introduced by a vignette that is intended to capture the essence of that chapter’s significance in the context of one middle school’s setting. Chapter I introduces the parameters of the research, including the Purpose of the Study, Problem Statement, Research Questions, and Theoretical Framework.

Chapter II is a review of the related literature. The evolution of related leadership literature is followed from its historical inception in the works of Scientific Management and Classical Theory on through to the more contemporary theories of Human Behavioral

Theory and Community Theory. Building on this scaffold of knowledge is the literature of the middle school and the school leadership literature. Finally, from the foundation of the symbolic interactionist, the idea of metaphors imbedded in the social context of the middle school is introduced.

The third chapter delineates the methods employed for this study. Following the introduction is a rationale for the selection of the research site and subjects interviewed. Case study research is discussed, including the context and phenomena to which it is most appropriately applied. Next, a review of the paradigms that guide qualitative research validates its appropriateness for this study. In the section on the pragmatics of the study, field procedures, data collection techniques, and analysis of data are discussed. A section on the role of the researcher adds insight into the personal curiosities of the author while making connections between these curiosities and the questions raised by leadership and middle school literature.

Chapter IV presents the study's findings. This includes an illumination of the themes that emerged from the issues raised by the research questions and their significance with relation to appropriate theories. A description of the selected middle school site and surrounding suburban community is included, as well as descriptions of the participants involved in the study. Archival data and document analysis are also presented.

Chapter V extends the framework provided by Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory by viewing the situation through the lens of the feminist leadership perspective. It also lends further insight by expanding the Bowen family systems theory (Dillow, 1982;

Gilmore, 1982; Kerr, 1982) and considering the theory of nested relationships (DeLange, personal communication, January 14, 2002).

Chapter VI completes the study with conclusions, interpretations, and implications. The study ends with recommendations for further study as suggested by the issues raised throughout the research process.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Are you going to BG's [Book Groupies] tonight?" veteran teacher and book group regular, Linda Dawson asked her younger teammate Ron Yanarty.

"Well, I read the book. And I was plannin' on goin' just to give Jess grief about it. What's up with all these Anne Tyler books? This is the third one," the almost thirty-something kidder teased. "I'm gonna force him into a Louis L'Amour. Now, there's a guy's guy! Dirt, guns, bad guys ... Ever read one?" he asked.

"No, but I wouldn't mind," answered Dawson. "Do you know if the teachers and principal from Center Middle School are still coming to OUR book group?" she continued.

"I heard Jess uninvited them. At least Molliganer said 'Jess took care of it' when I asked her about it," Yanarty shared.

"Good," Dawson emphatically replied. "I didn't like having extra people there. It just didn't feel right," she added in a protective tone.

"It's OUR book group, and besides, they're not BG's," she proclaimed. "These are our books, even the bad ones, even all three Anne Tyler's. Center can go review their own literature!"³

³ The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

Introduction

While the purpose of this research is to understand the role that relationships initiated and nurtured by a principal with a school's teachers plays in building a school's capacity, it will be necessary to understand the work compiled in several separate, but related areas. This in-depth look backward through the management and leadership literature will provide a greater appreciation for where we are with educational leadership.

Current literature and theory relating to organizational management and leadership will be a first focus, turning next to the role of instructional leader and the work that extends the organizational management theories to the world of education where the principal is leader. The next turn is toward the growing body of work emanating from educational research. Middle school philosophy and research and an even newer area of interest from the school reform camps, building capacity, will be important. Key, too, is what can be learned from the fields of psychology and sociology with particular reference to issues related to human relationships. From the relationship work, a turn back to education for a look at the combined notions of "building a culture of capacity" will set the stage for a look at a particular middle school that appears to have created just such a community.

Organizational Management and Leadership Theories

Two terms describe contrasting approaches of moving organizations forward. One is management; the other is leadership. Both have been studied and defined by countless researchers and studies. Evans (1996) noted, "Despite thousands of empirical

studies yielding hundreds of definitions of leadership, there is still no consensus about it” (p. 116). The same can be said of the term management. Subtle implications are attached to each. In *A Force For Change: How Leadership Differs From Management*, Kotter (1990) offers a substantial argument for the very dissimilar aspects of each. Kotter suggests that the primary role of management is to create consistency and order for organizations. In contrast, the goal of leadership is to create change and movement. Management promotes stability; leadership seeks progress through change. While it is simplifying the processes, leaders create vision and managers create agendas. Both seek to satisfy their goals. Many others agree with Kotter in the argument that management and leadership are distinct constructs, including Bennis and Nanus (1985), Hickman (1990) and Peters and Austin (1985). Managers build relationships with their employees; however, the relationships are likely to be based on low emotional involvement. Zaleznik (1977) suggests that managers, maintaining a low emotional involvement, are reactive and prefer to work with subordinates to solve problems in the work place. Leaders, on the other hand, are emotionally involved and active, not typically reactive.

To gain a better understanding of the subtle differences between management and leadership, it is helpful to study the evolution of ideas that have been applied to organizations such as schools. Shafritz and Ott (1996) begin their work *Classics of Organizational Theory* with a definition of both *organization* and *theory*. They define an organization as “a social unit” and a theory as a “set of propositions that seeks to explain or predict something” (p. 1). These definitions lend nicely to the study of relationships within schools because, rather obviously, schools are social units, which, for the purpose of this study, require both explanation and prediction.

The search for consensus in the study of organizational theory tends to lead both expert and novice in ever-spiraling circles. Shafritz and Ott (1996) suggest that there are cycles of thought within the theories of organizational theory and that the different theories often share commonalities, essences that appear and disappear through the different renditions.

Of the many groupings of organizational theories, some of the most common appear in the works of leaders such as Scott (1961), Koontz (1961), Perrow (1973), and Scott and Mitchell (1972). These researchers have offered explanations for theories that have evolved over the decades that include scientific management, classical theory, neoclassical theory, and human behavior theory. In addition, almost as new as the current century are schools that still beg classification, but for now are considered by Shafritz and Ott (1996) under the broad descriptors of organizational culture reform movements and postmodernism and the information age.

Educational organizations, particularly common education in the United States, have mirrored corporate and industrial models in organization, philosophy, and physical setting for much of the nation's history (Johnson, 1992). Early one-room schoolhouses reflected the same philosophy as the first American enterprises, family-owned and centrally located; Mom and Pop grocers implemented the same primitive organizational structures as the schoolmaster did in his one-size "fits" all classroom. Through the years, American enterprise flourished, the Industrial Revolution spawned manufacturing, and American education answered, over the course of the next hundred years, with its factory model schools. Just as the business world moved through an evolution of organizational theories to both direct and explain their workings, so too did education. Just as Mom and

Pop general stores evolved to mega-super center Walmarts, one room school houses grew to include school district student populations as large as some American towns. Almost concurrently, the drive for bottom line profits in corporate America foreshadowed the results and standards driven goals of the nation's schools. In both arenas, the search was on for people who could take the organizations from mediocrity to superiority. Managers and leaders became the species of interest for headhunters and organizations across the country, from corporations to school districts.

Both terms, management and leadership, have roots in scientific management, classical theory, neoclassical theory, and human behavior theory. There are likely as many definitions of management and leadership as there are theories and those who write about them.

Just a sampling of the definitions gives one a clear idea of the diversity and depth of literature dedicated to the topic. The role of influence in the leadership literature is prominent in the ideas of several theorists. Among them, Terry (1960) notes, "Leadership is the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives" (p. 493). Tannenbaum, Weschler, and Massarik (1959) define leadership from an interpersonal influence perspective as communication directed toward the attainment of specific goals. Also centering on the role of influence, Koontz and O'Donnell in *Principles of Management* (1959) state, "Leadership is influencing people to follow in the achievement of a common goal" (p. 435). Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2001) add metaphorical fire to the influence notion, noting, "Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. Great leadership works through the emotions" (p. 3).

Bennis (1989), who some would contend is the leader of contemporary leadership literature, all but gave up on a singular definition of leadership, conceding through the language of imagery, “To an extent, leadership is like beauty: it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (p. 1).

In *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*, Lambert (1998), one of the most contemporary researchers in school leadership, brings a notion of collaboration to the term leadership. Lambert, along with Senge (1990) and others, propose leadership in the context of learning communities. Lambert suggests, “Leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively” (1998, p. 5).

Metaphors, too, have been employed to define leadership. DePree (1992) described it as likened to the director of a jazz band. “The leader of a jazz band has the beautiful opportunity to draw the best out of the other musicians. We have much to learn from jazz-band leaders, for jazz, like leadership, combines the unpredictability of the future with the gifts of individuals” (p. 9).

For some, there may seem to be no difference between managers and leaders. However, Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996) distinguish between management and leadership. They define management “as the process of working with and through individuals and groups and other resources (such as equipment, capital, and technology) to accomplish organizational goals” (p. 7). This definition applies to a vast array of organizations, including those as diverse from one another as business, education, medicine, politics, and military. Leadership and management converge because, according to Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996), “The achievement of organizational

objectives through leadership is management” (p. 7). They further propose that interpersonal skills are the tools of effective management personnel.

Bennis (1989), a scholar whose life’s work revolved around leadership, further delineates the comparisons made between leadership and management.

I tried to think of the differences between leaders and managers as the differences between those who master the context and those who surrender to it. There are other differences, as well, and they are enormous and crucial. The manager administers; the leader innovates. The manager is a copy; the leader is an original. The manager maintains; the leader develops. The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people. The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust. The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective. The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why. The manager has an eye always on the bottom line; the leader has his eye on the horizon. The manager imitates; the leader originates. The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it. The manager does things right; leaders do the right things. (p 44)

The applied behavioral sciences offer the broadest and most fertile field to explore the trends and possibilities of organizational management and leadership. Behavioral science attempts to integrate concepts, theories, and research from a variety of disciplines to make decisions about the behavior of individuals and groups. Extending this thought, applied behavioral sciences seek to have an impact on making leaders more effective by moving the concepts of the science from the theoretical and descriptive to the applied and prescriptive (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 1996). However, because it is not an exact

science such as physics or chemistry, there are no universal truths. People, compared to rates of motion and chemicals, are hard to predict. For this reason, behavioral science is more of a science of probability, a science that seeks to predict the probable behavior of the very unpredictable human species. Applied to the issues of leadership and followership and organizational management and effectiveness, behavioral sciences help leaders to increase the probability of an employee's (and by extension the organization's) success by providing appropriate support in response to the employee's needs, whether task or relationship centered.

Situational Leadership

From the camps of the applied behavioral scientists, the framework that most nearly supports the scaffolds of learning necessary to understand the characters at play in the social setting of a school is the work of Hersey and Blanchard (1969) in their situational leadership model. Situational leadership is something of a hybrid of the many contingency theories that evolved in the late 1960s. Since that time, many approaches to contingency theory have evolved. The most widely recognized is Fiedler's (1964, 1967; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). Succinctly summarized, contingency theory deals with style and situations where leadership must be applied. It calls for flexibility and a propensity for matching needs with appropriate support; and with respect to mainstream versions such as that of Fiedler, it pays particular attention to matching leadership behaviors with the setting. Northouse (1997) describes contingency theory: "It is a leader-match theory that emphasizes the importance of matching a leader's *style* with the demands of a *situation*" (p. 86).

Situational leadership is considered as one of several contingency theories in that the contingency factor, using Hersey and Blanchard's 1969 term, is *follower maturity*. Looking at the same from a more politically correct and late 1990s perspective, the same kind of contingencies are now represented by the term *readiness*, with reference to the follower. In a retrospective collaboration, speaking in separate voices Hersey and Blanchard (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996) reflected on the evolution of their view of situational leadership. Hersey wrote of his: "As times changed, so did our thinking about diagnosing a person's ability to perform a specific task, as well as the terminology used. During the 1960's the term 'maturity' in reference to assessing people did not seem offensive; it does now" (p. 585). Also moving away from the term *maturity* toward more contemporary language, in the same text Blanchard added, "In the most general of terms, *readiness* is the amount of willingness and ability the follower demonstrates while performing a specific task" (p. 588).

Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership developed as something of an antithesis to contrasting "contingency theories," such as the normative decision model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), the Fiedler model (1967), and the path-goal theory (House & Dressler, 1974). Situational leadership theory maintains that leaders are more effective if they base their behaviors on the maturity or readiness of their followers (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1998), while other contingency theories and models base leadership success on variables such as expectancy, leader behaviors, or situation substitution.

As its name implies, situational leadership centers on leadership as it manifests itself in particular situations. The premise of the model is that different situations require different approaches from the leader; thus, a leader serves best when he/she can adapt his

or her style to the demands of the situation at hand. This model suggests that both a directive and a supportive role might be required of the leader, either in any given situation. In order for the leader to choose the correct approach, he/she must evaluate the employee in order to assess both commitment and competency. Commitment reflects a person's positive attitude toward a specific task, and competency refers to a person's accomplished level of skill mastery necessary to address a task. As the needs of the subordinate change, the leader must continue to stay attuned to the employee's skill and motivational levels. By doing so, the leader will know whether to apply a directive or a supportive role (Northouse, 1997).

Directive behaviors are related to task; supportive behaviors are of a relationship nature. Directive behaviors move the employee toward the accomplishment of a task by offering directions, creating time lines, defining performance goals and evaluation methods, and/or modeling appropriate efforts. By contrast, relationship behaviors include praising, problem solving, collaborating, and listening. These behaviors then motivate by enhancing the employee's self-esteem and making them more comfortable with their task, their coworkers, and their situation. Task behavior requires more one-way (supervisor to subordinate) communication, while supportive behavior is best conducted through two-way communication (supervisor to subordinate and the converse) (Northouse, 1997). Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996) define the two behaviors as follows:

Task behavior – The extent to which leaders are likely to organize and define the roles of the members of their group (followers) and to explain what activities each is to do and when, where, and how tasks are to be accomplished; characterized by

endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and ways of getting jobs accomplished.

Relationship behavior – The extent to which leaders are likely to maintain personal relationships between themselves and members of their group (followers) by opening up channels of communication, providing socio-emotional support, active listening, “psychological strokes,” and facilitating behaviors. (p. 134)

Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996) propose that a combination of task and relationship behaviors is typically required of a leader’s approach. In order for a leader to know the appropriate approach to each employee, it is important to have an understanding of the individual’s typical behaviors and motivations. Key to this study is understanding the role relationships play in creating a vehicle for understanding the needs of the workers and thus the appropriate requirements of their leadership.

Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996) specifically address the administrator-faculty relationship, suggesting that the low relationship-low task style approach might be best in a typical school setting where a decentralized organizational structure with delegation of responsibilities to individuals is the case. At other times, the authors suggest, this approach may need to be adjusted for the same faculty group, if, for instance, something like a curriculum change needs to be implemented. Also, contrasted to established, experienced faculty members, a new teacher might require more direction and fall in the realm of high relationship–high task leadership needs. This same teacher, as she/he gains experience, may move to more low relationship and task behaviors. An astute leader needs to be aware of these follower changes. An administrator who has

invested in a relationship with the individual teachers will know when these follower changes evolve. With the careful consideration of its originators, it appears that the situational leadership model may hold some important concepts for educators, especially since its authors have proposed an application for it in the schoolhouse.

Additional Leadership Models

With regard to other theories, as the organizational and leadership literature has evolved, it has focused on the structures and needs of the business world. Educators seeking improvement and aware of the similar efforts for betterment in the business setting often sought and implemented variations of the leadership and organizational models practiced by their corporate counterparts. Borrowing from the early days of the factory model schools whose two and three story facades remain as ghosts of theories past to the much more recent attempts to duplicate bureaucratic theories. These theories include those cited by Sergiovanni (1996) such as the pyramid theory, the railroad theory, or Peters and Waterman's (1982) high performance theory. In using these theories, educators have attempted to reorganize their thinking and functioning to pattern themselves after other formal organizations. Though all three of these theories have important lessons to teach those in education organizations, none of them provide a consistently comfortable fit for the missions, objectives, and structures of the school setting. Bonstingl (1992) tried to transfer the precepts of Total Quality Management (TQM) to the school setting. He professed that strong, consistent leadership from the highest level of school leadership was the most important characteristic of a quality

school. School reform advocates Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) argued, however, that individuals, not systems, would prove to be the solution to education reform.

While the business models for leadership and organization seem a poor fit for the school setting, they do offer food for thought. Sergiovanni (1996) notes concern for educators who “borrow” rather than “learning from” the models of corporations. He provides an analogy of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are handed down from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and moral philosophy. Business applications create secondary sources. To then take and adapt the theories to education would create a tertiary level of practices. It is better, Sergiovanni (1996) asserts, to construct unique, appropriately situated concepts, created particularly for school settings and purposes.

This is what current school reform theorists and practitioners seek to do. Emerging literature is offering school administrators a framework that Blasé (1985) terms *organizational literacy*. Just as in the literacy of reading books, literacy in the social system of recurring patterns of actions and events can equip a school principal with a bag of tricks more amazing than the bunny in the magician’s top hat (Earle & Kruse, 1999). In *Organizational Literacy for Educators*, Earle and Kruse (1999) propose three social patterns present in schools - bureaucratic, political, communal – as well as several patterns of inequality that exist in schools.

The communal model, given impetus by Sergiovanni’s (1994) community metaphor in *Building Community in Schools* (1994), introduces the opportunity for schools to “do things differently, to develop new kinds of relationships, to create new ties, to make new commitments” (p. 153). Earle and Kruse (1999) also look to a

community construct suggesting that caring relationships prosper when situated within environments that value a sense of larger community, such as a school. Roland Barth (2001) in *Learning By Heart* dedicates an entire chapter on teacher-principal relationships, calling them “decisive” (p. 105). He further asserts that the nature and quality of teacher-principal relationships is “absolutely central to the capacity of a school” (p. 106). Fullan (1991), too, points to the power of relationships as they manifest themselves in the efforts of collaborative cultures within schools. Within the work of these passionate educators, lie the common themes of school leadership and organization created and espoused, not by bureaucrats of the business world, but by those who began as teachers, and for the most part, continue as such.

Community Theory

Though situational leadership seems promising in many ways, none of the leadership theories from the earliest renditions to current evolutions seems a perfect fit with the school setting. In answer to his own problems with “theory borrowing,” Sergiovanni (1996) has proposed *community theory*, which he describes as follows:

The emphasis in community leadership is building a shared followership and the emphasis in building a shared followership is not on *who* to follow, but on *what* to follow. Community members are not asked to comply in response to clever leadership processes or in response to aspects of the leader’s personality. They are asked to respond to substance. Leadership in communities is idea based. And the goal of idea-based leadership is to develop a broad-based commitment to shared values and conceptions that become a compelling source of authority for

what people must do. (p. 83)

In his community theory, Sergiovanni (1996) holds a high regard for the moral aspects of school leadership, particularly given that the “schools function as extensions of families, and principals and teachers function *in loco parentis*” (p. 83). Additionally, Sergiovanni cites the moral purposes of schools as the safeguards and nurturers of civic responsibility, ensuring the presence and long life of our nation’s democratic principles.

Sergiovanni bases his theory on a consensual understanding between leaders and followers. He refers to the work of Gardner (1986) who explains the connection between the teachers and principal:

It is in this context that leaders arise; and it is this context that determines what kinds of leaders will emerge and what will be expected of them. A loyal constituency [followership] is won when people, consciously or unconsciously, judge the leader to be capable of solving their problems and meeting their needs, when the leader is seen as symbolizing their norms, and when their image of the leader (whether or not it corresponds to reality) is congruent with their inner environment of myth and legend. (p. 11)

This connection between leaders and followers speaks again to the moral responsibilities of school leadership because the principal is held to what Bellah, Madsen, Swidler and Tipton (1985) describe as the “standards of public obligation” (p. 290), a higher calling than simply the requirements of profit and product in business. Taking the moral role a step further, Sergiovanni (1986) likens the principal’s role and commitment to that of a minister, a shepherd, a servant, as one who must “administer to the needs of the school as an institution by serving its purposes, by serving those who struggle to

embody these purposes, and by acting as a guardian to protect the institutional integrity of the school” (p. 88).

Sergiovanni anchors his community theory in the work of Tonnies (1957) and two terms Tonnies employed in explaining the evolution of society, *gemeinschaft*, which translates to “community” and *gesellschaft*, which translates to “society.” In 1887, Tonnies used these terms to describe the evolution of societies from hunters and gatherers to agrarians to members of industrial societies. Each successive evolution led societies away from community ideals and toward the rules and actions of a more secular society. Sergiovanni (1994) interprets this evolution, “Each of the societal transformations resulted in a shift away from *gemeinschaft* toward *gesellschaft*, away from a vision of life as sacred community and toward a more secular society” (p. 49).

Sergiovanni (1994) borrowed the ideas of Tonnies to create his theory of community for schools. In particular, Tonnies’ explains that *gemeinschaft* exists in three forms: by kinship, of place, and of mind ([1887] 1957, p. 42). Sergiovanni (1994) expands this proposition to add community of memory, an idea first proffered by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985), to the communities of relationship (kinship), place and mind. The addition of community of memory ensures an organization an ability to sustain itself in difficult times, connect it when members are apart from one another, and provide a sense of history that can create meaning and purpose (Sergiovanni, 1996). Sergiovanni (1994) explains, “The relationships among the four forms of community are mutually reinforcing” (p. 8).

Neither *gemeinschaft* nor *gesellschaft* exist in a pure form in modern society. They are considered ideals, “ideal ways of thinking and living, two different types of

cultures, two alternative visions of life” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 49). They represent contrasts similar to those already noted between management and leadership. Management might be more likely applied in a *gesellschaft* setting, perhaps in a setting where community values are held less sacred than contractual obligations, whereas *gemeinschaft* would be found in a setting in which individuals have chosen to affiliate with each other, a place where “natural will is the motivating force” (p. 49) as compared to “rational will” (p. 49). Ties in a *gesellschaft* union are calculated, created to attain a goal or gain some benefit. In a *gemeinschaft* community, the ties are moral and the reason for affiliation is such because the “individuals decide to relate to each other because doing so has its own intrinsic meaning and significance” (p. 49).

Sergiovanni (1996) goes on to suggest that a modern corporation is an example of a *gesellschaft*. It is an organization of relationships forged to reach specific goals. The relationships are well-defined, stiff, and businesslike. They are short lived, defined by the benefit of goal attainment; and once the goal is attained, the relationship likely ends. Reward, job descriptions, promotions and organizational needs create competitive relationships among the community members in a *gesellschaft* organization. By contrast, communities grounded in *gemeinschaft* values seek committed rather than calculated involvement. The relationships are colored with the shades of morality. These community members “understand the importance of identifying with place and space over a period of time, and providing members with security, sense, and meaning. And they recognize that in the end the ties that bind us together come from sharing with others a common commitment to a set of ideas and ideals” (p. 50).

Sergiovanni (1994) warns that the ideal is a balance of the best of both *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* because too much *gemeinschaft* blocks progress whereas too much *gesellschaft* results in a loss of community. Ideally, a school will have just enough of *gesellschaft* values to allow for change and progress while maintaining a healthy dose of *gemeinschaft* to ensure the benefits of community.

Looking at community through the lens of intersubjectivity, the self-defining aspects of membership that speak of *gesellschaft* and the self-regulating elements of *gemeinschaft* combine to create an interworld of citizenship, a balance of membership and community. A community viewed by a symbolic interactionist keen to the nuances of intersubjectivity is a place where a “member is to be involved in the shared understandings of the community, to have an interdependent role within it and to be recognized as such” (Crossley, 1996, p. 153).

Sergiovanni’s (1996) community theory is structured around four specific ties or communities that bind school faculties together: communities by relationships, communities of mind, communities by place, and communities by memory. Community by relationship is marked by the special kinds of unions among people that create a sense of belonging similar to that of families and other well-connected collections of people. Communities of mind evolve from the connections and practices of people who share “common goals, values and conceptions of being and doing” (p. 51). Community by place “characterizes the sharing of a common habitat or locale. This sharing of place with others for sustained periods of time creates a special identity and a shared sense of belonging that connects people together in special ways” (p. 51). Lastly, the community of memory emerges as the other three unions intertwine as a system of arteries through

the body of the group carrying the lifeblood of the larger community. In doing so, a powerful energy, able to sustain the community in difficult and trying times, through personal and group tragedies, as well as in times of great communal joy, is created; and that is the community of memory.

As schools struggle to become the kind of community that is the objective of Sergiovanni's theory, they will address the following questions proposed by Sergiovanni (1996):

- What can be done to increase the sense of family, neighborliness, and collegiality among the faculty of a community where everyone cares about each other and helps each other to be, to learn together, and to lead together?
- What kinds of school-parent relationships need to be cultivated to include parents in this emerging community?
- How can the web of relationships that exist among teachers and between teachers and students be defined so that they embody community?
- How can teaching and learning settings be arranged so that they are more family-like?
- How can the school itself, as a collection of families, be more like a neighborhood?
- What are the shared values and commitments that enable the school to become a community of mind?

- How will these values and commitments become practical standards that can guide the lives community members want to lead, what community members learn and how, and how community members treat each other?
- What are the patterns of mutual obligations and duties that emerge in the school as community is achieved? (p. 51)

In a *gemeinschaft* school, the principal may likely seek to move a school toward the community described above by embodying the characteristics of the servant leader, described in the works of Greenleaf (1977), Covey (1990, 1999), DePree (1992), Sergiovanni (1992) and Wheatley (2002). Spears (2002) identify ten characteristics central to the practices of a servant leader: “listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, building community” (pp. 5-8). Greenleaf (1977) is credited as having coined the term *servant leader* in his 1970 essay, *The Servant as Leader*. In that seminal piece of literature on servant leadership, Greenleaf states his belief that “a new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (p. 10). This is the same idea posited by Gardner (1986) in his discussion of the intertwining elements of leadership and followership.

The school leader who is able to create this synergy between the forces of leadership and followership is an administrator in the *gemeinschaft* realm in that he/she has created a people-centered organization through the service or stewardship of the “led.” Sergiovanni (1992) describes this leadership practice: “Stewardship represents

primarily an act of trust, whereby people and institutions entrust a leader with certain obligations and duties to fulfill and perform on their behalf” (p. 139). Implementation of stewardship will likely require a leader who understands the requirements of Selznick’s (1957) *interpersonal leader* whose “task is to smooth the path of human interaction, ease communication, evoke personal devotion, and allay anxiety. His expertness has relatively little to do with content; he is more concerned with persons than with policies” (pp. 27-28).

Social Psychology and Personal Relationships

From the stages of organizational theory, the situational leadership model, community theory and other current school reform literature, it is a small and logical step to the platforms of social psychology and the study of personal relationships. Following Sergiovanni’s (1996) advice to seek information from primary sources rather than borrowing and applying the ideologies from another setting, a direct look at the social psychology literature should accompany a query into the role of relationships in school leadership. Editor and researcher Duck (1988) in the preface of the first edition of *Handbook of Personal Relationships* opened the door for practitioners in the field of education to walk through in seeking stronger tools of leadership through relationships. Duck (1988) invites educators and leaders alike to join in the discussion of personal relationships and their place in organizational theory with the following comment.

The field of research in personal relationships is *inherently and necessarily* a cross-disciplinary enterprise. It can grow in scholarship and application only if the different disciplines continue to feed one another with their insights and their

own special contributions ... [It] is not created nor sustained by the efforts of only one section of the community of scholars alone, but instead feeds and grows from the interaction of many different schools of thought, all of which need to be informed about the work of the others. (p.xv)

School administrators and education theorists have unique contributions to bring to this research. They also stand to benefit from its lessons. By linking situational leadership with the study of personal relationships, as well as family and community models, educators might create a vehicle for better understanding their followers' needs for direction and motivation. Duck (1997) offers that relationships are "multiplex, variable, subject to re-characterization, describable in many ways simultaneously, open-ended, to some extent contentious" (p. 5). This multi-faceted description of relationships seems to lend itself well to the variances in the continuum of supervision required of situational leadership. The variance suggested speaks directly to the school setting – calm and predictable one moment, explosive and tense the next. Just as the disaster of the day requires a unique reaction from those in the setting, so too does a relationship require a carefully tended approach in the face of a personal or professional disaster. In the language of situational leadership, what is necessary in school administration is at one moment a high-relational, high-task style of leadership and at the next a low-relational, low-task style.

Middle School Practices of a Relationship Nature

Middle schools, perhaps more than any other level of American education, rely on relationships as part of their foundation for success. In *Turning Points 2000*:

Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century (Jackson, 2000) the title of Chapter Six is “Organizing Relationships for Learning,” a clear herald of the organization of current middle schools that not only invites, but encourages the establishment of relationships. This education reform document declares, “The relationships established within the middle school affect both the quality of student learning and the quality of teaching” (p. 122). It further suggests that at the heart of middle school philosophy is a “supportive web of relationships” (p.122). This web includes the principal to teacher relationships and the teacher to student relationships. Often, teacher to parent and student to parent relationships are part of the “supportive web.”

Clark and Clark (Irvin, 1997) cite the role of relationships as enabling and supporting teacher success, specifically by cultivating a network of relationships. According to Clark and Clark, relationships in a school help bring about meaningful school change.

Relationships between teachers and administrators are encouraged in middle schools through the organizational structures of inter-disciplinary academic teams. Created to lessen the problems inherent in the larger schools of today, middle school teams are structures intended to provide a small school feeling in a large school environment. In most middle schools, a team includes four or five teachers, each teaching a single core subject, such as math, English, science, history, and a foreign language. These same five teachers work exclusively with a group of 125 to 140 students. In most schools, an administrator and counselor are considered part of the instructional team. Jackson & Davis (2000) note that the team approach “is an important strategy for fostering supportive relationships between teachers and

students” (p. 125). They are equally valuable in bolstering administrator-teacher relationships. Erb and Stevenson (1999) report that increased professional contact provided through the team structure enhances the potential for teachers to develop high teacher efficacy, an understanding that they can have a positive impact on a student’s performance regardless of complicating challenges such as family stability, academic history, or poorly developed learning skills. Not just one teacher working alone as in an elementary self-contained classroom, the middle school teacher has a team of adults to support him/her.

Where the principal is considered part of the team, meeting regularly with the team, a venue for dialogue and relationship building is created. Dialogue is important because it creates a situation of collaboration rather than competition, an opportunity characterized by mutual respect and equality (Combs, Miser, & Whitaker, 1999). Senge (1990) addresses the value of dialogue in work groups such as middle school teams. He notes that dialogue allows individuals to gain insights that simply could not be achieved individually. As a member of the team, the middle school principal has a unique opportunity to employ dialogue within the structure of the team and its meetings, possibly extending those dialogues outside the formal team setting as well. According to Jackson and Davis (2000), “As teachers receive emotional, moral, and intellectual support from a network of colleagues they are better able to focus their attention and coordinated action on student learning and behavior” (p. 128).

One of the many roles of the principal in a middle school is that of facilitating the relationships of the members of the teams and the greater school community. Jackson and Davis (2000) contend, “Principals often act as facilitators by helping

teams deal with conflicts and confront issues that may be seen as threatening to the “family” feeling many teams strive to create” (p. 137). Principals can also help middle school teachers find a balance between the membership in the community of the instructional, grade level team and the larger school community (Kruse & Louis, 1995). A strong sense of team membership need not supplant or diminish teachers’ comfort in the “whole school family feeling” (Guiton et al., 1995).

The team structures in middle schools are precisely what Sergiovanni (1996) recommends for secondary schools that have grown to such large student populations that they cannot create communities of relationships and place. The team situation helps provide a setting that allows students and teachers to share their common setting by providing more time together.

A 1984 study by Lipsitz examined four successful middle schools and from that study created a checklist of characteristics common to all. The resulting list lend clarity to the strength of middle school practices in general and in reference to those of a “relationship nature.” The characteristics included the following:

- The four schools achieved unusual clarity about the purposes of intermediate schooling and the students they teach.
- The schools made powerful statements, both in word and in practice, about their purposes. There is little disagreement within them and little discrepancy between what they say they are doing and what they are actually doing. As a result, everyone can articulate what the school stands for.

- These are confident schools. Each one stands for something special, whether it is being the best in the country, desegregation, diversity, or the arts. Each has a mission and knows what it is and in each case it is both academic and social.
- In every case, a principal ... took hold of the possible for definition and proclaimed it within the school and throughout the community. Each school became special.
- Made to feel like chosen people, staff and students have banded together in their specialness and achieved accordingly. The sense of definition that comes from the exclusivity felt by each school is important in keeping staff morale high and retaining parent support. More important, though, is the sense of purpose it gives the young adolescents. It helps bind them to the school.
- Each of the four schools has or has had a principal with a driving vision who imbues decisions and practices with meaning, placing powerful emphasis on why things are done as well as how. Decisions are not made just because they are practical but for reasons of principle.
- Through their vision and practicality they articulate for their schools ... a collective ideology that defines an organization's identity and purposes. The principals make these schools coherent, binding philosophy to goals, goals to programs, and programs to practices.
- The principals see their major function to be instructional leadership. It is their job to sustain their faculty's commitment. They set standards for performance and establish the norms and taboos for adult-child relationships.

- The major contribution of the principal is to make the schools larger than one person. They institutionalize their vision in program and organizational structure.
- The principals are good enough to leave a legacy behind: their staff, a powerfully defined school, an educated community and a tradition of excitement, sensitivity, and striving for excellence.
- Most striking is the level of caring in these schools.
- Most striking is the lack of adult isolation in these schools ... Common planning and lunch periods, team teaching encourage constant communication and allow for high levels of companionship.
- ... teachers have high expectations for themselves and ... they believe that they are capable of making a difference in their students' learning.
- Each school's principal has been a driven, energetic worker, committed to establishing the best possible school environment for the age group.
- The principal's authority is derived from their acknowledged competence. They are authoritative, not authoritarian leaders, although one often senses that a strain of authoritarianism is being kept carefully in tow.
- While the particulars of school governance differ from school to school, the schools have in common highly autonomous teachers. They understand how the whole school works, and in most cases they know why.
- These driven, possessive, and sometimes defiant principals are critical to the continued excellence and support of their schools; but they are not alone

responsible for their schools' success, nor are they indispensable (1984, pp.267-323).

Middle School Philosophy Implementation in Oklahoma

Teams, interdisciplinary units of instruction, student advisory and other characteristics of middle schools slowly began to make their appearances on the landscape of American common education in the 1960s. Alexander et al. (1968) reported that 14 states still did not report middle schools as part of the K-12 structure. Oklahoma was one of those. Formalized with the founding of the National Middle School Association (NMSA) in 1973, and promulgated with the publication of key reform documents, including *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), and *This We Believe* (Lounsbury, 1995), middle school philosophy made its way inland to Oklahoma's schools.

No different from situations around the nation, the 1970s witnessed a surge in suburban student populations, largely a result of white flight and resulting student growth, which instigated the construction of many middle schools in Oklahoma (George & Alexander, 1993; Harsha, 1999). During the 1980s, Oklahoma educators became more comfortable with the practices of middle school philosophies. Interdisciplinary teaming, small group student advisory councils, flexible scheduling, and grade level to grade level transition programs became more common through the decade. In the early 1990's the Oklahoma Department of Education, in collaboration with the state's universities,

professional organizations, and school districts, promoted a statewide task force to familiarize the public with middle school philosophy.

By the late 1990s, communities now comfortable with the terminology and practices of the middle school philosophy began to shift their interest, attention and demands. The early emphasis on adolescent developmental issues had waned, giving new attention to instruction (Gatewood, 1998) and curriculum standards (Manning, 1997). With an increasing concern for academic performance beginning to build at the end of the 1990s and the initiation of the state's Academic Performance Index as an answer to the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requirements, Oklahoma middle schools began to pool their resources, experiences and opinions to reach ever-higher state standards.

The Notion of "Capacity" in Schools

The term *capacity* is actually a term revived from its first introduction in educational literature in the 1970s. At that time, it referred to "creating the experiences and opportunities for people to learn how to do certain things" (Lambert, 1998, p.11). During the 1970s, capacity building implied that principals would organize school improvement efforts, teachers would learn about and embody collaborative teams, and the dialogue of educators would reflect the changes that were transpiring. Today's reform efforts witness such strategies as inquiry, shared leadership, collaboration, and collective responsibility. The central focus of all capacity building in a school, whether the 1970s version or the 2000s version is, teaching and learning.

Many definitions of capacity exist, particularly in the school reform literature; however, one way to think of it is in metaphorical terms. Imagine a school's capacity as

an unbreakable balloon, actually the inside of the balloon. With each infusion of air, it increases its size. The added energy equals added capacity. At any point, should the balloon be released, each added breath of air would give it added energy as it raced around the room. Looking at it another way, perhaps a bottomless lake would be a more clear metaphor. It always seems full, but it can always grow to even greater capacity. The idea is that it has the potential to continue to grow and expand its possibilities.

In the reform literature, capacity is described with words like *multidimensional* and *evolving* (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1996). In "Building Capacity for Education Reform" (1996), the thrust of the definition of capacity is the ability of the education system to help all students meet more challenging standards. The authors of this study suggest that if the capacity of a school or system is insufficient for accomplishing a particular goal, then the capacity can be increased by improving the work of the teacher, adding resources, or restructuring either how the work is done or how it is delivered.

"Building Capacity for Educational Reform" (1996) posits three themes that define the broader view of the dimensions of capacity in a school setting, including teacher capacity that is multidimensional and evolving, interacting with organizational capacity, and boosted by outside influences.

The term *multidimensional and evolving*, suggests four dimensions vital to teachers' capacity: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and views of self. Teachers, first, need a thorough knowledge of their subject matter. This dimension has recently been given impetus by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), which calls for "highly qualified teachers" in all disciplines. However, it is not just knowledge of subject matter that is

important. Knowledge of curriculum, students, pedagogy, local and national standards, and child development issues are all key concepts that teachers must command.

Interacting with knowledge is skill. This refers to a teacher's belief and practice of delivery methods that are research based, proven, and new or emerging. Such skills as curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessment are all areas where skill must interface with knowledge to increase capacity among teachers.

Having the skill and knowledge is not sufficient if a teacher is lacking either a positive, affirming disposition or a view of self that includes empowerment and a self-directed teacher as learner. An effective disposition toward the subject matter, the children, the student expectations, and toward change and commitment is vital for renewal of capacity (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1996).

The O'Day, Goertz, and Floden (1996) study on capacity also suggests that an individual teacher's capacity interacts with the organizational capacity. One teacher's goals depend on the like commitment of many others. In order for this interaction to be most profitable for all, the school communities of practice must be in place. The school must be a learning community, or, in some cases the school's boundaries may extend outward to the learning communities of the district or local professional organizations.

Perhaps the greatest influence on teacher capacity, according to the O'Day, Goertz, and Floden (1996) study are the cohort teachers that individuals share so much of their daily time with. Receptivity and support of colleagues in a school is affirming and encouraging.

Five dimensions of organizational capacity evolved from the 1996 study. They included vision and leadership, collective commitment and cultural norms, knowledge or

access to knowledge, organizational structures and management, and resources. As might be expected, some overlap is suggested between these organizational dimensions and individual ones.

Included in dimension of knowledge is the belief that organizational capacity can be boosted by outside ideas. This refers to ideas generated by professional organizations such as the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics or professional conferences that lead teachers to new ideas and excitement. By bolstering these areas recommended by the O'Day, Goertz and Floden (1996) study or other similar reports on building capacity, end results such as high test scores and state and national commendations mark the real and ever-present goal of schools to increase student learning and achievement.

The parameters of this case study will provide an opportunity to observe one school's efforts to build its capacity for student learning and achievement through the context of relationships.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"Good morning, students, teachers, parents, former faculty, alumnae, and distinguished guests. Welcome to Suburban's Blue Ribbons in the Back Yard!" the assistant principal's voice boomed from the podium across the football field.

Jess Edison, principal of the most recently named National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, sat quietly on the portable stage, content with his back seat in the festivities. A humble sort, one not given to public attention or large gatherings, the administrator was clearly touched as his eyes swept the grassy field, dotted with Suburban T-shirt clad children and their families.

"Barbara!" a surprised voice shouted under the din of the middle school band's clamor. "It's so good to see you! I can't believe you came up from Houston. "

"Oh, my goodness! Ronnie Hood! It's good to see you too. Who could have imagined 16 years ago when I hired you that we'd meet again here on the football field for such a wonderful event. You know, I wouldn't miss this for anything. I couldn't be any prouder than if I'd never left here," the former Suburban principal answered.

"How are Mary and your son? He must be in high school now," Barbara continued.

"Yeah, Mark? Yeah, he is. You know, Mark came to middle school here with me. That was great, but he's at the high school now," Hood answered.

“What? I didn’t hear that,” the silver headed woman asked.

“Never mind, the band is gonna win on this one. They’re really loud! Almost as loud as Jess on the loudspeaker at a football game,” Hood answered.

“What? Jess is a loud speaker?” the confused retiree asked. “We better give up on this conversation for awhile. Looks like Jess is going to speak. I want to hear what he has to say. He must have been doing something right. Let’s be sure and finish up our visit at the reception.”⁴

Case Study

Suburban Middle School, led by Edison, is doing something right. From its national recognitions such as the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence to its high teacher tenure figures, non-existent student dropout percentage, and state-high Academic Performance Index, all indications are that Suburban is doing a lot of things right. Recent research bears this out, demonstrating that Suburban does, in fact, demonstrate many of the markers of an exemplary school (Harsha, 1999). The question that this research seeks to illuminate is the role principal-teacher relationships play in these successes.

Interviews with the staff and on-site observations reveal that this is a group of people who work, play, celebrate, and suffer together. At work in this school appears to be a phenomenon of “relationships.” These relationships are the phenomenon that this qualitative research piece, a single case study bounded by the school community of Suburban Middle School, studies (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1994) describes the case study in the terms of the process that this study follows: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when

⁴ The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a case is “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). For this study, Suburban Middle School is the context and the relationships are the phenomenon.

As the case study proceeds, I draw on the practices and techniques that have been derived from work in sociological case studies and applied to educational settings.

Hamel (1993) writes “as a sociological approach, the case study strives to highlight the features or attributes of social life. This is true whether the latter is perceived as a set of interactions, as common behavior patterns, or as structures” (p. 2). With relationships at the heart of this study, social life and interactions are at the heart of the phenomenon to be considered. The case study is particularly appropriate from the lens of symbolic interactionism, given the centrality of social life and interactions.

Site Selection

My choice of Suburban Middle School for this case study follows Merriam’s (1998) recommendation to seek a nonprobabilistic, yet purposeful (Chein, 1981) sample. Nonprobabilistic sampling is best suited for qualitative research because it seeks to yield an understanding of a phenomenon rather than the cause and effect of the phenomenon. What follows is a look at the relationships at work at Suburban and an attempt to understand how they are at interplay with other forces in this particular setting. It is not an attempt to see their cause and effect. With regard to purposeful sampling, Merriam (1998) elaborates, saying it “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the

most can be learned” (p. 61). Suburban is a school with proven results, and it is home to many long, established professional and personal relationships. It is for these reasons that I very purposefully chose it as my sampling site.

Purposeful samples in qualitative research include a number of different types. For this work, the most accurate type is defined by Merriam (1998) as a *unique* sample site. Merriam defines a unique site as one selected because it demonstrates “unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 62). This is true of Suburban because of its reputation in the community as a high-performing, developmentally responsive school (grounded in the diverse characteristics and needs of pre-adolescent and early adolescent students) (National Middle School Association, 1995), one where teachers come early in their careers and stay for decades, one where families new to the area gravitate and families long part of the neighborhood refuse to leave (B. Lyons, personal communication, 2003).

Merriam (1998) also suggests that *convenience* is often a factor for sample selection. While I cannot argue that Suburban Middle School is conveniently located in my community and was, for that reason, a very suitable site for my research, I must also remark that the location of this school is not just convenient, but more aptly “conveniently fortuitous.” As a full-time employed, part-time graduate student and doctoral candidate researcher, having a sample like Suburban Middle School in my own community was not just convenient, it was fortuitous.

Data Collection

In her discussion of case study applications in education, Merriam (1998) regards balanced data collection as a tripod of informing sources: interviews, observations, and documents. This case study followed Merriam's recommendation, seeking a combination of sources and information to provide the rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973) that is the hallmark of qualitative research.

The interviews recommended by Merriam (1998) were conducted primarily among the staff members present at Suburban Middle School in the fall and winter months of the 2002-2003 academic year. In addition, I engaged in countless conversations with staff members in such places as the lunchroom, at the crosswalk, and in the audience of the orchestra concert, seeking as frequently as possible to follow the conversations with quickly written notes on the comments exchanged. Additional comments were solicited from district level administrators and two teachers no longer at the school. In an effort to ensure validity, the sample selection of those interviewed during data collection included a purposeful representation and range of teachers employed at Suburban during the research period. The principal and 12 of the 64 certified staff members were interviewed in-depth during 45 to 60 minute sessions, often followed up with shorter phone conversations or email clarifications. In addition, 9 teachers were contacted through email for short, two or three question submissions. Those interviewed included representative teachers from the following groups: male (4 of 10) and female (17 of 54); core and elective subject matter; sixth, seventh and eighth grade; experienced and inexperienced; recently and long-ago hired; classroom teacher and support roles.

The interviews were, in every case, one-on-one conversations formatted to elicit the unique perspectives of each subject. Given my grounding in symbolic interactionism, it was important to seek a setting, tone, and level of trust in the interviews that would allow the research subjects to share their thoughts and ideas that were rooted in their own individual consciousness and perceptions (Blumer, 1969). The interview protocol allowed for open-ended, less structured questioning. The intent was to encourage, on the one hand, insight into particular situations and ideas and, on the other hand, the unexpected, emergent views of the respondent, which added new ideas to the topic (Merriam, 1998). Most interviews were audio taped and transcribed by me; however, for the last three teacher interviews, I hired a transcriptionist. I took a limited number of notes during the interview; upon completion of each interview, I added field notes and questions to a reflective journal that spanned the months of the project. Some interviews were conducted at Suburban Middle School, while others were not. For example, conversations with Linda Dawson and Kate Holly, both language arts teachers, were conducted in their classrooms during their planning periods. Interviews with counselor Kay Todd and assistant principal Lisa Milliganer were held during their breaks between the basketball games they supervised during a weekend long, district wide seventh grade tournament. Jane Maddy and Kelly Baker asked if they could come to my school for their interviews, both asking for a tour around the district's newest facility following their afternoon interviews. Jess Edison's initial interview took place in his office on a Saturday. Lasting two and a half hours, the uninterrupted session was followed by several shorter interviews in the office, down the halls, at ball games, concerts, and

district meetings. Countless emails and phone conversations supplemented the face-to-face conversations.

On those occasions when I was present at the site for interviews, observations were conducted as well. Many other opportunities for observations were created in frequent drop-by visits to the site. The visits included free access to all classrooms, faculty workrooms and lounge areas, the administrators' offices, and common areas such as the cafeteria. Also of interest during the observations on site were publicly displayed artifacts such as photographs, bulletin boards, awards, banners, artwork, and signs. Again, I followed these opportunities for observation with notes to myself. Members of the school community, including faculty, parents, and students, were also observed at special events such as faculty meetings, student awards assemblies, sporting events, community education events, district level committee meetings, and various impromptu gatherings in places as odd and unpredictable as the local bookstore and restaurants. Key in both the choices for observation and the reflection upon the observations was the insight they would provide to my research questions. The faculty was advised of the research project by the principal; and although all were aware of their right to participate or not, no one declined either conversation or observation.

The third element of the tripod of data gathering, documents, took a variety of forms. As a school that is entrenched in a reputation as a print rich school, one known for its fiction author visits and daily principal's letters, documents were found throughout Suburban Middle School. Daily bulletins, including the minutiae of the lunch menu and the yearbook photo schedule as well as a daily quote and advice for living, the principal's daily letter to the school, faculty meeting agendas, school-wide flyers, school

publications, and parent newsletters were all collected for review. In addition, archival documents, including results from an Organization Health Profile conducted in 1997 and again in 1998, the 1994-95 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence application, employment records, and notes from the principal's personal files were reviewed.

Research Criteria

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest four criteria to ensure ethical constructivist research: credibility, trustworthiness, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria parallel the positivist language that ensures rigor in that paradigm, including internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

In seeking credibility, I have sought to “establish the match between the constructed realities of respondents (or stakeholders) and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). I have done this by employing several of the techniques recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1989). A *prolonged engagement* at the site, including six months of frequent visits that included shorter to full day periods, assisted in my efforts to build trust among the stakeholders. This trust then enabled me to avoid, as much as possible, the effects of misinformation and distortion. It also minimized the likelihood that the instructional staff at Suburban was able to perpetuate, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a false picture of its true culture. By insisting on a prolonged engagement, I was able to allow myself the opportunity of *persistent observation*, thus creating for myself a platform from which to discern those elements in the culture that were most relevant to my study of relationships. *Peer debriefing* was employed as I engaged the assistance of my cohorts in

the Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City doctoral program to listen, evaluate, and support me in my research. *Negative case analysis* was utilized as I attempted to seek out and understand any outliers that seemed in opposition to the phenomenon of my study. *Progressive subjectivity*, as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989), provided a wonderful tool of reflection as I required myself to record my own expectations prior to an observation and again after an observation. In doing this, I sought to monitor my own “developing constructions” (1989, p. 238). The last of the tools of creating and maintaining credibility included *member checks*. I offered each of my interviewees an opportunity to verify my work, both during the data collection and analysis aspects of the work. This helped ensure that the realities I portrayed in my research findings were those put forth by the respondents. For the most part, I conducted the checks by requesting those interviewed to review my transcriptions of our conversations.

To ensure transferability in this study, I kept ever mindful of the need for thick description, a technique first attributed to anthropologist Ryle and elaborated by Geertz (1973). The chore of “transferring” my findings is not to be mine, but the job of those who read my work and seek to apply it to their own situations. My task is to provide a depth and richness of time, place, and happenstance that will allow the readers to make their own applications (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

To prepare a project that is considered to exhibit dependability, I have taken care to track my process of documentation. While it is considered appropriate and even likely that a constructivist researcher might shift and change in methodological patterns, it is important to document these changes as part of the process of a maturing inquiry (Guba

& Lincoln, 1989). Thus, continuous reflection and documentation have been elements of my rigor.

The fourth element of ethical constructivist research, confirmability, parallels the positivist criteria of objectivity. As with objectivity, I have aimed to assure my audience that the data, interpretations, and outcomes of my research are entrenched in the settings and people of Suburban Middle School.

Pragmatics of the Study

Using the varieties of multiple and ethical data collection noted, I have enhanced the chances of uncovering converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 1994) and thus ensured triangulation of the study as well as validation. Triangulation, the process of multiple data collection, has provided the same degree of verification to my qualitative research that the methods of quantitative works, reliability and validity, ensure in research of that nature. Member checks also ensured that collected data and interpretations of interviews were accurately portrayed (Merriam, 1988).

The site chosen for this study, Suburban Middle School, is one that, as noted earlier, is known for the relationships within its building. The school district's director of personnel specifically named the school as a reference to a place where her comment, "It's all about relationships" was illustrated daily. The record of the school, from academics to teacher turnover, also suggests it is a site worthy of attention. Access to Suburban Middle School was granted by the superintendent and principal, both proponents of research and institutional introspection.

Institution Review Board (IRB) approval was granted prior to the collection of data, beginning immediately following the University's approval of the research proposal. The use of the IRB process ensured ethical standards of research by providing the participants with a vehicle for informed consent (Anderson, 1999). The integrity of my research, noting particularly my intentions as to procedure, duration, confidentiality, possible discomfort in the interviews and potential benefits of the research were all safeguarded as a result of the IRB and consent forms required by its process (Appendix A). Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants in this study.

For the most part, I sought typical samples, described by Merriam (1998) as "the average person, situation or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 62). However, I also used the technique known as networking to seek a unique sample that would help me understand the phenomenon of relationships from the perspective of one who is atypical of most of those at this school, one who does not seem to have a strong relationship with the principal (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was one of the most important exercises in this study. By simultaneously gathering and analyzing data, I ensured the multi-layered, multi-dimensional description that is the hallmark of qualitative research. I found the predictions of Miles and Huberman (1994) to be true as my early and continuous data analysis allowed me to "cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data" (p. 50). An example of this was my effort to put myself in the midst of earlier reported experiences. I heard

several teachers talk about the daily principal's letters. On one occasion during an observation, I observed a teacher reading the letter to her class. In the earliest months of my data collecting, I was satisfied with hearing about the letters and then hearing one read and discussed. However, following Miles and Huberman's (1994) advice, I "cycled back and forth thinking about the existing data" (p. 50) and realized I needed to examine the full body of collected principal's letters. Edison graciously supplied me with the current year's letters as well as those from the two prior years. In addition, I learned to "watch" in the letters for Edison's reflections and extensions of thought that were generated from the day's events at the school, including interactions with parents, children, and most important to this study, teachers. While this required rigor and tenacity, the final product provides a deep, insightful look at the relationships in a middle school.

Memos to myself, notes, and finally the careful coding (Merriam, 1998) of transcribed interviews, collected observations, and the school's own documents for emerging themes provided the tools for the analysis necessary to uncover the reality of the relationships between the principal of Suburban Middle School and his instructional staff. These tools then helped direct me to the units of data that suggested recurring regularities, or categories, within the research (Merriam, 1998). While it took me a few weeks of rolling about in the data to get comfortable with the process, I finally settled on a system that was a fit for my personal expectations of data analysis and my own learning style. As noted, interview transcriptions were a combination of those typed by me and those I contracted out. Those interviews I did not transcribe myself required an additional reading prior to any written analysis over those I did transcribe, as the self-

transcription yielded an extra and helpful dose of familiarity. After at least one thorough reading of an entire interview, or in some cases a document, I read through the piece with a highlighter in one hand and a pen in the other. I made coding notes in the left margins, regarding significant units of data, “chunks” as Miles and Huberman (1998) and others describe them, and highlighted any words or phrases that seemed to speak to “relationship” issues. I tried, as Miles and Huberman (1998) recommend, to precede the coding with a “start list of codes prior to fieldwork” (p. 58). However, I found this practice too limiting and caught myself trying to invent follow up interview questions that would fill in my codes. Once I abandoned the start list practice, I felt liberated to find what appeared, compared to my initial attempts to find what I predicted.

I reread the documents several times and found it helpful to let the data rest for a few days to return to it with fresher eyes for a follow-up read, often uncovering points missed in the first read throughs. For each interview, I created an alphabetized data file on a piece of paper I kept in a notebook section devoted entirely to that one interview or series of documents, such as the principal’s letters. Next to the data items, I noted the line number where it could be found. I then compared all of the analyzed data, seeking out categories that grew out of the chunks of data that emerged as commonalities.

I supplemented the coding and category building analysis tools with two other practices recommended by Miles and Huberman (1998), memos and data displays. I chose to employ both of these because they are a good fit with my own learning style. My thought processes are graphically portrayed by comparing them to the diagram that is the result of a data display, especially in its first iteration; so this analysis tool was quite comfortable for me to employ. It helped me make the natural progression that Rein and

Schon (1977) suggest from describing the situations I was observing to explaining them. It was during an exercise in building data displays that I first became aware of the alignment of my data and the Sergiovanni community theory. The themes that emerged began to look and sound like what I had read over the course of the literature review. However, I must admit, it took considerable rereading to finally come to the community theory. I had first spent more time in family systems literature, and I might have stayed in that body of work had I not seen the descriptions evolving in the patterns of my data maps (as I prefer to call them). As it worked out, the family explanations and the community explanations became what Kaplan (1964) describes as “concatenated descriptions,” closely related to one another. It was through my memo writing that the “concatenation” became clearer to me. As a former English teacher and current administrator, I am very familiar with the requirements of a memo. Additionally, knowing myself to be a “dialectic learner,” one who talks to learn, the kind of talking to oneself that a memo affords offered me a sort of substitution for a research partner. As I wrote, I made sense of the data displays by talking to myself on paper. The concise format of a memo helped me keep focused. It is work accomplished most easily by those who are more concrete and sequential in their thinking. That kind of thinking does not come naturally for me, but I did find it helpful as it forced me into more logical patterns of thought.

One personal tool I found helpful in keeping me focused was a bulletin board hung on the wall adjacent to my desk. There, in large, bold letters, I posted a summary of my theoretical framework, problem, purpose, and guiding questions, my own beacon in the occasional darkness. Well into the data analysis, I added to my bulletin board the four

themes of community that are reported in Sergiovanni's *Theory for the Schoolhouse* (1996). Throughout the process, I trimmed and culled the information, finally arriving at results reported in Chapter Four.

Following many of the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I found it helpful to relate my findings in terms of metaphors and analogies. As themes began to emerge from the suggestions of these metaphors, I turned immediately to the literature for added depth and insight during the analysis and remaining interviews. For instance, as noted, the themes of community and family led me somewhat circuitously back to the work of Sergiovanni, first to his research reported in *Building Community in Schools* (1994) and finally to *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (1996). While both titles were included in my initial literature review, my own emerging themes and metaphors gave impetus to a more telescoped examination of Sergiovanni.

In interpreting the data, it is important to recognize certain assumptions inherent in qualitative research. As Ratcliffe (1983) points out, data does not stand alone. It is not reality, but the observer's interpretation of the reality of the observed. With this in mind, I have chosen in Chapters 4 and 5 to present my data in tandem with significant literature, which lends illumination to my own interpretations of the reality I have constructed from my observations and interviews. Specifically, during my simultaneous data collection and analysis, I saw that my own data was clustering in sub-themes under the four "communities" proposed by Sergiovanni in *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (1996): community by relationships, community of mind, community of place, and community of memory. Throughout my research I kept a watchful eye on this trend, and in my final

analysis have presented my findings using the Sergiovanni framework in recognition of the extremely congruous fit between my data and his theory of community.

While Sergiovanni (1994, 1996) makes frequent mention of middle schools in his works, he has not made the middle school the central focus of his study. However, Daniel and Blount (1992) have spent considerable effort researching the middle school format. In fact, as researchers in the area of organizational cultures in middle schools, they suggested that their own quantitative research would provide an interesting background for a follow-up middle school qualitative study. Daniel and Blount (1992) ended their study with a reference to Schein (1985), who suggests that cultures such as schools are best understood by observing the activities and getting to know the individuals within the school community. This recommendation leads me to my own qualitative study of Suburban Middle School, a school with a demonstrated capacity for success in a variety of settings, and a look at the role of the culture of relationships between the principal and teachers. It is a school where relationships are forged and reflected in communities by relationship, of mind, place and memory (Sergiovanni, 1996), a place that begs understanding through the careful, reflective observations and interactions of an intrinsic case study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

With less than 48 hours until the first sweaty little middle school bodies arrive to reoccupy Suburban's classrooms for another nine months, tensions are beginning to mount. Lockers are yet to be assigned, schedules have to be printed, signs need to go up over every teacher's door, and the extra duty teacher rotations must be assigned.

In the assistant principal's office a pair of contrasting, yet strangely similar voices can be heard discussing ... Candy!

"Emily, where did you get all that candy?" asked assistant principal Darci Benson.

Stifling her giggles as she tried to shove a far-too-full mouthful of M & M's to the sides of her puffy little cheeks, the three year-old answered, "I think Jess gave it too me."

"You think?" the pre-occupied mother/administrator questioned. "Hey, careful. Don't mess up those piles of paper. You're standing in the middle of the tenured pile of lunch duty teachers. Emily, move! Does Jess know you have all that candy? Did he give it to you or did you take it?" the assistant principal interrogated as if practicing up for a new year of student discipline conferences.

"He ... I ... aaaaahhh," the candy decorated toddler stuttered.

“Hey, little girl!” a friendly, but booming voice interrupted. “What kind of mess are you and your mom making? What’s all this paper doing all over the floor? And what’s that in your pockets, Emily Benson?”

With that, the 73 inches of menacing candy monster picked the giggling sugar thief up by the ankles and playfully held her upside down as lollipops, Snickers, Starbursts, and M & M’s fell from her pockets like change from a slot machine. “I believe I’ve hit the jackpot, Little Girl!” he laughed.

With a smile that told a story of friendship, Edison sat his still laughing miniature buddy down next to her mom and admitted, “I’m sure glad you two are up here together today. Schools are just no fun without the kids here.”

Slapping his leg as he rose, Edison exhorted his little buddy to join him. “Come on, Emily. Your mom’s no fun. Let’s go have a cookie. You can open the new Girl Scout ones Mrs. Halloram’s daughter sold me.”

And the two walked hand-in-hand together down the hall for one last Suburban summer treat.⁵

Introduction

To lend illumination to the findings that emerged from my study of Suburban Middle School, I now share a description and short history of the school and its principal, Jess Edison. Following these descriptions, I introduce my findings by reviewing the tenets of Sergiovanni’s community theory. The theory then serves as a scaffold for the layers of evidence. One at a time, I present a review of each of Sergiovanni’s four communities of community theory. Then, with each of the communities, I present the

⁵ The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

themes that emerged in the analysis of the data drawn from my six-month engagement with Suburban Middle School.

Suburban Middle School

Built to accommodate the growing population of a suburban Oklahoma town adjacent to a metroplex of approximately one million residents, the doors of Suburban Middle School were opened in the fall of 1976. During its first three years in existence, the school included only sixth and seventh graders. Then, in 1981, the area's eighth graders were transferred from an eighth grade center to the new, not-quite-finished facility prepared for the students of Suburban Middle School. Since that time, over a span of years, the school has adopted many middle school philosophies, including teaming, interdisciplinary planning and instruction, exploratory classes, advisory, and developmentally appropriate practices in areas that ranged from socialization and athletics to academics and extracurricular activities.

The school currently serves a student population of 902 students, down from a high of nearly 1400 in the mid-1990s, the decrease a result of the opening of a new middle school, created for the specific purpose of reducing the over-crowding at Suburban (Harsha, 1999). The staff currently includes the principal, two assistant principals, three counselors and 64 teachers. Of the 70 certified staff members, 11 are male and 59 are female. The staff is 98% Caucasian, with one Hispanic. By comparison, the student body includes 806 Caucasian students, 23 African Americans, 28 Native Americans, 29 Hispanics, and 16 Asians. The U. S. Census Bureau reports that the town of Suburban includes a population that is 87.3% Caucasian, with 3.7% African

Americans, 2.1% Native Americans, 2.4% Hispanic, and 3.7% Asian Americans. This demonstrates that the faculty's homogeneous ethnicity does not mirror the entire town's population statistics.

The school's residential boundaries include some of the district's wealthiest families and some of its poorest, though most fall in a range considered advantaged in terms of socio-economic standards. While there are no figures that are specific to Suburban, census information for the zip code area including Suburban indicates that in 2000 the citizens of the area claimed a median household income of \$70,143 (U. S. census) compared to the state median figure of \$33,714 (U.S. Census). The 2001 estimated average household income in all of Suburban is \$82,952 (Suburban Economic Development Authority). Looking again at just the zip code area of Suburban Middle School, in 1999, 27.3% of the residents live in homes earn over \$100,000 (U. S. Census). In 2001, Suburban, 47% of the adult residents claimed at least a bachelor's degree (Suburban Economic Development Authority), compared to the state average of 20% (U. S. census). Since 1990, Suburban has grown more than 38% (Suburban Economic Development Authority). The 2002 estimated population of Suburban is 72,475 (Suburban Economic Development Authority).

Performance of the school has been documented over the years in a number of ways. Both the state and the district have required criterion and norm referenced tests in grades, 6, 7, and 8. While the specific tests and required grades of administration have varied over the past 25 years, the school has consistently performed in the top 15% of the state and district on those tests. In 1996, Suburban was designated as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, an honor that places it among fewer than 1% of the

nation's finest. In the fall of 2002, Suburban was listed as one of the state's top ten middle schools by a popular statewide publication (Wigton, 2002), which based its selection primarily on the state's department of education Academic Performance Index ranking, a standards and assessment based system that has aligned the state with requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Many other individual awards have recognized members of the faculty. In 1995, the school's representative for the statewide Teacher of the Year recognition ascended through the levels of competition to the final level of the state's six most respected teachers. As recently as this year, the state's music educators honored Edison as Administrator of the Year. In a similar event five years ago, the state's organization of media center directors recognized Edison for his support of reading and the mission of media center directors statewide.

Jess Edison, Suburban Middle School's Principal

With the exception of the 8 years Edison spent as a teacher and assistant principal at a neighboring middle school, at age 47, he has now spent most of his 24-year career at Suburban Middle School. Born in Oklahoma, his childhood was spent in poverty on farmland in Blackwell, a situation his father chose to escape with a move to Santa Maria, California, when Edison was ten years old. Following his public school education and two years of junior college in California, Edison returned to Oklahoma to attend the University of Oklahoma where he majored in English education, graduating in 1978 after spending a semester assigned as a student teacher at Suburban Middle School. It was during his time at the University that he met his wife of 25 years. They have two children, ages 22 and 21, both currently attending their father's alma mater.

Edison calls his current position “the best job of my life.” Reflecting on his career, he recounts:

I was hired in '78, and I've been a custodian in the public schools, and a teacher, and an assistant principal, and a principal; and in that order, my tenure has been longer every time. In other words, I've been a principal longer than I was an assistant principal and an assistant longer than a teacher and a teacher longer than a custodian. There are people here who were here – Dolores Samuel, for example. I did my student teaching under her in '78.

While it may seem a predictable twenty-some years, it has not been a static quarter century for Edison. He earned his master's degree in educational administration early on, completing it just two years after receiving his bachelor's. This opened the door for the principalship, a move necessitated more than anything else by the economics of raising a family on an Oklahoma teacher's salary.

Edison casts an imposing shadow on the grassy front yard of his well-kept school facility. In fact, in the spring and summer months, his 6'1", burly T-shirt clad figure can often be seen atop a riding a lawn mower, taking care of what he calls one of a school leader's “dirty jobs.” Once confused with Santa Claus by a student's younger sibling, Edison sports a beard as full as, though somewhat more peppered in color, St. Nick's, and a beard that he jokes takes up the slack for his mostly bald, and now shaved, pate.

Where as in his twenties and thirties Edison was more likely to wear a uniform of white shirt, black pants, and tie, his fourth decade has witnessed the introduction of a more casual attire that includes sweaters, knit vests, Hawaiian shirts, and an occasional Oklahoma University emblazoned shirt. The more casual dress, he has noticed, seems to

eliminate some of the perceptual communication barriers of his staff and community patrons. He is respected districtwide, from the level of the superintendency to the most timid of the sixth graders. Associate superintendent Lynne Byrons commented on the school community and reputation that has evolved under Edison's direction:

Parent involvement has been a great strength. So many Suburban parents have become major players in the district as involved parents. Additionally, so many teachers have gone on to be administrators. Perhaps it's the nurturing attitude. I have few parent complaints from Suburban. Very seldom does anyone complain about day-to-day operations.

Community Theory

Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory, based in large part on Toonies' *gemeinschaft*, provides an ideal lens for examining the themes that emerged from the study of Suburban Middle School. Arranged as they illustrate the four centers of meaning that combine for community theory, the emergent themes of this research are reported as they unfolded in an inductive process during analysis as representative of one of the four communities: communities of relationship, of place, of mind, and of memory (1996). Together, these communities "represent webs of meaning that connect people together uniquely by creating a special sense of belonging and a strong common identity" (p. 51). These communities, then, will provide the scaffold for building an understanding of the relationships between the principal and teachers and how these relationships are at play in a building that demonstrates an uncanny ability to continually increase its capacity for success. Each of the four "communities" will provide a stage for the drama

of the sub-themes to unfold. Key in the discussion of the findings and their alignment with Sergiovanni's community theory is the lens of symbolic interactionism, which holds central to its core a growthful world, enhanced by the practices of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication.

Themes Relating to "Community by Relationships"

The ties that bind a school community together are what Tonnie (1957) refers to as *community by relationships*. Sergiovanni (1996) extends this idea: "Community by relationships characterizes the special kinds of connections among people that create a unity of being similar to that found in families and other closely knit collections of people" (p. 50). Several themes emerged that are evidence of a community of relationships: family, dialogue, and physical touch.

Family - Throughout this research, particularly in the interviews and the school's published documents, the theme of family was an overwhelmingly poignant leitmotiv. Foremost, this theme rang true and purposeful in the language of the principal. In fact, he used the family system as a metaphor to describe how he hoped to be perceived by all of the different aged members of the faculty. He further connected his image to his own experiences with familial relationships.

At this point in my life, I want the older teachers who are about 10 years older than me to perceive me as the younger brother they can count on just about any time. For the staff who is about my age or a little bit younger, I want them to think of me as their bigger brother. And for those who are young enough to be my children, and I have some now, I'd like them to think of me as someone they could trust like their father as someone who will look out for what's best for them.

I'm not saying I want to be looked at as a father figure. I just want to be trusted as one. To this day -- I'm 46 and my dad just turned 71 -- I trust his advice completely. Now, he doesn't make my decisions for me, or anything like that anymore, but I do trust his advice completely. And now my son, who is the same age as three of the teachers in this building, you know, he trusts me. He still makes his own decisions, but he does trust me and asks me for advice.

Jane Maddy, a teacher of 17 years experience with the past 6 at Suburban, has picked up on Edison's self-described role, speaking of Edison in family terms. "I think he is the definite patriarch of our school. You feel that, and everyone looks up to that."

Edison's hope for the relationships he establishes with his faculty can be explained by the Bowen family systems theory (Sobel, 1982). Edison's application of the family metaphor to his own faculty demonstrates the Bowen premise that "when an individual's attachment to family of origin is extremely intense, there is a greater potential for the individual to relate to the organization and/or the individuals within in an extremely intense way" (Sobel, 1982, p. 9). Thus, in sharing his relationships with his own father and son, Edison explains his propensity for seeking to develop similar relationships with his faculty, even if only by way of verbal metaphor.

However, for Edison, the family reference is considerably stronger than a simple word picture.

From my own perspective, the school is my family. I've been to more school weddings, and been to visit more people who've just had babies than I have with any of my family. I have a brother who lives in Germany and a brother and sister who live in California and my parents who live in California; but I have people I

work with every day here, in the neighborhood so to speak, who know if I've got a cold. They know if I'm feeling lousy. They may offer advice. They may tell me to go home and get some rest. They may cover things for me because they know I don't feel well. They'll celebrate with me when my children get married or when I become a grandfather. Would I give a kidney if one of these people needed one? Yeah. If somebody called me during this interview, and said so-and-so was hurt in an accident, I'd go to the hospital.

He would expect the same quick response of his faculty to the needs of their own family as well. Counselor Kay Todd asserted of the school, "It's family oriented. Family comes first. I can go in today and say, 'I need to leave,' or 'I need to take care of my son or my daughter,' and Mr. Edison would say, 'By all means.'"

The role of family plays such a preeminent role in Edison's philosophy, he includes it in his "best advice" for young, new administrators he occasionally mentors. Speaking in one of his characteristic word pictures he advises:

I would tell a new principal to integrate their family life with their school life. Make sure that there's a balance there. You know, the scales are harder to balance when they're farther apart. It's harder to keep a scale balanced because of the physics of the arm going up. But if the scales are really close, it doesn't matter. You could set a brick right here, and it's going to be perfectly balanced. So, when my kids were younger, I would bring them up here to work after school or on the weekends. That's what I mean by integration. I don't bring my family up here every chance I get, but I try to integrate them both [work and family] as often as possible.

This personal theory of integration of family and work has made an impact on the faculty as well. Faculty members feel encouraged to bring their children to school for special occasions or when they are at school after hours. Seven year veteran Spanish teacher Ron Yanarty said, "My daughter's welcome; my wife's welcome. We'll see all kinds of teachers with their kids up here. Today one of the teachers who is on maternity leave brought her baby up. They're always welcome." A third year teacher and a new father, Allen Sandler, admits that he plans to bring his toddler up to school for one of the planned play group sessions the teachers are putting together for their younger children.

Taking a look around Edison's office is like flipping through the pages of the faculty family album. His office door is covered with a collage of photos, including many of the children of faculty members past and present. A paper elephant sculpture perches atop his computer, a gift from a former assistant principal's daughter over seven years ago. Christmas photo cards of former faculty members' families were part of the holiday décor. Out in the building through the many classrooms, whether at the example of Edison or independently, family photos adorn the desks and walls of teachers.

The return of former teachers with children in tow, the cards they send, and family greetings on the faculty lounge door from as far away as Japan, speak not only of the family theme of community of relationships, but also of community of memory, to be discussed in greater detail later. It addresses the strong pull of community to those who have left the immediate confines of the school community, but return as if pulled by an invisible connection.

Language - Suburban Middle School has not, it seems, fallen into this family atmosphere accidentally. Rather, Edison has carefully nurtured the “school family” metaphor. Sandler, a third year science teacher, recalled the principal sharing in the first few days of the school year that he wanted to ask the teachers to make a purposeful effort to become better acquainted with one another’s lives outside the classroom. Sandler shared, “We had our staff meetings, and he [Edison] wanted our goal to be this year, not just him, but all his teachers to try to learn more about each other as people outside the classroom. He wanted us to learn how many kids each of us has, their names ... that kind of information.”

Edison’s request of his teachers to get to know one another more deeply reflects his perception of what has been created at Suburban. “For me [Edison], at this point, it’s very much like being part of a family. It’s very much like being in the Walton house. I mean there’s a sense of family to it, not intimacy, but definitely concern and care, and it’s genuine for each other.” Both Noddings (1992) and Sernak (1998) address the ethic of care in their works centered on school leadership and restructuring. In *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings argues that like other social institutions in our time, too often schools fail to care for people. Nodding writes, “We need a scheme that speaks to the existential heart of life – one that draws attention to our passions, attitudes, connections, concerns, and experienced responsibilities” (p. 47). She goes on to discuss how an ethic of caring connects community and a relationship of trust among the members of a school. To meet this end, Nodding emphasizes the absolute necessity of dialogue, a tool that ensures compassion and understanding. Sernak (1998) assigns the responsibility for creating this dialogue and other structures that will support an ethic of caring squarely on

the shoulders of the administrator. She suggests that it is incumbent upon educational leaders to demonstrate an ethic of caring by creating a nurturing environment, establishing and maintaining internal and external relationships within and beyond the school, making a commitment to “caring” for members of the community, and striving to understand the other members.

Language is the key medium of most social interactions, the voice of connection in relationships (Crossley, 1996). Language is a symbol of caring, or sometimes, either through its employment or repression, of not caring. Language is also central to the philosophy of intersubjectivity (Buber, 1958), which is embedded in the lens of symbolic interactionism. Buber places the greatest value on language and its role in a community in relation to the constitutive action in such word couples as the I-Thou pair. Crossley (1996) reminds us that such couples “aren’t so much descriptions, ... as ways of opening and initiating relationships. It is by utterance of the word “Thou” that an I-Thou relation is begun” (p. 13), and thus, a relationship is initiated. Language and dialogue are the fabric of mutual relationships.

At Suburban, Jess Edison is generally the first to utter the I-Thou phrase, the phrase which initiates a relationship. Typically, this verbal handshake, is first uttered in an employment interview. Crossley (1996) explains that these exact words need not be spoken for the implication to be asserted. As Buber (1958) teaches, language belongs to the life of a community, and its employment suggests a belongingness to a community as represented by the common fabric of the language. Shared understanding, mutuality and reciprocity are made possible through language.

A conversation 13 years earlier when seventh grade English teacher Linda Dawson was serving as a substitute teacher in the building formed the foundation for her relationship with the principal even prior to an interview when Edison asked the then 40 year old woman to consider interviewing for a permanent position. "He told me he knew I could do it. He really took a chance on me, but I knew if he had that kind of confidence in me I could do it." In that early exchange of dialogue, Edison gave life to the I-Thou statement from Buber's (1958) theories on intersubjectivity.

By comparison, another teacher shared that she was not interviewed by Edison, but by a faculty interview team led by an assistant principal. The omission of this early connection between the teacher and the principal led to a slow start on their relationship. Now in her sixth year at the school, Liv Teason concedes that members of the interview team became her first mentors in the building. "I wouldn't say until this year I've really gotten to know him [Edison], like where I'm really comfortable with him. I know other teachers who did interview with Jeff, and they just seem a little more comfortable with him, that is a little sooner than maybe I did."

Without the interview as a foundation for bringing this teacher into the community of relationships, Edison had to rely on other opportunities to establish a relationship. Now, in the sixth year of her tenure, Teason is the chair of the school's professional development committee. "When I took over this job, professional development committee chairperson, he just said, 'Will you accept this leadership role?' and I said, 'Yes.' That was it. He never said, 'Well, you need to do this and that. He just let me know he had confidence in me."

Sergiovanni (1996) talks about “special kinds of connections” (p. 56) as being a hallmark of a community of relationships. Over the years, many of those special connections have evolved. From morning coffee klatches to informal vacation clubs, different combinations of people have united around common interests. Edison came to his appreciation for connections in 1989 when he read Smalley and Trent’s (1982) *The Blessing*. “That’s when I started exploring relationships and what makes them work. It’s when I decided not to take them for granted. From reading that book, I began to think about connections. We can ignore connections or we can nurture them and see what happens.”

Meaningful Touch - In a community by relationship, one symbol of the connections that bind the relationships within Suburban Middle School is what Edison refers to as “meaningful touch.” Borrowing from the same work he cited by Smalley and Trent (1982), Edison refers to the text of *The Blessing* frequently among both teachers and parents. In fact, it is a book that the principal shares as a prize in drawings each spring when fifth grade parents meet with him in an orientation meeting. Likewise, the practice of extending a physical reinforcement to a verbal message is a conscious act of the principal as he speaks with teachers. Edison relies on the premise that Smalley and Trent (1982) present: “Even today the symbolic meaning of touch is powerful. While we may not be consciously aware of it, the way we touch can carry tremendous symbolic meaning” (p. 42). The construction of meaning from this act of touching may take two separate evolutions, one meaning is that of the initiator and the other is that of the recipient. This is in keeping with the lens of symbolic interactionism and

intersubjectivity. For Edison, the meaning is quite clear. When I asked him to tell me about the meaning of relationships, he answered:

To be honest with you, it would be easier to show you than to tell you. (He extended his hand toward mine, took my hand in his, and held it gently, but firmly.) It could be argued, but I don't think that, in my mind, that's the most intimate symbol of relationship. The hands. Not the handshake, just holding the hands. If somebody were to ask me to visualize the relationship with my own kids, it's my holding their hands. It's my holding their hand when they're three or four. It's my holding their hand when they hurt and they're a teenager.... So, that's the meaning of relationships, is that meaningful touch that comes about through a hand, not a handshake because that's a 'How are you doing; I'm doing fine!' kind of thing, anymore.

Counselor Kay Todd, who has been at the school for 7 years and currently teams with Edison on seventh grade matters and meetings, is consciously aware of Edison's "meaningful touches." She recalled, "Sometimes he physically puts his hand on my shoulder. Especially when he needs for me to do something for him, or he needs some help with something, he always puts his hand on my shoulder. Watch him. He does it every time."

With Edison, touching is a purposeful, premeditated, often choreographed, act. It is as Smalley and Trent (1982) call it, meaningful touch. Edison distinguishes between two different kinds of touches, one is to give or to send a message and the other is to selfishly take. In order to give to someone with his act of touching, Edison is careful to be sensitive to the recipient. "When I touch someone, usually in conversation, I am

thinking, 'I really care about you.' I think it; I don't say it." However, Edison is very careful about who he chooses to share his touches with. "All I typically do is cup my hand at the base of a teacher's elbow, very carefully. And I don't do it with everyone. I'd never touch any of the younger teachers, and there are several older teachers I wouldn't make physical contact with." Edison believes in the power of meaningful touch, but he does not impose his belief on others. He waits for a sign from others. "One of the older teachers, I'd never initiate a touch with. But sometimes when she tells me a funny story, she'll reach out and touch my forearm. Only then will I reciprocate with a similar gesture."

Edison believes touching is a vital gesture that reaches back to our first moments on earth when we are cradled by a nurse, a doctor, or our mothers. He views it as an asexual gesture, one of nurturing. To Edison, the intensely physical nature of the middle schoolers roaming the halls is a sign of their own touch deprivation. He believes when the kids are not given the amount and frequency of physical contact, hugs or other physical affirmations that they require, they steal moments of touch from their friends as they pass in the halls.

In this day of sexual harassment charges and other volatile workplace issues, Edison's practice of sharing a "meaningful touch" may be considered archaic. However, his own hyper-sensitivity to the personal nature of the act, added to his sincere and earnest belief in the appropriateness and power it, combine to provide a balance that makes the probability that it would be shared with anyone who might find it offensive minimal, if likely at all.

Themes Relating to “Community of Mind”

By purposefully seeking to create opportunities to bind the faculty to “common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 51), the school’s leader is pursuing a community of mind. Together, common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing “represent webs of meaning that connect people together uniquely by creating a special sense of belonging and a strong common identity” (p.51). This structure provides a greater sense of purpose to the duties and obligations that are part of a school teacher or principal’s daily life. With a community of mind at work, satisfying these tasks becomes an act of “selfless behavior, altruistic love” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 32).

Again, viewing this element of Suburban Middle School through the lens of symbolic interactionism, we are reminded that language is a symbolic tool that the principal, teachers, and all members of the school community employ to share and communicate. As Crotty (1998) points out, “Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent” (p. 75). At Suburban, themes relating to the community of mind are expressed in voices, the voices of story telling, story reading, teacher leadership and membership, teaching and learning, and moral voices.

Story Telling - Deal and Peterson (2000) in their essay “Eight Roles of Symbolic Leaders” assign *poet* as one of the metaphors for principal. The principal as figurative poet uses language as his leadership tool. Speaking of the power of finely crafted language, the authors posit the following:

One of the highest forms of culture-shaping communication is the story. A well-chosen story provides a powerful image that addresses a question without compromising its complexity. Stories ground complicated ideas in concrete terms, personifying them in flesh and blood. Stories carry values and connect abstract ideas with sentiment, emotions, and events. (Deal & Peterson, p. 211)

Imbedding his own stories often from his life, one of the most overt tools that Edison employs to create or reinforce the “common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 51) is the daily principal’s letter. Distributed weekly to all teachers and intended to be read to the children each day by their English teachers, the letters cover a multitude of subjects. In one week in October, subjects included messages on personal potential, bullying, commitment, community involvement, and a positive attitude. Reflecting about the many letters of the past two years, teacher Teason recalled, “He writes about stories about his family, things that his kids have done in the past or things he has learned as a parent, things that he has done wrong as a principal and how he has learned to work with kids better.”

Different letters seem to have different purposes. “Too,” continued Teason, “I think the letters are probably for the kids to learn that it’s okay to make mistakes and for the kids to know him better, because, you know, there was a girl here in my classroom one day when he was in here. We were getting ready for a meeting, and a little girl came in to sell me something, and I bought something from her. She left and Mr. Edison remarked to me, ‘See that’s the girl I’ll never get to know, because she hasn’t caused any problems. She’s kind of quiet.’ And so I think by writing those letters, those kids that

are afraid to talk to him or that he'll never have any contact with will actually know him a little better through the stories in his letters."

While Edison's intentions for the letters are a brand of his own character education program for the students, he admits to less conspicuous motives for the letters as well. "You have to give a lot of indoctrination," he said. "Those letters – half of them are for the teachers." English teacher Linda Dawson confirmed, "The letters put him as such an alive, breathing person, you know, he's so visible with his sheer presence, but then we know a lot about him from those [letters]. And, I think maybe the teachers, by the time I've read that five times in a day, I probably benefit more from that than the kids who hear it once."

What Edison refers to as "indoctrination" is the culture shaping of Schein (1985). Schein define culture as follows:

A pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 9)

In the August 23, 2002, letter Edison wrote to the students about language, using a quote from the letter of James to the Twelve Tribes of Israel: "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison." Amid the comments about gossip, vulgarity, and the powerful potential of kindness held by language, Edison divulged his thoughts on language. He did so by quoting one of the

students who had submitted an entry into the “Letters of Wisdom” contest, an opportunity for other members of the community to share in the letter writing. His student wrote, “Knowing that our tongue has the power to speak good and the power to speak evil, we need to remember which language to choose. The decision of character through our mouth is up to us.” While the letter was written to the children, Edison admitted there was a message for teachers as well. “Half of ‘em,” he said, “are for teachers. The letters are like indoctrination. You have to give a lot of indoctrination.” Edison likens indoctrination to coaching. He employs coaching as a tool particularly with those teachers and parents he views as immature. “Geared to people with a certain level of maturity, you have to coach them and like I say indoctrinate them,” explained Edison.

In these daily letters, the power and use of language as a tool for communication is again demonstrated. In the case of the letters, while the ethic of care may be one purpose for the sharing of the verbal message, other objectives may be consciously met, particularly the sharing of common goals and values -- indoctrination, as Edison said. Some of the values illustrated in the fall of 2002 included the following: teamwork (August 15 & 29, September 4 & 9), reflective practice (August 21), friendship (August 22), striving for excellence (August 26), reading (August 27), bullying (August 28, September 16), integrity (September 3), selflessness (September 5), responsibility (September 6 & 12), respect (September 25), and commitment (October 2). Over the course of the semester, a different (or sometimes repeated) lesson was shared each day. Most of the letters included a quote or kernel of wisdom, and each story ended with the following: “With words that I would like you to consider and reflect upon, make yours

an exceptional life – or not. The greatest power that a person possesses is the power to choose. Please choose wisely.”

Deal and Peterson (1999) explain what Edison is doing with his letters.

Stories told by or about leaders help followers know what is expected of them. They emphasize what is valued, watched, and rewarded for old-timers and greenhorns alike. By repeating such stories, leaders reinforce values and beliefs and so shape the culture of the school. Sagas – stories of unique accomplishment, rooted in history and held in sentiment – can convey core values to all of a school’s constituents. They can define for the outside world an “intense sense of the unique” that captures imagination, engenders loyalty, and secures resources and support from outsiders. (p. 211)

When Edison pens his letters or offers an office visitor the familiar oak rocker that sits across from his own rocking desk chair, he is choosing to employ conversation, that which *Stewardship*’s author Block (1993) says is where all that matters most in our lives is measured. For symbolic interactionists Mead (1934) or Blumer (1969) this conversation is all a part of what is necessary to engender interpretations and make meaning within the social world of a community. Each conversation or shared letter that may later trigger a conversation is an opportunity for the members of the Suburban community to come to common understandings and make the meanings that translate into this community’s shared values.

Story Reading - The importance of language as a symbol of a relationship-laden community translates to the written word through such tools as the principal’s letters and again at Edison’s instigation in the form of the school’s faculty book club. Begun in

March, 1996, the book group, dubbed “The BG’s,” short for “Book Groupies,” was intentionally employed by Edison and a core group of teachers. He explains.

We started the book group for social reasons. Our staff wanted opportunities to interact without being on the same team. I thought that a book group would meet that need. I read reviews about the possible books and choose them hoping they would explore relationships, good and bad. Most discussions are pushed toward examination of people’s motives and responses, and how it relates to life in general. Sometimes how it may impact a school, individual, or community.

Again, referring to Sergiovanni’s (1996) community of mind, the book group is a focused, specific effort of Edison to create an opportunity or vehicle to allow for members of the faculty to bind to “common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing” (p. 51) through the dialogue and sharing of reactions to the books read by the group.

Media director Mary Ann Halloran, who has been at Suburban since it opened 26 years ago, reflected on the power of the book group to provide a common focus for persons with varying differences.

The book group is a lot of fun. Jess started the group, and it’s another way for teachers to have, I think, a common interest. We have one specified book that we read each month, and then we discuss it. It’s pretty interesting because the age level of the group goes from old people like me to the younger group like Betsy and some of those.

Clearly, Halloran understood Edison’s intentions for the book group. In his words:

The benefit of the book group is that it has made a great transition place for new teachers. It has also given us a field where age differences and experience history can be shared. We have been able to learn more about each other in once a month meetings. You know, of course, we don't always stay on the topic of the book.

Ron Yanarty, a young man in his sixth year of teaching sixth grade Spanish, all at Suburban, shares his perception of Edison's purpose for starting the book group.

I can't compare this school and principal with others, because I've really never been to other schools, but it is clear that Edison will do certain things to get the teachers together. The book group? That's a pretty good link between teachers.

Yanarty confessed that the book group has had an impact on him in a personal fashion.

Reflecting on his participation in the community of readers, he said:

I never read as much all my life until I came to Suburban. At least, it's a lot to me. The first one [book talk] I went to was one that an actual author came to the dinner to discuss his work with the teachers. I figured, OK, I'll read the book and see what this guy is writing. I read it, and I actually enjoyed the book group, but I mostly read the books to tear them apart and give Jess a hard time.

The "guy" that Yanarty referenced was author William Bernhardt, known nationally for a series of "legal thriller /good guy – bad guy" books similar in theme and genre to the work of the more recognized John Grisham. Bernhardt was a former childhood beau of one of the teachers at Suburban, and Edison capitalized on that connection, as well as a long standing relationship with the local bookstore owner, to entice the author to join the book club members for dinner and a discussion of his novel, *Perfect Justice* (1993). That

1997 visit was repeated again in 2000. Additionally, the BG's enjoyed the company of popular fiction writer Billie Letts (*Where the Heart Is*, 1995 and *The Honk and Holler Opening Soon*, 1998) and adolescent fiction writer Brian Burks. By bringing the authors of the works of fiction to the book club, Edison took himself out of the role of leader and became a member of the group on a more even footing with the others. Though at the beginning Edison chose all the books for discussion and led the discussions, over the years the book selection became a group effort and the role of the discussion leader in the talks has been shared as well.

Yanarty's experience illustrates Sergiovanni's (1996) premise of the need and value of creating opportunities for sharing and communicating the community's values. Apparently, and according to his teachers, Edison has made a specific effort to create a community of mind around reading. It is not just with the teachers that this value has been communicated and modeled. Edison has also created small communities of the mind among his student body with student reading groups, many of which are also attended by teachers in support of the effort. On one occasion, in an effort to win over both a student and a teacher to the reading community, Edison used a book as a symbol for better choices in an effort to resolve a discipline issue.

Again, Yanarty related his observation of Edison dealing with a student who had chosen repeatedly to lie to the teacher and administrator.

We had a student who was flat out lying to us. Edison kept giving him every opportunity to tell the truth. With this particular kid, Edison tried an approach that I wouldn't have thought would work at all, but it worked beautifully. The kid was lying to both of us, and we knew it. Edison finally called the kid on it, and the

kid broke down. It took about 50 other lies to explain the first one. But then, out of nowhere, Jess gave the kid a book. He said, "Here you go; I want to give you this book." It was just a copy of a book, and he gave it to the kid. He told the kid, 'I want you to take this book and read it.' And from that day, the kid carried the book everywhere he went. He read it every day and when he finished it, Jess gave him an autographed copy of that same book. This kid, if it had been up to me, I would have ended up stringing him up. What I would have done, wouldn't have worked. What Jess did with that kid -- he's still not perfect -- but I think if he ever runs into Mr. Edison again, it's gonna be a different situation.

In this scenario, the book was a symbol of the community of mind that Edison has skillfully crafted in his schoolhouse. The book was a gift, but it was more. It was a symbol of trust, something a liar would not typically be extended. From Yanarty's observation, it would appear that the child accepted the book in the same spirit that it was extended because he carried it religiously, read it purposefully, and traded it with his principal when a signed copy was offered. Whether the student knew "what hit him" or not, and it would appear from his constant companionship with the book that he did, it could not be denied that, at the very least, the teacher learned from the purposeful mentorship and modeling of his principal.

Teacher Leadership and Membership - Within the community of the mind, "which emerges from the binding of people to common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing" (Sergiovanni 1996, p. 51), several groups at Suburban illustrate the roles of teacher leadership and membership within the school.

Opportunities for this personal and professional growth and sense of growth through

membership and self-determination include curriculum teams, grade level teams, and building committees.

In the wake of the school reform movement of the past 10 years, considerable attention has been paid to the forces and power of teachers as leaders. In Lambert's book *What Is Leadership Capacity?* (1998), she addresses the issue of including the teachers as leaders. She says, "Leadership needs to speak to a group broader than the individual leaders. [It] involves an energy flow or synergy generated by those who choose to lead" (p. 5). She continues:

Leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of leadership. (p. 5-6)

The effective schools literature (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979) is replete with recommendations for a strong effort toward teacher leadership. Joan Lipsitz's (1984) study of four successful middle schools identified several factors tied to teacher involvement in the school's mission. Among the more recent studies of effective school characteristics, Duttweiler (1988, 1990) has reviewed the work of several (Rouche & Baker, 1986; Stedman, 1987; Wayson & Associates, 1988; Wimpelberg, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 1989) to compile a synthesized list that includes several references to teacher leadership in a school, including the following: effective schools foster collegial

interaction, and effective schools have extensive staff development, and effective schools practice shared leadership.

Teacher leadership is a valued commodity at Suburban. Seventh grade reading teacher, Kate Holly, with six years experience in the building, considers her membership on IMPACT (Improving Morale by Providing Advice from Classroom Teachers) to be just one of her several “team” memberships. Teaming, being a hallmark of Suburban that Holly feels is a distinguishing element of the school’s excellence, holds its own significance in her response. Asked what she considered the distinctions that have earned Suburban accolades such as Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, Holly replied:

Teams! Team, as in lots of things. Teamwork within my individual grade, the individual grade teams. Teamwork within all of the teachers of the school. We truly, I think, and the people that I’ve taught with, which are several people in the building, since I’ve done elective and reading/writing, we see ourselves as a whole, not as separate. I’m not just Mrs. Holly, I’m part of several teams, and I think that makes, that’s the biggest difference.

One of Holly’s team memberships is IMPACT, a committee of teachers who meet monthly to advise the principal on issues ranging from climate to curriculum. With representatives from each grade, the electives, and an at-large representative, they both ask and answer questions of the school’s leader. Representative Sergovanni’s (1996) description of a community of mind, this group is a proactive force, with a sometimes reactive mission, that attempts, without apology, to help focus the entire school on the progress and impediments they face in their attempts to create and pursue “common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing” (p. 51). Of the

IMPACT team, Holly explains this Sergiovanni (1996) thinking as it is translated in Suburban's IMPACT committee.

The IMPACT team is a special committee that Mr. Edison has. It is very much, I think, a very important team, and once you're on IMPACT the faculty votes the people on, and we have remained. It's the same people that are on, unless somebody retires or something like that, then you have to replace them. I believe we're a sounding board for Mr. Edison, and the other administrators. They come to us before big important information is dispersed, and so you have one person from each grade level that knows it first, not that we get to disperse the information, but we can kind of help them, especially in this age of negative information coming to us because of the budget.

You know, we can kind of help them feel better about what the teachers are going to say or do or whatever. They're worried about it staying as a family. And this committee, sort of, is like the big brothers and big sisters that kind of go out and disperse, hopefully, positive. I think that's a real important team that I'm on.

While this committee and its working falls under the theme of community of mind, it is also clear that there is some overlap in its role in the school. Holly's reference to the family theme, rings a reference to community of relationships. Holly's perspective of her role is one of both problem solver (community of mind) and nurturer (community of relationships). The proximity the role gives her to the principal and his problem solving efforts has, from her perspective, created a special connection between her and Edison.

For teachers not on the committee, like Mary Ann Halloran, the librarian who has been at the school 26 years and was on staff when Edison first came to the building as a student teacher, the committee is viewed as a sort of insurance for clear communication. Halloran recalled that IMPACT was begun several years ago when there was a concern that “communication was not flowing as smoothly as they wanted. It guaranteed attention right there with the IMPACT committee.” Reflecting on the role of the committee, she continued:

I think that’s a good way, one avenue for people to feel comfortable with people bringing concerns. I don’t think anyone is afraid of talking to Jess. No one’s afraid to talk to him about a problem. It’s more like they would be afraid of hurting his feelings by questioning a decision or practice.

Teaching and Learning - Suburban’s mission statement proclaims the following: “Together we will nurture our infinite talents and encourage our potential for growth by supporting sincere, quality endeavors and celebrating success.” Or, as the statement’s underlined words suggest in the briefer form, “We nurture talents and encourage growth.” Created in collaboration by the faculty some years ago, the statement succinctly states what Suburban intends to do each day and how they intend to do it.

The plural pronouns “we” and “our” suggest the collaborative nature of teaching and learning at Suburban. “Talents,” “growth,” “quality endeavors,” and “celebrating success” tell the rest of the story. Adherence to this mission is expected; it is the measuring stick for a teacher’s worth. Second only to the atmosphere of caring the school is known for, Edison considers the school’s most recognized strength “is a sense of commitment to the kids and their educational process.” In teacher evaluations, high

test scores are not the focus of discussion. Nor are they the center of attention in parent convocations. Nonetheless, the test scores are there, strong and competitive, for anyone who seeks them as a sign of success. Below are the most recent scores available on the state's mandated eighth grade test.

Suburban's 2001-2002 8th grade Criterion Referenced Test Results

	Reading	Writing	Math	History	Science	Geography	Arts
Suburban	95	93	88	83	96	74	69
District Average	92	94	86	82	95	71	69
State Average	78	88	71	61	87	47	44

Certainly, Edison and his staff examine the scores. Typically, one of the assistant principals analyzes the test data for the administrative team (the three principals and three counselors), who then each return to their respective teams (a counselor-principal partner is permanently assigned to meet weekly with two of six grade level teams) to report strengths and weaknesses. Teachers and administrators together study the analysis to make recommendations to the School Improvement Committee, a building wide team that coordinates needs analysis, goal setting, and professional development plans. There, information from the scores is also folded into the school site plan in the form of goals and objectives for instruction. As Lorraine Olson, a 24 year veteran vocal music teacher who has spent her entire career at Suburban, observed, "I've learned from Jess that if we base our decisions on what is "best for the student," we'll be headed in the right direction." As might be predicted, when Edison reflects on the building's success, it is not the test scores that capture his greatest degree of attention.

How do I measure success at this school? Hmm... My office is a measure of success to a certain degree. You know all the student pictures on the doors and elsewhere. The "It's a Wonderful Life" sign that was given by the office staff. And pictures of my kids and people who have been here. Books that have been given to me. The two yardsticks above the door, one in reference to the 1990-91 eighth grade class and the other to the 2000-01 class, which are really the measuring sticks of all other eighth grade classes. But it's not spelled out there. What's the criterion for that? The criterion is something that is intangible and something that just happens. And ahh... it's something that is based on gut feeling and an aggregate of things that are out there. If this school is being successful, people are going to care about it. You know, we're going to have people walk in and give us a check every once in a while. We're going to have people to volunteer to help us out. We're going to have people who can't be here physically, but are willing to give resources as simple as brownies or pop.

I'd also say if people want to transfer here [on the district's open transfer program], that's a measure of success. If people want to transfer here, it means that Suburban is a good place. The patrons say of us, "They'll make sure your kids get educated." Things like that. There is no reality. It's all perception. And unfortunately, you can't measure perception accurately.

It is no accident, rather a result of focused efforts, that Suburban scores so well on both test scores and the "perception scale" of measurement. The professional development committee has been in place at Suburban for many years. Its work, combined with the resident teacher program, district summer institutes, Pathwise

professional development, and such programs as the national board teacher certification process all contribute to bolster the teachers' skills in the areas of instructional strategies and delivery methods. Staff members are consistently finalists in the district Teacher of the Year process, and their students' performance on state and district mandated tests are documentation that both professional and student growth, which translates to quality teaching and learning, is taking place.

In middle school, each teacher typically teaches only one subject. Understandably, the teacher's perspective is to some degree limited to the requirements and aspects of that curriculum. However, common threads of reference cross individual curriculums to shed light on over-arching principles held by most teachers at Suburban.

Teachers often cited instructional autonomy in the classroom as the most appreciated professional practice of the administration. It was regarded by all as a strength, a factor they felt responsible for the many noted successes of the instructional team. *Autonomy* refers to the degree of license that teachers have in self-determining the different work processes (Blasé & Kirby, 1992). Rosenholtz's (1989) elaboration on this term sheds a clearer light on this topic as it is demonstrated at Suburban. Rosenholtz distinguishes between two kinds of autonomy in school settings: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. *Freedom from* autonomy is found where teacher commitment and collaboration are low. By contrast, *freedom to* autonomy is found where teachers have plentiful opportunities for learning and collaboration. They feel few limitations preventing them from growing and developing as professionals, more able to serve their students. The *freedom to* rendition of autonomy appears to be that which is at work at Suburban.

Anna Sawyer, a relatively young teacher with all seven years of experience at Suburban, came to the school having been named her university's top graduate from the college of education. Well-versed in pedagogy, Sawyer came to Suburban with high expectations and creative plans. Citing Edison as a "huge part of my development as a teacher," she credited his "hands-off approach" as significant in allowing her "the *freedom to explore new areas in the classroom.*" She continued:

He has been encouraging of me from the very beginning. His evaluations have been very informative and supportive. If I ever need his advice or support, he has always been there to help me in whatever I've needed.

Representing a contrast in experience only, a 27 year veteran of the classroom with 11 years at Suburban, Polly Best, a teacher of the gifted and talented enrichment elective, also notes autonomy as a hallmark of Edison's style.

We are *free to* develop our own "style," and the "attagirls" or "attaboys" received on evaluations provide feedback that our methods are effective. It would be difficult for me to teach in a lecture, work, hand-in-paper, return paper, test format, but some teachers use that style quite successfully. Jess encourages us to use what works for us and for our students.

Support and encouragement have translated into risk-taking for teachers. Eight year veteran seventh grade social studies teacher Sharon Gaston noted, "Edison is very supportive and because of that, I have been willing to try new things in my classroom to give the students an exciting and hands-on lesson."

According to state accreditation standards, each teacher with three or fewer years experience must be evaluated twice annually, and teachers with over three years

experience must have one observation and evaluation. As evidenced in comments from both Sawyer and Best, Edison employs the evaluation process as an affirmation, saying that a teacher demonstrating serious difficulties will have been addressed multiple times outside of and in addition to the evaluation tool. So, for most of the teachers, the evaluation, along with its pre and post-conference, is an opportunity for sharing professional conversations and affirming the performance and contributions of the teacher.

Kelly Baker, math teacher, recalled an evaluation from a few years prior, which came on the heels of a parent complaint regarding her handling of a cheating incident in the classroom.

I can't remember now if it was my annual evaluation or just a result of the complaint. But we were doing a pre-algebra math assignment, and it was a real pleasant time. Mr. Edison thought it was a good activity. It wasn't intimidating. I really felt he was there in a supportive way so he could review how I taught and be better able to respond if another parent called. It made me feel good to know that he was interested in my perspective, and he commented on how much he liked the way I presented the lesson.

Aaron Bellam, one of the teachers reassigned in the building as a result of budget cuts, began his career at Suburban as a technology specialist. He was originally hired as a support employee to man the curriculum based computer lab, but he was promoted to full teacher standing after his first year when Jess lobbied on his behalf. No other school in the district had such a position, but because of the bulging-at-the-seams student numbers at Suburban, the deal was cut as a consolation for the over-crowding issues.

“There’s not much I wouldn’t do for Jess. I couldn’t have stayed on at support pay, and Jess knew that,” said Bellam. “I think what we’ve been able to accomplish with technology as a tool and how I’ve been able to assist classroom teachers in their instruction has been well worth the gamble Jess took.”

Middle school philosophy concerns itself with not only academic growth, but it also seeks to be developmentally responsive. If academic performance sometimes seems difficult to accurately assess, affective issues such as developmental growth pose an even greater challenge. However, Suburban is a true middle school that ascribes to the National Middle School Association (NMSA) philosophy, which calls for a quality of commitment that is characterized by two equally important aspects:

- (1) The provision of significant academic learning experiences for young adolescent students, learning experiences that are characterized by high content and high expectations for all learners.
- (2) The provision of developmentally appropriate classrooms, schools, programs, and practices for all young adolescent students within the learning community. (Erb, 2001, p. 11)

Considering the developmental needs of children, several teachers cited the school’s efforts to provide for this aspect of a child’s education. “The people here truly care about kids, and it shows each and every day. Whether it is a unique and creative lesson plan or a simple smile in the hallway, I think the students feel respected for their ability and curiosity as well as loved and cared about.”

Some might drive the streets of Suburban’s residential district and automatically assume that the real reason for the school’s successes and recognition is primarily due to

the socio-economic factor. While there is no denying that the children at this school, on the whole, live a comfortable existence as children of professionals that does not tell the whole story. Holly considers this issue:

I don't think there are more successes here because of the "white collar" element. That might help, but our population is not all "white collar," and most "successes" are with non-white collar kids. They need us more; therefore, we try harder to help them. Also, I think having Jess as the principal has something to do with that, my level of effort to serve, because I feel valued as a teacher, friend, "family member." It makes me want to perform my job well for the good of the "team" or "family"!

Dawson, English teacher, sums up the Suburban goal. "I just think it's because we all really are here for the same reasons. I think the kids want to be here to learn, and we want to teach them. We want to see them grow as young adults, not just academically, but as young people." Comparing Suburban to another district school, which her children attended, Dawson reflected, "My boys went to a strong academic school, but it seemed to be missing the student centered factor that I see here."

Dawson felt that the support she got from Edison was paramount in her efforts to continue to grow and offer her students both the academic and personal support.

He doesn't come up and say, 'Man, that was a great lesson you taught.' Or 'That was a great field trip you planned.' He doesn't do that, but you just know that he is supportive of you, in that he always knows what we're doing. Maybe that's it. He's always attuned, and I think we take that as support and encouragement.

Moral Voices - In *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, Sergiovanni (1996) talks about “moral authority” and “moral voices” (p. 57). He uses the term “covenantal,” a term also referenced in the work of Pohly (1993). Sergiovanni (1996) employs it to speak of the “shared agreements and compacts that bring community members together into a shared followership” (p. 57). He points out that this way of relating to the cohorts of a community finds its derivation in Jeremiah (31:33), “which points out that for laws to be effective they must be planted in the heart rather than written on stone” (p. 57). Turning to the work and terminology of Selznick (1957), Sergiovanni agrees that communities are organizations that have ascended to a higher level of purpose, one “infused with value.” According to Selznick, a community, or school, that operates out of this infusion can be recognized for its “distinctive outlook, habits, and other commitments [that] are unified, coloring all aspects of organizational life and lending it a *social integration* that goes beyond formal organization and command” (p. 40). A moral voice is the voice of a *gemeinschaft* community. In a school community founded on *gemeinschaft* principles, a covenantal community evolves, one that compels its members to work together for the common good. As Sergiovanni describes it in *Moral Leadership* (1992), a covenantal community is one where the members do and recognize the right thing because it is *right* (moral) and because it is the best thing for the community, based on a shared consensus of ideas. The right thing can be as insignificant as complimenting the janitor on a clean room or having the students put their chairs atop the tables to expedite the janitor’s evening routine.

Within the themes of community of relationship, place, mind, and memory, many examples of moral authority can be cited from among the data collected at Suburban.

However, one curious theme that reflects Selznick's "moral authority" was repeated in numerous Suburban conversations, and it dealt with what Edison called "ugly jobs."

Edison uses the term to describe jobs around the school that anyone might choose to do that would counter one of his most despised phrases, "It's not my job!"

For Edison, people are doing ugly jobs when instead of calling a custodian for a spill, they quickly take care of it themselves because of a sense of ownership or commitment to the organization's life. Whether it's a case of a student getting sick in the hallway or a soda spill in the cafeteria, the "It's not my job!" statement is not considered acceptable at Suburban. Edison explains:

You know, to grab a mop - it's already prepared - hold your breath, sprinkle some of the dry stuff on it, and mop it up. I did it just last week. You don't look at whose responsibility it is. It's everybody's responsibility, or it certainly should be that way.

Teachers had a different way of reporting this concept, particularly with regard to the building's custodians and their role in the school. Their comments were different mainly because of their different perspective, but the consistency with which they introduced the collaborative relationships between themselves and the custodians was significant.

An eighth grade social studies teacher with all 21 years of experience at Suburban, Ronnie Hood, mentioned the cleanliness first as he began to describe the characteristics that have given Suburban its reputation. "They (custodians) are so undermanned. They do a terrific job of keeping this place spic and span, but it takes all of us pitching in to keep it that way."

The assistant principal, who as part of her job meets and greets walk-ins every day that range from the superintendent to an out-of-town parent preparing for a move to the area, noted the frequency that she receives compliments on the condition of the building. “I just tell them it’s because the people here take pride in our school. We have great custodians, but it takes everybody working together for the better of the school.”

Again, repeating the same refrain, drama teacher Maddy shared:

Parents walk in the office at Suburban and there’s someone to help them right away. And even if it’s just a teacher walking through, everyone feels the ability to help out and pitch in. I don’t ever see anyone saying, “It’s not my job.” Everyone assumes that the school is their job... all aspects of it. You see people cleaning up. You don’t just call for a custodian. You clean something; you pick it up. Even the kids do that.

Librarian Mary Ann Halloran summed up the faculty responses regarding the ugly jobs that require the attention of everyone.

Everyone has some stake in the school. And that’s a nice feeling because I think if you have ownership even if it’s a small piece of ownership you are more committed to making sure that whatever it is, if it’s a building like this, you’re more committed to helping it be that way and better.

The “ugly jobs” and commitment and pride associated with the building’s upkeep and cleanliness are the “distinctive outlook, habits, and other commitments” that are “coloring all aspects of organizational life” at Suburban (Selznick, 1995, p. 40).

Themes Relating to Community of Place

A community of place is a setting that entices people to stay over a period of time. It is a place that has created a unique identity and cohesive web of connections among its community members. In the words of Sergiovanni (1996), “Community of place characterizes the sharing of a common habitat or locale. This sharing of place with others for sustained periods of time creates a special identity and a shared sense of belonging that connects people together in special ways” (p. 51). At Suburban, teachers tend to come and stay, creating a community of place over the sustained years that Sergiovanni (1996) suggests as important, nurturing a shared sense of belonging. Of the 64 certified teachers, the average length of stay at Suburban is 11.3 years. For matters of comparison, the three other sister schools in the district (open ten years or longer) have average teacher tenures of 5.1, 7.2, and 7.9 years. A likely outcome of teachers feeling a sense of belonging is a healthy school climate, which translates into student achievement (Kaplan & Owings, 2002). Further research has demonstrated that high-performing schools are distinguished by three specific characteristics clearly present among the staff: stability, continuity, and cohesion (Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). In examining school improvement efforts, high teacher turnover is also cited as a key detriment to progress (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Huberman & Miles, 1984). In sharp contrast to current employment records at Suburban, large numbers of teachers leave the profession each year for reasons other than retirement. In fact, nationally, 17% departed in 2001-02 (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 21).

In addition to the benefit of a sense of belonging, Ingersoll (2001) and Useem (1997) have both asserted in recent studies that teacher mobility has a distinct impact on

school improvement. A look at the frequency of and reasons for teacher resignations lends insight to what can happen in a school where community of place is not valued. Ingersoll's (2002) study of the role of organizational characteristics in teacher turnover reveals some interesting issues regarding the reasons given for teacher resignations. Personal reasons are cited as the cause for teacher resignations in 39% of the cases studied. These personal reasons include departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves. In a field served by an inordinate number of females as compared to males, issues relating to family matters such as child rearing and the trailing spouse, typically issues that affect women more than men, departures related to such personal reasons are understandable and predictable. Other factors have an impact on teacher departures too. In Ingersoll's study, retirement was cited by 12% of those studied, and school staffing action, something Suburban has witnessed more of in the last two years, caused 28% of the moves. However, the most significant figure in the reasons for teacher turnover in the Ingersoll study was the combined rankings of job dissatisfaction and the desire to pursue other jobs, 51%. Included among the reasons teachers gave for their dissatisfaction were the lack of support from the school administration and lack of teacher influence over decision making. The study goes on to recommend increased administrative support for teachers, particularly new teachers, and increased teacher input as the antidote for the dissatisfaction. In reviewing the teacher responses collected at Suburban Middle School, it appears that administrative support is at play in the low teacher turnover rates at the school. Yanarty, a six year Spanish teacher, offered, "I think the teachers who are here like being here, really about all of

them. And I told Jess this in my last evaluation that I like being here and you're a big reason for that." Drama teacher Jane Maddy added to that sentiment.

I think people at Suburban are, for the most part, just like me. They are happy to be there. The longevity of a lot of people probably makes a big difference in the climate at Suburban. There are a lot of people there who could retire. Probably five. And I think that makes quite a statement when you could retire and you don't want to because you are so comfortable with your environment.

The principal's use of teacher input in decision making with regard to professional development and instructional team plans also may help diminish the 51% turnover rate found in the Ingersoll (2002) study by creating vehicles for teacher input. With youthful exuberance, Yanarty gives voice to the principal's invitation for input.

One thing, I really enjoy having him there (at team meetings) because we can go directly to the source. And I'm pretty vocal about my disagreements. I may say, 'That's ridiculous.' And he may sit there and say, 'You're right.' Or he may stick to his guns, which he'll do more often than not, but at least I know I'm heard and valued.

So, the potential for frequent staff turnover is a predictable issue that most school leaders must face, which makes establishing a "community of place" a substantial challenge. Sergiovanni characterizes a community of place as the "sharing of a common habitat or locale ... for sustained periods of time" (1996, p. 51). He suggests that this "creates a special identity and a shared sense of belonging that connects people together in special ways"(p. 51).

Suburban seems to have established this identity described by Sergiovanni. The sense of belonging which he asserts works to bind people together appears to be a force at work in helping the school minimize teacher turnover and maximize the connection and sense of belonging that keeps people for longer periods of time.

With regard to community of place, the data collected at Suburban clustered around a couple of specific themes: professional structures and social structures.

Professional Structures

Professional structures are those organizations, formal and informal, employed in the work setting to accomplish various work-related goals. In a school, they might include any of the countless committees required to initiate and maintain the many district, state, and local initiatives.

Professional Development Committee - Phrases like shared governance and site-based management speak to the opportunities that administrators can employ to help create the “sense of belonging” that Sergiovanni considers important to a community of place. By giving teachers a leadership role and a greater meaning to their belonging in the community their sense of belonging is enhanced. In this area, community of place and of mind dovetail in the over-arching theme of teacher leadership.

At Suburban, in addition to the IMPACT committee already noted, the professional development committee is one such teacher-led group that helps create connections between the teachers and the “place” of Suburban. The professional development committee is responsible for all of the activities planned and implemented to enhance teachers’ professional growth. It is made up of classroom teachers from all

grade and curriculum areas. Teachers usually serve a three year tenure, rotating off the committee to be replaced by others who represent a like group, such as elective or particular grade level teachers. Historically, the committee chair is recruited by the principal.

Liv Teason, now in her sixth year of teaching, currently heads the professional development committee. In this position, she wields both autonomy and authority, both granted to her and her cohorts by the principal. "He never asks me what we are doing. He just lets me take over. He has never said, 'Well, you have to do this and this.' He just kind of made me feel like he had confidence in me," Teason said of her experience.

By allowing and encouraging this kind of teacher leadership, which in turn has created connections to the school community among the involved teachers, Edison has added leverage to school improvement, the problem at the root of this study. He has done so by encouraging "capacity-building" and "systems-changing," two terms offered in the work of McDonnell and Elmore (1987). Defined in this work, capacity-building involves teacher empowerment by increasing their professional skills, which in turn increases their commitment to the values of the profession. Systems-changing seeks a new way of looking at what we do in schools and how we do it. It allows for a new understanding of what practices are effective, and it does so as it simultaneously encourages a teacher base of authority within the change process regarding instructional practices. This base of authority again creates and strengthens connections to the school. As Blasé and Kirby (1992) point out, this authority or autonomy is not freedom from supervision but rather accountability to the community (p. 61). Recent plans of the committee have centered

around the needs and issues of both the smaller school community and the greater community outside the school walls. Committee chair Teason said:

Our professional development planning is related to school site goals in several ways. First, we plan activities related to things our school is focusing on during that particular year related to our test analysis and areas of weakness. We also look at other school wide issues, for example, Love and Logic or the bullying problem. Second, we plan according to things going on in the world, like the Twin Towers, the OKC bombing, the anniversary of the Titanic accident. We have visited the OKC Memorial and plan to visit the Titanic exhibit at the Omniplex. We are also having speakers on bullying and violence.

Edison's self-assigned role on the committee is largely administrative. Teason shared that he usually attends the meetings and that he sometimes helps them decide on the specific activities planned and the funding for the activities. She added:

I think there is a fair amount of personal trust amongst the members and Mr. Edison, and I think he relies on us to help him deal with problems or situations. Being on the committee, especially chairing it, has given me a greater stake in the success of the entire school.

Teason's comment is reminiscent of a study from the University of Oregon (Russell, Mazzarella, White, & Maurer, 1985) that looked at faculty participation in effective schools. The study found that in listing effective and ineffective administrator behaviors, 19 effective behaviors were associated with collaborative planning, such as those undertaken on the professional development committee. Further, Glickman (1990)

reports similar findings, but with greater attention to outcomes such as improved student achievement, lower, dropout rates, gains in teachers' critical thinking skills, and improved school climate, in Georgia schools where teachers were given a voice in school governance.

Teams - Since the inception of the middle school movement, the practice of "teaming," has been recommended. A team is a group of students, usually around 120 to 140, taught by the same 5 (or so) teachers, with each of the teachers presenting a different one of the core subjects. The purpose of the team is to help diminish the impact of the typically very large student bodies found in most urban and suburban schools. It is an important strategy for fostering supportive relationships between teachers and students and among teachers on the team (Jackson & Davis, 2000). *Turning Points 2000*, (Jackson & Davis, 2000) the most recent and comprehensive reform document for middle school grades reports, "For teachers, teams provide the kind of collaborative work group that is increasingly viewed as vital to organizational productivity across a wide range of professions" (p. 128). At Suburban Middle School, teaming has been in place from the beginning. Depending on the student body numbers in any given year, there have been two to three teams per grade level. Each team takes on a name that creates a special identity for those belonging to it. This year, the team names at Suburban are taken from professional sports teams and the logos of each team can be seen on the doors, bulletin boards, and hallways of the member teachers, a tactic which enhances team membership and identity.

By creating teams within the larger school population, Suburban, like other middle schools, has made a more comfortable "place" for both students and teachers to

find a connection. For both students and teachers the team provides “a psychological home within the school that helps reduce the stress of isolation and anonymity” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 125). Teams provide for, not only a community of place, but also a community of relationships by minimizing the large student populations of secondary schools in the creation of smaller learning groups, which encourage the formation of relationships (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Ronnie Hood, an eighth grade social studies teacher with 21 years of experience, all at Suburban, spoke of the benefits he has observed and experienced as a member of an instructional team.

There seems to be a synergy that the team creates. It keeps me motivated. And there are some unwritten rules of membership and meeting that most of the teams I've been a member of try to keep. It's like it's politically incorrect to gripe ... about other teachers, students, whatever. We try to keep each other focused on helping kids, not trashing them. But while we are focusing on kids, the teachers feel supported too. We are treated in such a way that we're happy; we feel valued.

From grade to grade, the sentiments about the value of teaming are echoed by teacher after teacher. At seventh grade, as Dawson reflected on the team structure, she credited its supportive nature with the confidence she has built over the years. She credited Edison for his efforts in assigning team membership: “It's a family atmosphere on the team. Everyone is so “rah-rah,” so “Let's do this” and “Let's do that.” I think it has a lot to do with the way Jess puts us together. He has a real knack for the personnel at least that gel feeling that's created on a team.”

Social Structures - The shared sense of belonging at Suburban has created a number of informal, social groups and opportunities that the teachers have chosen to create. As already noted, one of these is the reading group that evolved from the sense of community of mind. Other groups, some less cerebral in nature, have formed that seem to illustrate Sergiovanni's community of place.

One such group is a sort of vacation club, though the group is much less formal than the word *club* would indicate. Reading teacher Holly shared, "There are several of us that are not, we're not real close friends, but have started going on spring break vacations together. It's actually all different generations." What began as a teacher's lounge conversation evolved into a gag and finally a real trip. Over lunch, teachers were lamenting about the moratorium on student field trips and the conversation evolved into a practical joke that had one of the teachers assigned to create a travel brochure advertising a "Professional Development, Teachers Only, Field Trip" to sunny Las Vegas. Placing a copy in each teacher's mailbox, a common practice for legitimate professional development activities, the instigators received such a response that a real, not-so-professional, pleasure trip was put together, and eleven teachers joined in for the three days of fun. This coming spring, another group, including some of the same and some additional teachers, is going to Georgetown to combine a visit with one of their college age children and a sightseeing tour. Librarian Halloran described the community of place, which folds into the community of mind, at Suburban:

I think Suburban's climate is a place ... it's a place that people want to stay. They want to work here because they enjoy working here. A lot of schools have -- you know some buildings are very, very cliquey. They're not that way in this

building. There are a lot of cross-age friendships. You know usually people in departments will naturally kind of have friendships together. Or grade levels or teams. But yet there are a lot of cross-age and cross-level friendships that ... We have a lot of activities, I guess, that we do together. The most recent example is this Las Vegas trip. I didn't go, but I heard they had a wonderful time. And I can't honestly think of any other building in this district where that would happen. Here, everybody feels like they have an equal footing in this building, and that's a real important thing. They all feel like they have a part in the process. And when you feel important, then I think relationships are better. And people want to work, people want to do the best here. I mean, they don't just want to come here and sit and stagnate. They want to do their best, and it's not really a competition thing. It's just kind of a level that they want to keep, and they want to keep pushing it.

This shared sense of belonging that is community of place finds teachers of Suburban belonging to travel excursions hundreds of miles from home, but also to quick day trip teacher outings. Again, including some of the same and some different teachers each time, over the last few years teachers have traveled together to the local art museum, a regional craft show, a cooking school in a neighboring metropolitan area, and a circus performers' cemetery connected to one of the authors the book group read. According to the teachers, anyone can "belong" to the traveling groups. Assistant principal Molliganer asserts, "It is an open invitation. 'We are going to do this, if you would like to join us.'"

Security in Unsettling Times - In recent months, the sense of belonging and the security of a familiar place has been threatened by the uncertainty that resulted from a

statewide budget crunch. Across the state, schools have had to take unprecedented measures to combat ever-shrinking funding sources, and Suburban has not been immune to the effects of the shortfall. For years, Suburban has been the district's largest middle school with over 1300 students at times. During healthier budget years, the district was able to ease the high student numbers by supplying extra administrators and counselors and more than adequate numbers of teachers to meet the needs of the burgeoning student population. However, with the construction of a fifth middle school in the district, student numbers have steadily decreased over the past three years, about one hundred fewer each year. The decreasing population, combined with the decreasing funding, have caused personnel reductions to be a greater reality at Suburban than at other schools which have been more tightly staffed due to the more consistent student numbers.

As a result, several teachers have been temporarily or permanently reassigned to other positions at Suburban or even other buildings in the district. Sensitive to the impact such personnel changes can cause, Edison has carefully orchestrated as many of the moves as possible to intervene before the district could levy a top-down decision. With the staff reductions that took place over the past three springs when cuts were made to staff the new school, Edison used thoughtful, strategic planning to ensure the least possible disruption to his building. In personnel negotiations, he went so far as to offer to work for free for one year if it would help keep his staff in place -- he was not taken up on the offer. He relied on a long-standing professional relationship with the personnel director to faithfully represent the true staffing scenario at Suburban, including not only the needs of the students, but the needs of the teachers as well. One such case was that of one of the least senior teachers, one most likely to be reassigned to another building, who

had lost a toddler to a tragic disease-related death just prior to the spring staffing moves. Edison, leaning on his relationship with the personnel director and counting on the district to support him in what he considered a moral decision, won the opportunity to overlook the low seniority and leave the teacher in her position.

More recently, now several months after the devastating personal loss of the teacher, this same teacher was, in fact, moved to another building to fill the position of a mid-year, no notice departure. While it was still a potentially difficult personal move, it was considered an opportunity for the teacher that might ensure her permanence in the even tighter staffing year to come. Her move, then, leaving an English position open at Suburban, precipitated a series of teacher moves within Suburban. The in-school suspension teacher, a 17 year veteran of Suburban, moved from that position, one currently being considered for future district cuts, to the vacant English position; and the computer lab facilitator moved into the in-school position. All were mid-year moves. While the moves have caused considerable anxiety staff-wide, they have also been viewed as beneficial. "He is saving my job!" the lab teacher remarked of the principal when asked his feelings about the changes.

Another teacher, Maddy, the elective drama teacher whose position is not particularly secure, echoed a similar sentiment:

I've taught several places and for really great principals and not-so-great principals. And at Suburban I feel really secure. Even though now things are insecure, I know that my principals are going to fight for me to stay at Suburban if they can. And you know, maybe the security's not there, but I do feel secure in

the trust I have in him. So, there's trust; there's security; there's respect. It's just a pleasant place to go to work every day.

Others, reflecting on the staffing and budgeting problems, share a sensitivity for the situation that begins with concern for Edison and the toll it appears to have taken on him and extends to the teachers most likely affected by the cuts. One of two vocal music teachers who was reassigned to one of the district's high schools to cover a six week maternity leave shared after her return to Suburban, "I think Jess took it harder than I did, but I didn't mind it too much. It was better than having to leave Suburban permanently." One of the three counselors, Kay Todd, summed up a nearly building-wide sentiment: "There is a certain anxiety in the building as a result of the staffing issues, but there is also a trust among the staff that Jess will do the best, the right thing, for each teacher and all teachers."

This trust speaks to what Sergiovanni (1996) refers to as *moral authority*, which gives rise to *moral communities*: "Moral authority comes from the development of shared agreements and compacts that bring community members together into a shared followership. Moral authority allows the school as community to speak to teachers, students, and parents as a moral voice. Moral communities are *convenantal*" (p. 57). Whether it's doing the right thing for a teacher in need or helping the janitors, the voice of the moral community speaks with a tone of selflessness.

Sergiovanni (1996) draws from Etzioni's (1993) work with communities, and in particular his ideas on the moral voice within communities. Etzioni (1993) addresses the typical notion of community, one where people "know and care for one another" (p. 31). However, aligned with Sergiovanni (1996) and Toonies (1957), he speaks to a greater

mission of community, one evident in the administrative practices and teacher trusts present at Suburban. Etzioni (1993) writes: "Communities speak to us in moral voices. They lay claims on their members. Indeed, they are the most important sustaining source of moral voices other than the inner self" (p. 31). The example of the teacher who was allowed to remain in her position despite her lack of seniority as an effort to avoid exacerbating her deep personal loss gives volume to the moral voices of the Suburban teachers. In order to break from the contractual specifics that placed this teacher in the line of "next-to-be-transferred," Edison had to receive the agreement of the teachers next most likely to be affected. He did because as one of those, Teason, noted in a phone conversation, "It was the right thing to do. I trusted Jess to take care of all of us the best he could."

Edison believes the response of Teason is a result of his efforts in two areas: one, his efforts to remain at Suburban, now in his 14th consecutive year; and, two, his efforts to practice servant leadership, a philosophy that places the leader in the role of servant in the demonstration of "devotion to the organization's purposes and commitment to those in the organization who work day by day on the ordinary tasks that are necessary for those purposes to be realized" (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 334). He reflected on the two issues:

Because I control some of the change about me, like the fact that I've been here so long, then people have been able to predict my behavior. And because they feel good and secure about predicting my behavior, they can trust me, and I guess that translates into some credibility of some kind. It's their perception of what's real. It may not be real, but it's their perception. To maintain some kind of

servant leadership, you have to be really careful to make sure that the perception really is real and that to make sure that who you are is interpreted correctly. You know, I want people to know who I am really and to really know who I am. And not think they know who I am.

Community of Memory

Through the death of a faculty member's child, in the wake of the Murrah Building bombing of 1995, and in the face of difficult economic repercussions, a community of memory can sustain a faculty, providing a sense of history that creates sense and meaning of trying situations (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 51). To the three "communities" of Tonnies, Sergiovanni adds another, originally posited by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985), communities of memory. Enduring understandings of communities of relationships, of place, and of mind become communities of memory.

When the difficult times such as those noted occur or even in times of great joy and celebration, a community of memory will provide a connection to sustain both those present and involved and those departed from the mainstream of daily involvement (Sergiovanni, 1996). Flynn and Innes (1992) describe what happens over time in a community of memory:

It seems that a school that is a true community is a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with one another; who have built relationships that go deeper than their composites; and who have developed some significant

commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, delight in each other, and make others' conditions their own. (p. 203)

Conversations with the faculty invariably move into mention of their memories of the difficult periods the community has had to bear. Just as prominent in those memories, however, are joyful times of reunions, award ceremonies, births, and other celebrations. The memories are evidence of the cultural connections defined in the work of Johnson (1990): shared purposes, values, traditions, and history. Combined, they “promote harmony and provide a sense of community” (Sergiovanni, p. 58). They are examples of Toonies’ *gemeinschaft*.

Tragedies - On several occasions through the years, Suburban has found itself “mourning together.” Losses, particularly through death and divorce, and how the faculty has dealt with them, illustrate how connections have been established that bolster the faculty in times of need. They also demonstrate the role that the principal and the relationships he has established have played in encouraging the community of memory within the context of tragedy.

In 1995, a federal building in the adjoining metropolitan area near Suburban Middle School was bombed, killing 168 people, including the relatives of five members of the Suburban school community. Four children lost their parents, and one teacher’s brother died. At the time, that teacher had been at Suburban 17 years. The memories and thoughts shared by that teacher, compared to the views of her peers, differed only in as much as varying perspectives would affect the view. As the lens of intersubjectivity in symbolic interactionism explains this experience, the perceived similarities of this event

were a result of the teachers defining their personal experience through the experience of others.

Looking back almost eight years on a world event that significantly touched Suburban, teachers' memories are still very clear. In almost every conversation held with a staff member present at that time, reviews of the tragedies and celebrations of the school's history led to a comment, or more likely a detailed account, of what happened after news of the bombing reached the building.

Almost as subtly as the actual physical waves of the earth's vibration that were felt at Suburban at the moment of the explosion more than 15 miles from the site of the event, news of the devastation seeped into the schools in growing ripples of disbelief. Just two doors down from Fiona Langley, the teacher whose brother was killed, the seventh grade math teacher from the other team, Kelly Baker, heard the news from a long-time friend from across the building in the eighth grade hall. Soon after, Edison escorted Langley from the building to join her family and await the dreadful report. Taking care to stay well-informed of the situation, the administrator kept the faculty up-to-date on the unfolding story, particularly as it related to Suburban families. In doing this, Edison was practicing one of the lessons others would learn from the national disaster of September 11, 2001: "When a crisis occurs, be visible – no matter your leadership role. For if there is one thing that employees want in a time of uncertainty it is thoughtful and compassionate leaders who are visible – developing plans, providing encouragement, disseminating information" (Veninga, 2001, p. 155).

With four students affected by the tragedy, teachers from all grade levels had to deal not only with the sadness of a friend's grief, but also with the challenge of

ministering to the needs of both the students whose parents were killed and the other students, many of whom knew other victims.

Baker remembered:

All around the school, people immediately began praying for the families. Over the next several days, we went to prayer services for the different individuals since some of them were not considered officially dead, only missing. We took food to the families, went to the funeral of the ones they knew or had taught in class. Some teachers visited the kids at their homes to see how they were doing. Others kept track of the kids by getting reports from neighbors and friends.

We coped with the tragedy at school by talking about it a lot with our peers (not in our classes), though we did discuss the situation with our classes and reported to the counselor kids who were having a lot of difficulty coping with the bombing. We watched TV a lot at school when not in the class and shared feelings with friends.

For a week after the ordeal, a former counselor of the school who had gone on to open a private practice came to the school every day to help with the faculty and children who were having difficulty dealing with the sadness.

It was an all-consuming series of events that illustrated the kinds of relationships present at Suburban. It is indelibly etched in the memories of all present. Sharing the most intimate of all perspectives was Fiona Langley, the teacher whose brother had perished.

The Suburban staff was (and still is) part of our family at the time of the tragedy.

Telephone calls, cards, letters, visits, gifts, food items, hugs, and tears were all

shared with us. Staff members respected my presence by allowing me to share with them if I wanted to do so, or just be quiet around them.

The staff collected money to purchase a Dogwood tree and have it planted in my yard. The two boys who planted it had been former students of mine. Needless to say, that tree is a very special one!

Parents also collected money - the Giving Tree Program. In June of 1995, Jess called and wanted to come by the house. He brought me a copy of *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein that the parents had purchased for the four families at Suburban who had lost family members. Jess did not know that I read that book to all my classes each year at Christmas and have done so for many years - so it too is a very special book. The collected money went toward the purchase of trees planted at the school in memory of the family members. That day that Jess came by the house was Don's birthday, June 27. Jess was not aware of that.

Jess was very supportive during all the time that I was out of the classroom. I left on Wednesday, April 19, as soon as I received word of what had occurred and was out of the classroom six days. Also, during the trials Jess was very good about supporting me when I attended a week of each trial in Denver.

Jess also wrote a letter reflecting upon Don and his life and his influence and importance to our family and to society. This has been the most cherished note that I have ever received from a principal!

Many teachers did not think that I would return to school the remainder of the year because of the event, but I had to return to some state of normalcy and be

around people who understood. It was very difficult to return to the classroom, but I was so glad to have familiar surroundings.

What seems to be at work here at Suburban, particularly exaggerated and perhaps more easily viewed in circumstances such as those of great personal human loss, is an ethic of care (Sernak, 1998) illustrating certain tenets of care (Noddings, 1992). Both ideas are representative of the precepts of psychological feminism, which focuses on the development of a theory of reasoning that includes women's ways of knowing and women's voices, particularly in reference to moral reasoning. In addition to Sernak (1998) and Noddings (1992), literature of the feminine voice in moral reasoning has evolved in the work of Beck (1992) and Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985), which asserts that caring depends on the relationships of the people involved in them and is characterized by a measure of commitment.

Edison's actions at the time of the bombing were a reflection of his beliefs.

According to him being part of the Suburban community is

very much like being in the Walton house. I mean there's a sense of family to it, not intimacy, but definitely concern and care, and it's genuine for each other.

Umm... sharing and celebrating if someone has another grandchild or a baby and sharing the hurt when something tragic happens.

In his actions and deeds toward Fiona during her very tragic pain, Jess Edison demonstrated, not only an ethic of care, but also the characteristics of a servant-leader. Though few have had to bear the pain of Langley or experienced the kindness and empathetic gestures of Edison in such a situation, his service to her needs demonstrates many of the key characteristics central to the definition of servant leaders. Greenleaf

(1977) is credited with the idea of servant-leadership. In his introduction to *Focus on Leadership: Servant-Leadership for the 21st Century* (2002), Spears lists ten characteristics of a servant-leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Edison admits to being a student and believer in the power of servant-leadership.

I've never liked the word boss; but, you know, leadership is very much in my mind equal to servanthood, genuine servanthood, whether it's your family or friends or just people. Servanthood is a very altruistic stance, you look out for, you make a commitment to other people a priority over yourself. Servanthood could be like what I call appropriate parenting, and that is you want the best for kids you brought into your life, you even want the best so much so you're willing to sacrifice. And you're willing to do the ugly jobs, whether it's changing diapers or driving the older car around because you want your 16 year old to be in a safer car. It's sacrifice; servanthood is sacrifice, not martyrdom. It's a constant reevaluation of your priorities on a regular basis so that you come out of it believing that you're going to impact others because of your servanthood.

As he spoke of his belief in servanthood, Edison referenced the story of Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East* (1956/1968). In that tale, the servant performs menial tasks, but he also sustains the travelers with his extraordinary presence, songs, and inspiration. Hesse's point is that the simple servant was, by his very nature, one who served, and in that service, he led. Edison's use of the reference gives away his own study of servant-

leadership because it is the very story that Greenleaf (1977, 2002) references in his earliest origins and definitions of servant-leadership.

Closely related to the goals of servant-leadership are the *gemeinschaft* ideas of Pohly (1993), director of the Center for Supervisory Studies of the United Theological Seminary. He describes supervision from a pastoral platform. He defines pastoral supervision as:

Doing and reflecting on ministry in which a supervisor (teacher) and one or more supervisees (learners) covenant together to reflect critically on their ministry as a way of growing in self-awareness, ministering competence, theological understanding and Christian commitment (p. 75).

Pohly further describes supervision as “covenantal, reflective, and intentional.” These terms, when applied to the situation at Suburban, shed light on the reciprocal nature of the servanthood that has evolved. Pohly explains that supervision is pastoral in the sense that it is shepherding in nature and involves an exchange of care between supervisor and supervised. He further shares that supervision is a way of practicing ministry because “it provides a way for persons to engage in the same ministry as colleagues, as co-participants” (p. 75-76). It is covenantal because it occurs in a setting where people agree to serve together and hold one another accountable. It is reflective because the nature of the work demands that both parties constantly reflect critically on the ministry of the growth of those in the community. Finally, it is intentional because it requires people to understand their roles and work to intensify them (Pohly, 1993).

While Edison was the shepherd or servant in the case of Langley, as Pohly's (1993) work suggests, the role of caregiver has also been turned on Edison at a time when he needed to be ministered to.

Several years ago, Edison's niece attended Suburban. A victim of cystic fibrosis, the young girl's health declined rapidly during her early adolescence. Finally, during her sixth grade year, she succumbed to the disease. Like the bombing, almost every faculty member present at that time mentioned the event as one that tested the strength of the faculty. All also spoke of the traumatic pain it caused Edison. In fact, most often, it was Jess' relation to the child that was mentioned even before the child's mother, who was a teacher in the school at the time. All did recall the efforts the faculty made to serve the family's needs, including fundraising and helping in the home. "It was tough," said sixth grade teacher Linda Dawson. "We tried to do what we could, but there really wasn't anything we could do to ease the pain."

Edison, known for his deeply emotional connections to family and children, did feel comforted by the efforts of the faculty; he felt their efforts to minister to him in his sadness. Remembered as an outward sign, a symbolic gesture of the reciprocated care and appreciation that Pohly (1993) refers to as covenantal, Edison cited the occasion as a sign to him that he had been successful in his mission to serve others.

The best example of a measure of what I consider success was when my niece died and so many people came to her funeral. They come out of respect to her, but also, I think, to me; and she was just my niece. So many people didn't even know Abby, but they came out of respect because they knew me. And you know, we didn't go to the same church necessarily, and we didn't live in the same

neighborhood, but the thing that caused us to be connected was Suburban. To me, a showing of compassion and caring like that, speaks volumes more than any kind of rating scale, or poll, or questionnaire or something like that.

Those whom Edison sought to serve had chosen to serve him in a covenantal act of caring. Who is to say whether or not Edison's example as a shepherd is what makes the difference? But Katherine Sutter, the in-school suspension teacher recently turned English teacher notes, "We happen to have a principal who encourages our staff to bond and to support one another during both times of happiness and sadness. He leads in that by example."

Celebrations - Communities of memory are sustained through grief and tragedy in part by the memories generated in happier times. Celebrations within the community become relished experiences that are key in the mix of "human chemicals" that create the bonds of community of memory. One of those times of happiness Sutter referenced was also a fondly recalled occasion for every other teacher with whom I spoke, the 25th year reunion. Sutter called it, "Twenty Five Years of Excellence." The reunion was actually the second grand gathering of its sort in Suburban's history. On the occasion of the school's 10th anniversary, teachers also gathered, and Edison was present for that one. The 25th, however, was truly grand. The librarian recounted, "We made a master list of people who used to work here. So everybody took a list and tried to call people they knew. We called everyone: teachers, counselors, secretaries, basically anybody who had worked here." English teacher Dawson recalled, "It was great. We had a speaker and dinner. Just lots of visiting and reminiscing. It was surprising how quickly we all fell

back into the familiar roles and friendships [with departed teachers] that had waned over the years.”

Events like the reunion are intentionally planned. Teason surmises, “Friendships among coworkers are predictable. But I think Jess strengthens the relationships among the teachers or at least encourages them by planning events like the reunion.” She pointed out an interesting conflict in Edison’s involvement with social gatherings such as the reunion. “Everyone says he doesn’t really even like social gatherings. So it’s weird that he kind of instigates so many things like the reunion, the book group, and – I don’t know if he’s behind them – but all the showers and various celebrations.”

Another rather large social event that Edison instigated was “Blue Ribbons in the Backyard,” the celebration of Suburban’s designation as a 1996 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. Over 1500 students, parents, former and present teachers, state and local dignitaries gathered in the “backyard,” actually the practice football field, to rejoice on the occasion of the presentation of the national recognition. Read aloud to the gathered crowd was the announcement of Secretary of Education Richard Q. Riley (1996): “These schools are testimony to the successes we can have in American education if we work together to raise standards and focus on the basics of better schools. Each of them has demonstrated the key ingredients for excellence” (p. 1).

Those ingredients that Suburban celebrated that day included the following:

- Challenging academic standards and a rigorous curriculum for all students,
- A disciplined, supportive, safe and drug-free environment,
- Participatory leadership and a strong partnership among the family, school and community,

- Excellent teaching and an environment that strengthens teacher skills and improvement
- Low dropout rates and documented student achievement (U. S. Department of Education, 1996, p.1)

As with other celebrations in Suburban's history, the event was attended by many former members of the school's community as well as the current members, illustrating again the enduring nature of the connections of the relationships at the school. In fact, as part of the program, former students addressed their younger cohorts to extol the advantaged position they felt the school's support had placed them in. The school's original principal also shared reflections of the growth and progress of the school since its beginning.

As both the tragedy of the loss of life and the joy of the celebrations illustrate, the community of memory involves, not only those present, but also those departed, as many former staff and students returned to Suburban to join in the school's emotional experiences of joy and sadness.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study is to bring understanding to the role of relationships initiated and nurtured by a principal with the teachers in building a school's capacity for success. By scaffolding the findings on the structure of Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory, the role of the relationships is illuminated in their connections with the communities of relationship, place, mind, and memory. Key attributes of individuals within the community as well as of the whole community became apparent as the data uncovered the characteristics that make this school worthy of study. Those attributes

include the regard for family, selflessness, communication, the ethic of care demonstrated in a variety of ways from touch to prayer, compassion, learning and growth, respect, servanthood, patience, collaboration, introspection, autonomy, trust, celebration, security, and stability. Together, the characteristics supply the support necessary for schools to withstand the pressures and demands of trying international times, sparse financial support, increased requirements for standards based performance, and the high expectations that should be held for every public school.

CHAPTER V

ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

From the inner sanctum of the teachers' lounge, a jumble of laughter and conversation tumbled out into the labyrinth of halls behind the administrative complex of offices, signaling the beginning of the eighth grade lunch period and the predictable congregation of eighth grade teachers.

A youngish female voice quizzed an older male who was laughing as he tried to answer.

"Aren't you kind of intimidated by him? By Jess? He's huge! I could hardly answer my interview questions I was so nervous. I'm surprised I got the job," the first year, 22 year-old teacher queried.

"Intimidated by Jess? Just because he's a 6 foot, 1 inch, 300 pound bald headed, full bearded mountain looking man? Naw ... Try thinking of him as more like Clifford than King Kong, " answered the eighth grade history teacher of 21 years. "He just looks intimidating. Once you get to know him, you realize he is as emotional as your grandma, as whimsical as your toddler, and as genuinely concerned for your well-being as your own mother."

"Really?" the young woman replied in surprise.

"Absolutely!"¹

¹ The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

Introduction to Feminist Leadership Frameworks

While the conceptual framework of Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory provides a solid scaffold for understanding a great deal of what has unfolded at Suburban Middle School, it does not allow us to address one salient issue that emerged from the data. That issue is gender.

By looking through the lens of the feminist leadership framework, a richer, fuller picture of what is happening with Jess Edison's leadership style comes into focus. In addition, Gilmore's (1982) application of the Bowen family model of community and DeLange's (personal communication, January 14, 2002) nested relationships provide additional insight to the Sergiovanni framework.

Nested Relationships

First of all, the term that DeLange (2002) employs to explain the bonds found in all of creation, *nested relationships*, helps to explain the power that is generated from the principal-teacher relationships present at Suburban Middle School. While those relationships are key to the capacity building in this high performing school, they do not stand alone.

DeLange (2002) from the faculty of science at the University of Pretoria speaks to this notion of *nested relationships*. As a scientist, he has followed the notion of nested relationships for about 40 years, finding examples of it in such diverse fields of study as language, music, chemistry, biology, economy, and theology. He compares the bonds of a community to those found in soils.

Erosion happens in soils wherever their nested relationships get broken.

Similarly, when nested relationships in a community break down, its spirituality gets eroded. In other words, when parts get nested by relationships into a whole, something emerges which all the parts without these relationships would not have. (personal communication, January 14, 2002)

As a student and proponent of the ideas about “learning organizations,” DeLange, a frequent contributor to the internet dialog discussions of learning organizations hosted by Richard Karash (<http://www.learning-org.com/archives.html>), he believes that the environment created by a learning organization is the most fertile setting for the nested relationships that are born from the principal-teacher relationships to grow and evolve. Senge (1990), another proponent of learning organizations with whom DeLange aligns himself, defines a learning organization as “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” (p. 14).

Thus, by introducing the term *nested relationships* to the consideration of principal-teacher relationships, the role of relationships in a school community now paints a broader brush stroke than the single hair of the brush of simpler term *relationships*.

Barth (2001) found the same to be true. He noted, “The relationship between teacher and principal seems to have an extraordinary amplifying effect. For better or for worse, it models what all relationships in the school will be” (p. 106). Resorting to the word pictures that principal Edison likes to employ, imagine the concentric circles that resonate one outward past the one before it, created on a quiet lake when a pebble is tossed on the still. Each circle builds on the one just before it, amplifying its effect, one

from the other. Another picture has been stirring in my own mind as I have read and reread the references to “nested relationships.” That is the picture of the Russian nesting dolls, called *matryoshka* in Russian. The word *matryoshka* comes from a very popular female name. Scholars trace this name to the Latin root “mater,” meaning mother. From the Russian usage, this name was associated with the image of a mother of a big peasant family (<http://russian-crafts.com/nest/history/name.html>). The matryoshka of the nesting dolls was portrayed as a very healthy woman with a portly figure, not unlike and coincidentally, Edison.

Ethic of Care

Whether coincidence or not, this metaphor evokes, if only by way of a physical picture, an image of Edison, now with a female persona or image connected to him, and this suggestion sends us back to the literature of feminist ethics, where the ethic of care is central. As Noddings (1992) elaborates on this notion in *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, she discusses the domains of caring. “We need a scheme that speaks to the existential heart of life – one that draws attention to our passions, attitudes, connections, concerns, and experienced responsibilities” (p. 47). Her words evoke the word picture of the pebble in the lake as she proposes the nested or webbed relationships of the widening domains or spheres of caring with which education should be concerned. The rippling pools of Noddings’ expand from the self outward to the family, next to the community and beyond to the ecosystem of the planet (Great Ideas in Education, n.d.), each sphere rich and complex, each level amplifying the other.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

This image revives the premise of the Bowen Family Systems Theory (Gilmore, 1982), which speaks of interlocking triangles of relationships. Using Noddings' (1992) terms and applying to Bowen, one triangle might be principal, teacher, student. This triangle could interlock, then, using the student and teacher line as the base of a second triangle with family creating the third "angle" of the triangle.

These interlocking triangles that Bowen describes explain how an outlier at Suburban can still remain part of the community. It also gives a theory to the phenomena that Edison described (Fig. A).

There are key teachers that I really feel like I have to be successful with because they are relationship oriented people. And their success with relationships can be my success with relationships if I'm successful with them. If they're successful with a teacher who might be difficult for me, then I'm successful with that teacher too, indirectly.

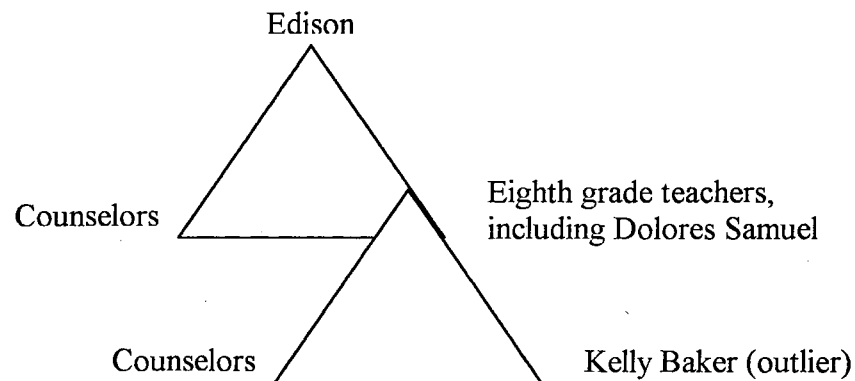
If Dolores Samuel is successful with certain teachers that I have not been able to build up success with, then, my success with Dolores allows me to access her success. Again, not in a manipulative or wrong way. It's just that if I can't run the Christmas lights to run this way to get the light on this extension cord, then maybe I use the other extension cord to run the lights this other way then maybe I can get the effect I want. And, you know, a person's credibility. Who was it, Brad Henry, just got nominated and he had a second effort by establishing himself with Barry Switzer whose credibility or like-ability helped Brad Henry

come from behind and win that election. I'm sure that had a major part in it.

That's what I call earning success in a different way.

Edison's extension cord is the interlocking triangle piece. He admits having had a difficult time making a connection with Baker, and she confirms the uneasiness in their relationship. So, he relies on the long-standing relationship Baker has with Dolores Samuel and the morning coffee klatches they share with other teachers to make up for fact that Baker is not part of one of his many interlocking triangles. Out of that group, another triangle may be present; and all triangles of relationships interlock with one another.

Figure A



The Bowen Family Systems Theory also helps explain the emotional element Edison refers to as “emotional maturity.” Edison describes the greatest weakness at Suburban as being a result of the varying maturity levels of the people in the building. He believes that when the members of the organization are at a higher level of maturity the organization is more powerful because immaturity leads to what he calls “some very dangerous behavior characteristics, like jealousy.” The Bowen Theory looks at schools as “emotional systems.” Gilbert (1992) describes the school as an emotional unit: “The

emotional unit [is] a group of individuals who, by virtue of time spent together are involved in meaningful relationships” (p. 182).

The “meaningful relationships” present in a school like Suburban do not necessarily require the teachers’ involvement outside of the school setting. In fact, secure, differentiated individuals are comfortable choosing to affiliate or not in full or to a lesser degree. Some, like Liv Teason, are on the smorgasbord plan. She enjoys the after-school book group and an occasional gathering such as one teacher’s annual Halloween party. However, generally she chooses not to bring her school friendships outside the school day. “I would say my relationships are more in school. It’s not that I don’t want to have relationships outside of school, but I don’t have kids, and I don’t have, you know, there’s not another couple that we would hang out with. Not that we wouldn’t; it just has never happened.” Clearly, by the level of her involvement as chair of the professional development committee and the trust Edison has vested in her in that position, there is no expectation for outside school involvement. Her contributions to the faculty as a professional are valued and respected with no further expectation for engagement.

The Bowen Theory examines several elements of the emotional relationship system, particularly key in a school, including level of differentiation and level of organizational anxiety. A member of an organization who demonstrates self-differentiation is able to maintain a sense of independence within the system. The Bowen theory states, “The level of differentiation describes varying levels of human adaptability (Kerr, 1982, p. 5). Likewise, the differentiation the members of an organization demonstrate characterize the entire system. “Better differentiated systems are more able

to handle periods of anxiety or poor functioning in a member or members without the whole system coming apart at the seams” (p. 6). Papero (1990) notes that differentiation of self “addresses how people differ from one another in terms of their sensitivity to one another and their varying abilities to preserve a degree of autonomy in the face of pressures for togetherness” (p. 45). The self-differentiated individual is also able to avoid the influence of chronic anxiety in the emotional system while at the same time remaining an integral part of the system. A principal who is able to maintain self-differentiation demonstrates objectivity. Dillow (1996) describes that leader:

He/she is more likely to see the behavior of others at school objectively, to operate on the basis of fact rather than on subjective perceptions of people and interpretations of their motives, and to have a “built-in” long-range perspective on the growth and development of both individuals and institutions as well as an objective understanding of the history of the school and its larger social context.

Levels of differentiation also determine an administrator’s ability to see objectively his or her own part in emotional process and to assume responsibility for managing his/her reactivity while maintaining awareness of his/her own emotional influence on people. (pp. 131-132)

Turning from this understanding of a school as an emotional organization and the understanding of the leader and followers at varying levels of self-differentiation, I return to the model of situational leadership. All things considered, I am led to conclude that Edison leads from out of a contingency theory, specifically situational leadership.

Situational Leadership

In Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) original model of situational leadership as well as the refined versions coming out of Hersey's (1984) Center for Leadership Studies, the leader determines the most effective means and motivations to employ with each individual based on the follower's level of maturity. While Blanchard and Hersey do employ "relationship" terminology, specifically the use of either leadership *task* behaviors or leadership *relationship* behaviors, these terms are part of the discussion of how a leader moves a staff toward the mission or through particular activities. I believe that what we see at work at Suburban is an administrator who intentionally initiates and nurtures relationships with his teachers and then uses the knowledge and understanding he gains from those relationships to make more appropriate decisions as to the level of direction, more task or more relational, that each teacher needs to be a more productive member of the staff. Edison admits, "I've always reflected a lot because I like to think about things that I read, and I like to predict people's behavior. One way you can predict it is to study 'em and think about it." In using the "information of the relationship" to guide each teacher, Edison is more likely to lead each teacher and all teachers to a greater level of effectiveness. This, then, has an impact on the capacity of the organization, since each teacher is more likely to rise to his/her highest and most growthful state of performance. With the emphasis on community at Suburban, more often translated to family in their own discourse, the close relational proximity of the teachers and the teaming present in a middle school allows for the success of one to encourage another. As Edison says, "People don't want to be left out, sometimes they take steps in changing themselves to be included." In changing themselves, as Edison says "toward a greater

commitment to the organization or culture,” they increase the school’s capacity for success.

The efforts employed along the way to increased capacity and growth have, in fact, proven to be those valued by symbolic interactionism: “The world of the symbolic interactionist ... is a peaceable and certainly growthful world. It is a world of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication, in and out of which we come to be persons and to live as persons” (Crotty, 1998, p. 63).

The Gendered Organizational Perspective

It would be comfortable to leave this discussion as is, but not, perhaps, wise. Before proceeding on, a first step back to problematize the situation is necessary. For some readers, particularly those viewing this research from a feminist perspective, there may be some disconcerting issues that bear review.

While I have represented what to some would seem an almost utopian community, others may view it as a gendered process where “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity” (Acker, 1990) are employed by the male administrator to ensure subservience or acquiescence among the largely female (54 of the 64 teachers) teaching staff.

Clearly, gender, as suggested by the imbalance of male to female representation among the teaching staff, has the potential to be a salient issue in this case study. Scott (1986) suggests that gender is a strong and frequently employed symbol for “power,” and Acker (1990) describes *gender* as specific, patterned differences, that center on the subordination of women, at either a concrete or symbolic level.

Acker provides four sets of processes that gendered organizations employ to perpetuate the male dominant paradigm. By considering these processes and their employment at Suburban, the act of problematizing this situation might be better anchored in issue and act rather than emotion and perception. Following, I will present the four processes as well as a discussion of each of them

The first process that a “gendered organization” might employ is the production of gender divisions. This can be done by the highest levels of the organization, specifically the district level in this situation, where pay scales and promotions are set or at the lower levels, the school site, where committee placements, leadership positions, and extra duty or paid duty assignments are delegated. As Kanter (1977) points out from the corporate world, this results in hierarchies, power, and subordination.

Isolating this issue, we are reminded that both pay and promotions are decided primarily at the district level, with the teachers’ organization providing input on both contract specifics and pay during the annual contract negotiation process. The exception is the input the principal is allowed in the hiring of teachers and assistant principals, usually, with occasional administrative placement exceptions, the singular vote and decision. In the case of Suburban, Edison has hired women as his assistants at almost every opportunity in the past, with just one male among all the others who were female. Currently, both men and women serve on all building-wide committees in about the same proportion as their total numbers would suggest. Appointments to paid, stipend supported or by-the-hour extra duties are usually delegated by Edison, sometimes his assistants, but they are assigned by seniority per the negotiated contract; or, in the case of stipend positions, such as coaching or yearbook advisor, they are assigned to the few who

are interested, which generally does not include more than one interested teacher per opening. One admittedly traditionally gendered group of placements rests in the coaching ranks where men usually coach boys and women usually coach girls. This is generally the case at Suburban; however, there have been breaks in that practice recently. Edison asked Linda Dawson to partner with a male coach to lead the boys' eighth grade baseball team and less unusual is the current situation of a male coaching the girls' basketball team. In the case of gendered assignments to coaching positions, it has not been the principal who has perpetuated the status quo so much as the stereotypical self-assigned roles that the teachers perpetuate in their choice not to volunteer to coach teams of the opposite gender. Of course, attitudes of the parents and students do not make such a decision to do so any easier. Nonetheless, gender patterning does not appear to be a practice of Edison. His appointments are disproportionately in favor of the women on staff.

Acker's (1990) second set of processes typical of a gendered organization deals with the creation of symbols and images that justify gender divisions. Two symbols come to mind in the consideration of Edison: his dress and his office.

In a gendered organization, the leader is generally portrayed as compelling, strong-minded, rational, and forceful (Calas & Smircich, 1989). Edison referred to the symbolic representation of such a leader as a "suit." Edison shared:

I've tried to learn to control my own verbal language to a certain extent. I've done that in several ways. You know because I'm a big guy, and I've got this shaved head, and this beard. And I know I can intimidate people if I'm not careful. So, I don't wear power suits. For 15 years, as both an assistant principal and here, I've

worn rather harmless ties sometimes that could be talked about or joked about because of the animated characters on them. And in the last couple of years, I've gotten to where I'm wearin' Hawaiian shirts. Just last year a teacher said, "You know, Jess, I like your shirt. You seem more approachable." I've never worn a suit or sport coat 'cause I hate those. I hear people who wear those described as 'the suit.' Well, I don't want to be described as a suit. I want to be able to be approached.

Edison's office, "the principal's office," as it is referred to in common references from comic books to sit coms, is not a seat of gender based power. It is filled with books, tiny figurines of animals and characters reading books, quotations about books, a bowl of candy the size of a fish tank, and countless McDonald-land and Disney trinkets. On the issue of power, Edison explained:

I'm very conscious of the potential for using power for power's sake. When it is necessary, I choose to use influence. In fact, I look for ways to balance power issues. I know there are people who are not comfortable coming in my office; so I look for ways to neutralize my office to offset the perception of power. That's why I have a rocking chair for guests. There are Mickey Mouse figurines, a candy dish, family photos, lots of books. They're all there to set a comfortable tone.

The third set of processes that Acker suggests reproduces gendered organizations are interactions between all the individuals of an organization: women and men, women and women, men and men. This process is about creating levels of dominance and subordination and creating alliances and exclusions through interactions.

Looking at this process is a bit more perplexing when viewing the interactions at Suburban. More than political alliances, I see alliances based in friendships that entertain particular interactions. Some friendships, like the morning coffee klatch group in the seventh grade hall, are built on commonalities like church affiliation, similar ages, or like-curriculums, and their interactions reflect the commonalities. Other alliances may seem gender specific, but on closer examination, they are interest specific, like the talk of football coaches. However, when everyone sits together at the big round lunch table in the teachers' lounge, there seem to be no exclusionary chats. The football coaches talk to the librarians, the drama teacher to the science teacher, and the principal to anyone who is still in the lounge after everyone else is gone, because only after all the lunch periods are over does the principal get to sit down and eat.

Relationships between Edison and the teachers do not appear to be based on gender. Twenty-one year Suburban veteran Hood, reflected on his relationship with Edison.

I never felt comfortable being buddies with him, or even trying to pursue any kind of a ... He's somebody I would love to hang out with because I just think he's hilarious, and we've got a lot in common. And he's a very interesting person, but I just, I've always had that, a little bit of a problem with administration to be honest. You know, I never wanted to overstep my bounds and yet I really know that it's really not a worry, because I know he's got good relationships with a number of people. It's probably me because he has encouraged all of us to stop by more often and stuff.

While Hood's comments do suggest that he feels a certain subservience or boss-employee stigma, it does not appear to have been established as a result of gender, but rather more a matter of self-imposed cultural expectations. What his comments do show is that at Suburban, it is not the men versus the women.

Edison is aware of the dominance issue, gender related as well as positional authority, that his role invites. It is particularly sensitive with Edison because of his imposing stature, bald head, and bushy graying beard. While he certainly has no control over his height or formidable frame, the shaved head and full beard are a choice he has made. "Several years back, I decided that by growing my beard out and keeping it a little less trimmed, I could use that as a message to people to say I'm not the stereotypical administrator. I'm not who they think I should be." It was an effort, he explained, to encourage people to accept him for who he is.

By contrast, in casual conversations with people, he takes special measures to misrepresent who he is. That is, especially when he is speaking to women, he takes care to lessen his bulk by leaning on a counter or sitting down and, in effect, making himself shorter, less powerful appearing. Edison shared,

Depending on the situation, when a teacher needs to talk to me, I often choose to sit while the teacher stands next to me. That places me much closer to eye level with most of my teachers compared to when we're both standing. When they are standing and I am sitting or both of us are sitting, I think they have a keener sense of my attention to their concerns. Their perception is one of me listening.

Acker's (1990) fourth dimension of gendering deals with the mindset of individuals as they understand their work and their opportunities with regard to the

expectations and rewards or punishments for culturally accepted standards of gender appropriate behaviors and attitudes (Pringle, 1989). In my dealings with this community, I have not observed any cases of this process. While there are both a few unmarried men and women on staff, their sexual preference has never been an issue, and I do not believe any have changed their behaviors to satisfy perceived discrimination based on gender. A tattooed woman's ankle is about the most radical behavior I observed among the adults, and it was not hidden or kept from the view or judgment of Edison, a fact that I believe demonstrates an absence of fear of discrimination.

A final question must be asked regarding the racial and gender homogeneity of the staff. Of the 64 teachers, only one is Hispanic, the remaining Caucasian, with some Native American blood claimed by several though none more than 1/16th. By contrast, the student body includes 902 students, with just under 90% being Caucasian. While the family or community culture currently seems to be a fit for everyone at Suburban, what if someone outside the very homogeneous group were to be hired and feel, by their cultural difference, as an outsider? How would the community react to that situation?

Here, we can only conjecture. First, Edison would likely be welcoming, and in the way of his admitted philosophy, seek to bring the newcomer into the culture. While he may now be firmly entrenched in the life and culture of the town of Suburban, he has not spent all of his life in the comparatively homogeneous culture of this southwest state. Edison's adolescent years were spent with his family in Santa Maria, CA, a richly diverse community with a significant Hispanic population. His "letters from the principal" are replete with references to the Hispanic friends of his youth -- Juan, Jose, Alberto, and Diego. Do Edison's hiring practices eliminate people of color? More likely the town of

Suburban's reputation as a mostly white community discourages applicants to the district. According to the district's associate superintendent of personnel, the limited number of minorities in the applicant pool, then, does not translate into multiple opportunities for the interested administrators, a situation exacerbated by the hundreds of applications typically received and filed at the district each year, none indicating race as a distinguishing factor.

Currently, the staff at Suburban includes a Puerto Rican and a Belgian woman. While neither of these is far from the mainstream culture and both would be classified as Caucasian, they do both represent differences. The Puerto Rican's appearance and accent identify her as a native Spanish speaker. The Belgian is a petite, older lady with a heavy accent. She is multi-lingual. If Edison can be accused of anything with regard to these two women of "difference," it can only be of seeking to bring them into the "fold" through socialization, not acculturation. Their own cultures have been cause for celebration and honor, as each has been encouraged to share about their native countries.

As for the gender homogeneity among the staff of Suburban, the reality of the situation is very simple. Men are less likely to apply to teach the middle school grade levels than are women. Even fewer men can be found in an elementary school; and more men teachers are in high school classrooms. More than anything, it is a reflection of culturally imposed stereotypes and economic realities. Men are not encouraged to consider teaching young children; and the men who do pursue common education either gravitate to the high school positions that offer coaching opportunities or move into administration for the added financial incentives.

“I look for the best applicant,” said Edison. “I don’t purposely avoid minorities or men. They’re just not there. In 14 years, I’ve had only one opportunity to hire a highly qualified male as my assistant principal.”

Related to the gender issue and concerns of possible intentional male dominance and power is the demonstrated affective nature of Edison. I believe it is Edison’s tendencies toward leadership behaviors that are considered more feminine that balance any tendencies, perceived or real, toward unfair dominance. Edison, as with so many other issues, has reflected on his own leadership style. He explains his own more feminine leadership style in relating his own his childhood experience.

You know, though I always wished for a stronger connection to my dad, the best connection I had as a child with any adult was with my mom. I think that has had a lasting and significant effect on the man I am.

Relational Leadership

The research and practice of Regan and Brooks (1995) explains Edison’s connection with his mother and his leadership style. Regan and Brooks (1995) begin their book, *Out of Women’s Experience: Creating Relational Leadership* with attention to the importance of language from the feminist perspective. Their comment is especially interesting in light of Edison’s reference to his relationship with his mother. Regan and Brooks refer to the work of Smith (1990) who raises the issue of “the undernurtured language of woman’s voice.” According to Smith, women develop language through an early attachment and ongoing relationship with their mothers. At the same time, they develop what Smith refers to as a “fathertongue,” which is born of their relationship with

their fathers. The authors go on to say that women struggle with their “split language,” trying to use their women’s voice as a bridge in predominantly male settings (p. 3). It seems to me that Edison’s language may also be an outgrowth of his early relationship with his mother, someone whom he said “wanted to give everyone a Christmas present and see that everyone was taken care of.”

According to Regan and Brooks (1995), Edison demonstrates what they call relational leadership. They explain that “relational leadership is created in practice by the union of the feminist attributes with the traditional practices described in works such as those by Senge (1990), Peters and Waterman (1982), and Sergiovanni (1992)” (p. 2). They further suggest that the attributes of relational leadership are accessible and valuable to not only women but also men. I believe that Edison’s practice of relational leadership undergirds all of his other strengths, and likely weaknesses, as a leader.

The five attributes that Regan and Brooks (1995) assign to relational leadership include collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision. *Collaboration* is described “as the ability to work in a group, eliciting and offering support to each other member, creating a synergistic environment for everyone” (p. 26). It was teacher Ronnie Hood who described the atmosphere at Suburban as one of synergy. *Caring* is defined “as the development of an affinity for the world and the people in it, translating moral commitment to action on behalf of others” (p. 27). The care that Edison demonstrates for both the students at Suburban and the staff is deep and genuine. *Courage* is defined “as the capacity to move ahead into the unknown, testing new ideas in the world of practice” (p. 30). It involves risk-taking. I think this translates to the trust the Edison places in his staff, taking the risk each day to believe in them and their commitment to the shared

mission. *Intuition* is “the ability to give equal weight to experience and abstraction, mind and heart” (p. 32). The intensely reflective nature that Edison demonstrates, his devotion to reading, and his enormous heart for the suffering of his community are all signs of the relational leadership trait of intuition. Finally, *vision* is “the ability to formulate and express original ideas, enabling others to consider options in new and different ways” (p. 36). The authors consider it a process whereby disparate points of view are synthesized to “create a totally new and progressive position” (p. 36). At Suburban, the process has been in progress for over a decade, and it continues to evolve under Edison’s direction. I believe that Edison does practice relational leadership and demonstrates all five of the attributes put forward by Regan and Brooks (1995). This helps explain how to a great degree, despite the fact that he is in a position of power and potential dominance over a building filled with women, he does not take unfair advantage. Rather he seeks the collaboration of the women, and men, in the best interests of the children they serve together.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Breaking through the screeches of predictable feedback on the hotel meeting room sound system, the workshop coordinator motioned to the distracted “suits” in the audience. Haltingly, the audience members departed from their networking conversations and returned to the real business of the day.

“Test, test, excuse me? Oh! It’s on? For real? Well, I guess that’s what we’re here to talk about today, tests! In a manner of speaking! Welcome to CCOSA’s [Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrator’s] first ‘Gathering of Excellence.’ In a few minutes, we will break into groups: elementary, middle, and high school. Each group will be led by principals representing three of the top scoring schools based on the recently released state scores on the Academic Performance Index.”

After a few minutes of predictable banter at the microphone, middle school administrators were instructed to follow the signs to the Redbud Room. I found my seat quickly near the front, unfettered by familiar faces. I didn’t see anyone I knew ... except, as I soon realized, one of the three speakers, Karen Good. She was a fellow principal from the same district as Jess Edison and me.

“Strange,” I thought. “Her school’s scores aren’t as high as Edison’s. I wonder ...”

“Hey!” a familiar voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Hi!" I answered Lisa Molliganer, Edison's assistant principal. "I didn't realize you were here. Did you see Karen up there?" I said, nodding toward the podium. "Why isn't Jess on the program? You guys have higher scores than they do."

"Yeah. I guess the CCOSA director called him; but, you know, this the first anniversary of Mary's ... You know, our sixth grade counselor? Mmmhmm ... Mary's baby's death. So Jess didn't want to leave the building today. Besides, you know how he is about these big gatherings. Hates 'em."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. But isn't Mary's husband the band director at Karen's school?" I thought out loud.

"Well, now that you mention it," Molliganer answered. "I guess he is."

"Hmmm," I mumbled as I wondered to myself why it wouldn't occur to Karen to stay back at her school on the anniversary of her band director's baby's death. Returning to the conversation, I added, "Oh, hey, speaking of band, tell Jess congratulations on that honor from the Music Educator's Association."⁷

A Review

Recognitions from our peer groups, like the Music Educator's Association award to Edison, are just one sign that we are meeting certain standards of excellence. While they are not generally based on quantitative measures, they are symbols of measures of the heart: honor, trust, gratitude, and appreciation. They are often times symbols of the presence of relationships.

The purpose of this case study is to understand the role of principal-teacher relationships in a school's ability to build its organizational capacity for effectiveness,

⁷ The preceding vignette is a fictionalized account, based on an actual event at Suburban school district.

hoping that this understanding might shed new light on the key challenge facing schools today, improving teaching and learning.

Now more than ever before, particularly in the wake of the “No Child Left Behind” legislation, the challenge to meet specific regional and national standards and demonstrate growth in high-stakes testing situations has created a problem for educators like no other. The added problem educational leaders face is determining which of the many tactics and recommendations they are given to ensure success for their schools will prove most fruitful.

Around the country, schools in various communities and educational climates face vastly different sets of interacting influences as they seek to improve teaching and learning. Existing circumstances at inner-city schools, fraught with poverty and transience, may face very different complications than those of their counterparts in rural or suburban areas. Study after study has been constructed to offer support to the nation’s more at-risk schools, those with what appear to be the greatest barriers, many related to socio-economic issues. However, far less research has been conducted on high-performing schools, research that would offer support to schools that seek continuous improvement beyond their already above-average standing. This study has undertaken the task of examining one high achieving, suburban middle school. It is a school like many others nearby and many others around the country; yet, this school, unlike others similar in many ways, has demonstrated particularly strong and continuous performance in both quantitative measures such as test scores and teacher turnover rates and qualitative measures such as self-reported teacher efficacy and culture-building. Thus, as I explained Chapter I, this study seeks to bring understanding to the role that

relationships, initiated and nurtured by a school's principal with the teachers, has played in continuously building its capacity for success.

In Chapter II, a relevant and in-depth literature review, followed the evolution of school leadership thought and practice from its genesis in classic organizational management pieces, on to more recent organizational models such as situational leadership, and finally to its current and more recent renditions, including those focused much more specifically on what Sergiovanni (1996) describes as *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*.

The methodology employed by this piece of qualitative research, a case study, was the focus of Chapter III. Issues such as site selection, data collection, research criteria and pragmatics were discussed in order to set the stage for reporting the findings in Chapter IV. Making connections to relevant literature as it applied, the information gleaned from observations, school documents, interviews, and on-site visits were reported. The findings were delivered from a scaffold constructed on the base of Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory, which includes communities of relationship, place, mind, and memory. While Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory provides a solid platform for understanding a great deal of what is happening at Suburban, additional literature is explored in Chapter V to add the feminist leadership perspective as well as an expanded view of the family systems theory and the idea of nested relationships.

Chapter VI now steps back from the research experience and reports the appropriate conclusions and recommendations related to this study and its supporting literature.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the answer to the research problem is best reported by returning to Creswell's (1998) advice and looking not simply at "the answer to the problem," but at what would "satisfy the need," a need that findings reveal this school has satiated where other schools still hunger.

Based on the findings, a partial answer to the research problem is found in the vignette that introduces Chapter I. In personnel discussions among the five middle school principals, Associate Superintendent Adams turned and remarked to the emotionally bedraggled, contract negotiation-ragged principal and said, "It's all about relationships."

The very fact that I chose this topic, relationships, as a research interest might lead the skeptical reader to wonder if I did not "know" what my conclusion would be at the onset of the exercise. The introductory vignette might add to that suspicion. While it certainly was a curiosity of mine, I had no idea how relationships would prove to weave a web-like support beneath the weight of demands that all schools, but particularly middle schools, must bear. In fact, my conclusion lends much greater insight to the role that relationships play in ensuring that a school can continuously increase its capacity for success.

In *Learning by Heart* (2001), Barth relates from his own research this observation: "Among adult relationships in schools, that between teacher and principal is decisive. I have found no characteristic of a good school more pervasive than healthy teacher-principal relationships" (p. 105). He further suggests that the nature and quality

of principal-teacher relationships is key to the capacity of a school to become a community of learners.

What has Edison done to create the community of learners at Suburban? He has consciously worked to create a culture of caring, created one relationship at a time, to build a strong foundation that would support the professional and personal growth of each member of the staff. The building blocks of that foundation, as demonstrated in the conversations, observations, and documents of Suburban have included trust, which breeds teacher autonomy; concern; credibility; service; communication, including the use of symbols; teamwork; appreciation; support, both personal and professional; stability; and the intentional nurturing of community. With the foundation firmly laid on these strong supports, each teacher is then in an optimal position to evolve personally and professionally. While other outside factors which cannot be mitigated from within the school walls may affect the rate at which any single teacher can evolve and mature, the setting within the school provides a best case scenario for each teacher's success. One teacher at a time and many teachers together, most operating from a perspective of personal duty to the good of the community, they create the inertia behind continuous capacity building that ensures that a successful school will continue to build its potential for repeated and enhanced successes.

First, this conclusion must include a look back at the research questions that guided this project.

What does a culture of relationships look like in a middle school setting?

To use the language of Suburban, a culture of relationships in a middle school setting looks like a family, a very large family. With the teaming structure that is in place

in a middle school, the family metaphor might be expanded to include the picture of an extended family. This would conjure up a word picture that paints a family with six or seven adult siblings, each with their own family, the team. All are emotionally tied to and warmly valued by the parent, a parent who values and nurtures relationships.

In this setting where there are five women to every man, nurturing is central to the heterosexual relationships, both personal and professional. The women have typically taken up familial roles likened to aunt or cousin relationships with the men teachers.

Edison describes the situation among the teachers:

I think typically the men feel like they receive nurturing attention from the females. When one of our men teachers divorced last year, his women teammates sent him home with dinner. Another group of women began a prayer circle just last week for the unborn baby of one of our young men teachers. They may be performing in societal roles and according to societal expectations, but more than that, they are simply acting out of genuine concern.

The culture of relationships includes celebrations and communal grieving. Its symbols are found in photographs, letters, notes, books, and gatherings. Language is the vehicle that drives the efforts to define and duplicate the culture.

2) What tools are employed to encourage interaction, community, and communication?

The most powerful tool employed to encourage interaction, community, and communication is language. Evidence of this is found in the principal's letters, the daily bulletin, the marquee at the school's roadside that announces the word of the week, a value-laden word like honesty or kindness, the use of books as a focus for community

gatherings, and the value placed on faculty gatherings as a stage for encouraging community and communication. The huge round table in the faculty lounge where no one sits alone and all face one another is both a tool and a symbol. It is a tool to allow for communication and a symbol that all around it are a team, a family.

3) How do relationships encourage the qualities that enhance a school's ability to increase its capacity for success?

It seems that it is not merely relationships that encourage the qualities that enhance a school's ability to increase its capacity for success. Rather, it is the nested or webbed relationships that build a strong foundation beneath the entire structure of the organization that encourages renewal and all that is best in a high performing school. The nested relationships are like the fertile soil that brings out the very best in any crop that is sown in it, whether the crop is professional teacher growth, academic excellence, family involvement, a safe environment, high expectations, or open communication. It is a rich soil that yields trust, which breeds teacher autonomy; concern; credibility; service, communication, including the use of symbols; teamwork; appreciation; support, both personal and professional; stability; service; and the intentional nurturing of community.

4) How is a school's potential for building capacity influenced by relationship building?

As Edison described it, the community that evolves from relationship building enjoys a phenomenon that encourages those who, for a variety of reasons, are outside the culture or perhaps not performing at the level of the agreed upon mission. Whether a teacher feels a need to join the book group just to see what everyone is talking about or to attend an optional technology workshop in order to learn the latest software that has earned

others on the team distinction, the community that relationships build encourages growth and growth builds capacity.

As the O'Day, Goertz, and Floden (1996) study on capacity building advocates, a building's greatest potential for success is multiplied exponentially when individual capacity is interdependent with organizational capacity. The communities of practice that the teachers engage in are formed by relationships with people of like goals. These communities of practice, then, can pursue the vision, knowledge, and resources that will directly impact student learning and growth.

5) *What are the symbols and metaphors of this culture of relationships?*

Suburban is a language rich environment. It is the language, a symbol itself, that provides the vehicle for many of the symbols and metaphors of Suburban. The principal's letters to students and faculty teem with stories of relationships, lessons, and the symbols of the culture. The certificates of recognition given to students by their teachers before the monthly early morning faculty meetings in the presence of their parents and siblings are symbols. Books, filled with the language of metaphor and symbolism, rest at the center of this culture that takes every possible opportunity to talk about stories.

The use of touch, by administrators, teachers, and children, is a symbol. Hugs of joy at the birth of a grandchild, embraces of consolation upon the news of an infirmed child, even a shared high-five between two lively eighth graders and their coach – all are symbols that this community demonstrates as part of its culture of relationships.

Also, photographs and artwork, from tiny thumbnail mug shots from the school pictures to wall-sized renditions of the book covers of visiting authors, symbolically depict the values of the culture. The subjects of the work are not places or things, but

people, the people of Suburban and many times their people -- their children, parents, or spouses.

The open door and bright lights of the principal's occupied office or the warm glow of the desk light glimmering from the corner of an otherwise dark, empty office stand as metaphor to the availability of the leader, to the exchange of information and emotion, and to relationships. A giant jar of M & M's standing ready to greet the grimmest of hands is a symbol of welcome. The comfortable, inviting oak rocker turned toward Edison's desk chair is a symbol of the intention of openness and interest in those who chose to share in conversation with the burly, but inviting principal.

The answers to these questions and all of the insight gleaned from this study satisfy the need for the purpose to this study, which was to bring understanding to the phenomena of relationships, initiated and nurtured by a principal with the school's teachers and to understand the role these relationships play in a school's ability to build its organizational capacity for effectiveness.

A key conclusion in this study is the role of "nested relationships" or the "web of relationships." Slightly different in the word picture they paint, but similar in the function they perform, these interlocking relationships serve as a foundation in the building of community. Sergiovanni's (1996) theory of community for schools, rooted in *gemeinschaft*, offers a sensible, though demanding, schema for shaping schools that can support the needs of a relationship rich environment. By encouraging the necessary conditions for a school that is a community by relationships, a community of place, a community of mind, and a community of memory, school leaders will find themselves in a welcoming environment for change, growth, and increasing capacity.

One factor that seems to play a role in the success of Suburban and its efforts to become a school community is the lengthy stay of the current principal at this site. Edison himself cites his longevity as having been a key factor in enhancing his faculty's ability to understand, predict, and trust him. Though it cannot be determined from any of the comments or research of this study, one must wonder if Edison's lengthy stay has had an impact on the similarly lengthy tenures of many of the teachers. Certainly, the stability these lengthy stays have yielded has been a factor in the establishment of relationships. There has been plenty of time to develop older relationships while initiating new ones. Thus, one implication of this study is that principals who demonstrate initial success should be allowed to remain at a single site as a means of increasing that school's capacity.

Another conclusion of this work is the demonstration of the value of teams. Well documented in the works of Senge (1990), Erb and Stevenson (1999), Guiton et al., (1995), and Jackson and Davis (2000), the benefits that teams ensure include increased organizational productivity, high teaching efficacy, a mechanism for translating academic standards into activities and strategies that ensure greater success, and, key to the relationship issue, the "emotional, moral, and intellectual support from a network of colleagues" (2000, p. 128) that enhances the opportunities made available for the benefit of all students. While the principal does not serve on every team, he/she serves on a representative number of teams and his/her assistants fill in for his presence on the remaining teams. Whether by presence or by proxy, the team membership is key in representing the principal's values and leadership.

While situational leadership may not prove most effective in every school setting or with every leader, it does appear to be demonstrating success at Suburban. Key here is the reflective, purposeful nature of the leader. Because factors relating to the “followers” are so central to this model of leadership, the relationship foundations established by the principal give him a greater insight to the readiness of the teachers to perform different tasks. Because the readiness to complete one task is not necessarily the same as for another, familiarity with the followers, with their abilities and willingness (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1969), enhances the potential for success of the leader, the follower, and the specific task. Both ability and willingness relate to what Edison referred to as the teachers’ “emotional maturity” as a potential complicating factor.

In conversation, Edison shared his recent review of *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) and his agreement with the significant themes. While this particular popular piece may not be considered the seminal or most academic work in this area, it does bring insight to some valuable lessons for leaders. Further, Edison’s mention of it brings to our attention the importance of a well-read, introspective, reflective, purposeful practitioner. It is a work, like many, many others, considered by Edison worthy of his attention and important to his own professional development. The implication being, that while situational leadership or “relational management” (p. 51), as Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2002) refer to it, may not be for everyone, it is what this particular leader has found to be most effective, given his strengths and his school’s staff and mission.

Finally, with regard to this particular principal and this particular school, it seems the only thing that Edison values and pampers more than relationships is the building

climate, which seems in his view to almost resonate from the harmony of the relationships present. While Suburban's test scores, the most concrete documentation of teaching and learning, are enviably high compared to all others and particularly to other schools of similar characteristics, I suspect they could be higher. I propose that by vigorously pursuing a result oriented plan such as that described in *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Dufour, Eaker, & Baker, 1998), Edison's teachers could increase their individual and institutional capacity even more. However, Edison disagrees with even the notion of this suggestion. He believes that over-analysis of test scores, practices like breaking down the reported scores by teacher – even if he kept the different teacher's students' scores confidential from one another – would cause competition to develop among the staff. He views the competition as harmful and divisive. He says, "Competition breaks down collaboration. Not everyone would be as mature in breaking down the state test results. There is already unhealthy competition among certain teachers, and breaking out the results would harm the climate, which would ultimately harm kids and inhibit learning." I understand Edison's comment and his philosophy. I just do not happen to agree with it. I think, from my observations, that the climate at Suburban could withstand more critical test analysis. I think the relationships currently in place would support that kind of professional scrutiny. However, the purpose of this research is not to propose new and improved practices, but to understand the ones currently in place at this already high-performing middle school, and I believe that goal has been accomplished.

Recommendations For Practice

Based on my study of Suburban Middle School, I recommend a leadership style that combines Sergiovanni's (1996) community theory and the feminist leadership attributes described by Noddings (1992) and Regan and Brooks (1996). Seeking to construct Sergiovanni's (1996) four communities -- of relationships, by place, by mind and by memory -- will create an atmosphere of trust and growth that brings out the best of all involved from the principal to the teachers to the children, especially when it is supported by feminist leadership characteristics.

Situational leadership, based on contingency theory, supported by a foundation of nested relationships creates fertile, growthful opportunities for teachers to extend and expand their practices and pedagogy. While this is a fruitful leadership model, it is also an exhausting one that requires careful attention and emotional investment on the part of the leader. Reflective practice on the part of the leader is a necessity, as is purposeful professional growth.

Recommendations For Research

A considerable bit of research and writing has focused on the role of relationships in the business world. However, by comparison, very little has been written of this phenomenon at work in schools. Sergiovanni (1992, 1994, 1996) has delved deepest into this subject, but his work needs to be explored through additional case studies that seek to apply his theory at both high performing and more challenged schools. A study that matches the principal behaviors and practices of the Lipsitz (1984) study with Sergiovanni's work would prove insightful. Toonies' (1887/1957) ideas of *gemeinschaft*

and *gesellschaft* also beg further exploration and application. It would be particularly illuminating to find an example of a school that has moved from *gesellschaft* to *gemeinschaft*.

In addition, I would recommend a study of the role of gender in the middle school principalship. Middle schools are just as their name implies, in the middle, in many ways. Where elementary principals are overwhelmingly female and high school principals are overwhelmingly male, the middle school is a hybrid. In Suburban's district, 40% of the middle schools are led by women. More "in-the-middleness" is the presence of the affective art of teaching. The clientele of elementary schools is one of beginnings. They are all about hugs and first time discoveries. High schools are more often a "handshake and a holler" social systems, more about endings, stepping off into beginnings. At the middle school, the kids are not quite little ones and not quite big ones. As a result, the adults in the building are forever jockeying their responses to meet the emotional and developmental needs of the in-betweeners. This fact has a significant implication for a middle school administrator. Given the emotional and developmental needs of a middle school child and the structures, such as teams, in place in a middle school, it seems a more affective oriented leader is the better fit. Further study into this issue would be fruitful. The differences in the way these philosophically collaborative organizations, middle schools, are run when a woman is at the helm versus her male counterpart is also an interesting issue. Valuable too would be a look at how the affective and gender issues in the elementary and high school principalships would play out.

Also interesting would be a study of the role of the assistant principal in the establishment of relationships in the school. Is the assistant an "extension" of the

principal. It would be valuable to discern if he/she were a separate member of the Bowen (1996) triangles or part of the principal's angle in the triad. The Bowen (1992, 1996) theories are interesting when applied to school communities. Little research appears to have followed this Georgetown University Center born theory into common education.

The extended time that Edison has spent at Suburban is somewhat unusual. A study of the principal's tenure and what impact it may have on the school climate and culture as well as the teachers' tenure would add to the school leadership and culture literature. Another idea that would delve into the area of culture would be a look at the relational behaviors of learning communities.

Burlingame (1999) suggested that "if you wrote this section [Recommendations] honestly, you knew what your next piece of research should be. It was the one you recommended be done next" (p. 1). If I were to take his advice, I would suggest that a follow-up ethnography be conducted at Suburban with Jess Edison as the 2003 version of Wolcott's (1973) *Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography*. I think this would be the very most insightful piece to add to the literature of relationships. It would be in much greater detail, expand over a lengthier period of time, and allow for a more complete picture of Edison's practices.

Finally, I have to admit it would be a toss up as to which piece I would make my next, the Wolcott-esque ethnography or a look specifically at "nested relationships" in a school. My study of Suburban opened the door to this fascinating concept. Just reading the lengthy email, turned essay, I received from the DeLange (2002) of the University of Pretoria made me silly with possibilities. While I thoroughly enjoyed the research I

conducted for this work, I think a piece centered squarely on “nested relationships” would be even more intriguing.

REFLECTIONS

Important in reading, understanding, synthesizing, and even critiquing the findings of this research are some significant questions that lend illumination as to how I came to my conclusions:

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the research questions?
2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology and my employment of it?
3. What were the strengths and weaknesses of my analytical practices?

To the first question, the strengths of the research questions were reshaped dramatically as a result of some penetrating and thoughtfully experienced guidance from my dissertation committee. The resulting questions, which I employed throughout my research, more clearly reflected my theoretical perspective, interpretivism, which concerns itself with the “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Additionally, I believe my research questions provided clarity as I viewed the research site and experiences through the lens of symbolic interactionism. The questions enabled me to consciously seek examples of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication at the site as I looked for the tools employed and symbols created to generate these elements of symbolic interactionism.

The weaknesses of the research questions lie primarily in the inexperience of the researcher. Sometimes I felt too singularly directed, too limited in my efforts to answer the questions. As a result, I may have overlooked an important piece of data that might have provided significant insight.

In examining my reflections, it is important to review the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology I employed. As an English teacher and sometimes journalism teacher and even less often an occasional newspaper reporter/feature writer, I feel rather comfortable in the role of interviewer. I believe my many hours spent in teacher employment interviews also favorably influenced my interviewing skills. As a high school literature teacher and modern literature graduate student, I am likely more comfortable than most with the consideration of symbolism. So, reviewing the data for the symbols of this community was a fruitful venture. Keeping copies of Stake (1995), Rubin and Rubin (1995), Merriam (1998), Creswell (1998), and Wolcott (1973) at my bedside helped keep me and my methodological practices on track.

A weakness of my methodology was, again, my inexperience. Earlier interviews were less pointed, less specific, with particular regard to follow-up questions, than earlier ones. Organization of the ever-growing collection of data was a challenge, but one I believe I stayed ahead of. Using the “communities” of Sergiovanni as a scaffold for organizing the reporting of the data may have been limiting; however, because the community theory came to my attention well into the project, not at the onset, I do not believe it had a “fill in the blank” effect on either my collection of data or my coding.

The strengths and weaknesses of my analytical practices may both have rested in my inexperience. With regard to the strengths, I had no limitations of previous habits,

good, or more importantly here, bad. My wide-eyed fascination and determination to “do it the right way” likely served as a guardian of ethical and thorough practice. However, as noted before, my inexperience may have resulted in less imaginative or, on the other hand, less logical coding and awareness of emerging patterns.

As a beginning researcher, I may have been over-conscious and over-eager about applying the theory of interpretivism, seeking a model - situational leadership - that explained what I saw, and constantly reminding myself of the precepts of symbolic interactionism. Admittedly shaky with these ideas at first, I did a lot of reading both before and during my time on site to help me better understand the ideas of Mead (1967), Blumer (1969), and Buber (1958). That, however, would be a strength, not a weakness.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

In education, as in most fields, research is a powerful tool. It has the potential to change thinking, practices, and lives. How much thinking, which practices, or how many lives this case study will affect is uncertain. However, there is absolute certainty that this work has influenced at least one practitioner, and that practitioner is the researcher!

For months now, I have read, reflected, questioned, dialogued, and written about Jess Edison, Suburban Middle School, relationships, and results. Throughout the entire process, however, as I considered the subject and site of this case study, I was also thinking about my own middle school, the one where I am principal. As a result, I have changed, omitted, and improved many of my practices. My actions are now informed with a greater sense of purpose as a result of my interactions with Sergiovanni, Senge, Noddings, Barth, and others. The elements of symbolic interactionism – community,

intersubjectivity, interaction, and communication – have new meaning for me in my work as an instructional leader. Now, with a clearer vision, I have additional tools to help me construct meaning from the episodes and elements of my own learning community. As Crotty (1998) says of the lens of symbolic interactionism, it “is a peaceable and certainly growthful world” (p. 63).

Just this week, I was reminded of this growth when my school’s drama teacher stopped me in the hall. She was one of those teachers who last year was transferred from Suburban to my school in the personnel changes that evoked the comment from the director of personnel, “It’s all about relationships.” While a break in service left her dead last in the seniority line up at Suburban last spring, she actually had a history of 15 years at the school before her one year of absence.

Darla stopped me in the hall to make an inquiry about the protocol for inviting concerned teachers to join her in an impromptu prayer service. She had just heard that Allen Sandler, the third year science teacher at Suburban, had discovered his yet-to-be born child was diagnosed with spina bifida. The genuine concern and angst in her voice struck a familiar chord in my mind. It was the Suburban ethic of care, the community of relationship, somehow moving with this teacher from her original teaching home to her new one. How very interesting, heartwarming, and sad -- interesting that it has been given a birth at my school, heartwarming that the relationship I have with this teacher can support such a personal inquiry, and sad that this will be another chapter of Suburban’s community of memory.

I hope this is a sign that my school is moving toward a community of relationships. Given the words of Flynn and Innes (1992), I think so.

It seems that a school that is a true community is a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with one another; who have built relationships that go deeper than their composites; and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, delight in each other, and make others' conditions their own. (p. 203)

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Consent Form

Consent Form

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Debra Bendick, to perform the following treatment or procedure.

Procedure: The individual named will be interviewed about his/her experiences and opinions regarding the role of relationships between the principal and the instructional staff and the effect of those relationships on building a capacity for success at the school. The individual has the prerogative to decline to answer any question at any time. After the interview has been transcribed, the individual has the right to examine the transcription to clarify any misstatements or misinterpretations. The responses, in tandem with existing literature and theory, will be analyzed for significance.

Duration: The interviewee will determine the length of the interview. Most interviews should last between 45 and 60 minutes.

Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be used in the final document. Only the researcher will have access to the actual names of the participants. Tape-recorded interviews will be transcribed. Any information deemed unacceptable by the interviewee for permanent documentation will be deleted. It is important for teacher participants to note that the school's principal will not have any access whatsoever to the teachers' responses, nor will the principal be made aware of which teachers actually participated.

Possible Discomfort: Although no question of a personal or intrusive nature is intended, some questions may cause discomfort; therefore, the respondent may discontinue such questions/answers at any time.

Possible Benefits: Novice and experienced principals alike may find benefit in this research as they seek to build the capacity for success at their schools.

This interview is being undertaken as an element of the research project entitled "It's All About Relationships." Research methods will be of the qualitative school of research, specifically case study, which includes interviews and observations as key methods of collecting data.

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 Debra Bendick (405)348-2545, dbendick@cox.net or the IRB Executive Secretary, 305 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405)744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been provided for me.

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)

Signed: _____

I certify that I have personally included all elements in this form for the subject to read before requesting the subject sign.

Signed: _____ Project Director/Researcher

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Debra McDonald Bendick

313 Little Chisholm Circle

Suburban, OK 73003

(405) 348-2545

October 21, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to introduce myself. I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, pursuing a doctorate in Higher Ed Administration with a minor emphasis in common education administration. I am currently serving the Suburban Public School District as the principal of Cheyenne Middle School where I have been for the past two years. Prior to this experience, I was employed as secondary English teacher in several schools, public and parochial, in a number of different states, including Oklahoma.

I am conducting a case study to understand the role that relationships, initiated and nurtured by a middle school principal with the instructional staff, play in building a school's capacity for success. The resulting analysis of the collected data should prove insightful to school administrators.

I am seeking the assistance of those currently assigned to Suburban Middle School to submit to a taped interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes. The data collected from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. If you decide to participate in this research, your identity and responses will not be revealed to the principal. He will have no knowledge of who has agreed to be interviewed. I have been granted access to Suburban Middle School by the superintendent, Dr. Superintendent and the principal of this site, Jess Edison. If you are amenable to the possibility of an interview, please respond to indicate when you are available. I will make every effort to comply with your schedule and preferences for date and time.

Please email me at dbendick@cox.net or call at 348-2545 or 330-7380.

Sincerely,

Debra M. Bendick

Appendix C

Demographic Information

Demographic Information

Name _____ Home address _____

Gender: (Circle one) Male Female _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

E-mail address _____

Grade level(s) taught _____ Subject(s) taught _____

Other than teaching, job description _____

Years teaching experience _____ Years at Sequoyah _____

Number of years experience as school administrator _____

Bachelor's Degree _____
(Name of College/University) (Major)Master's Degree _____
(Name of College/University) (Major)Doctorate Degree _____
(Name of College/University) (Major)

Ethnicity _____ Age _____

Professional Certification _____

Appendix D

Script For Soliciting Volunteers for Participation

Script

Thank you for allowing me to join your faculty meeting this morning. In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I have chosen to conduct a case study on various aspects of Suburban Middle School. Both Dr. Xxxx and Jess Edison have agreed to allow the staff members of this school to participate in the study. I am now seeking volunteers willing to participate in an approximately thirty minute interview. Based on your voluntary responses to my requests for demographic information, I will be seeking those of the staff who represent varying ages, genders, races, levels of experience and areas of curricular interest currently present on staff.

Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary. If at any time you feel compelled to withdraw from the study, you are welcome to do so. This study is in no way connected to your performance or evaluation at Suburban Middle School. Data gathered from this study will be employed to inform the practice of middle school administrators as they seek to increase their buildings' capacity for success.

Should you decide to participate, your identity will be carefully and respectfully guarded. All findings and subsequent published material referencing the study will be masked to maintain the anonymity of the school site and the specific participants. As teacher participants, your decision to participate will be withheld from the principal. He will not be given access to either your decision to participate or your responses. To ensure accurate representation of participants' words and ideas, scripted copies of all interviews will be provided to interviewees prior to the analysis of data. Corrections, additions or deletions will be made as noted by the participants.

Following my presentation, I will offer each of you a letter of further introduction and a survey of demographic information. If you are interested in being considered to participate in the study, please provide the requested demographic information and submit it prior to leaving today's meeting. If you are not interested, simply return a blank form. The school's secretary will gather the forms and return them to me this afternoon. I will be contacting those of you who indicate an interest in participating.

Thank you to all of you for your time and attention.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Implementing a focused interview style, the following questions were proposed to the principal of Suburban in an open-ended, conversational manner. This and all interviews were audio-taped for ease and accuracy of transcription.

Following are the questions I posed to the principal at the research site.

1. Tell me what it's like being the principal at Suburban Middle School.
2. Describe your philosophy of leadership.
3. If you were asked to create a committee to help you create a list of this school's strengths and weaknesses, what kind of representation would you seek?
4. What strengths and weaknesses would that committee likely uncover?
5. Describe the most effective administrator you have ever worked with.
6. I've been told you are a strong leader. Tell me about that.
7. How would you like to be perceived by your instructional staff?
8. Is there any discrepancy between this perception and how you wish it to be?
9. If you were to advise a first year principal, what would you tell them about building relationships?
10. Tell me about the meaning of relationships.
11. What does it mean to have relationships in a school?
12. Describe the relationships that exist here in the school setting?
13. What are some incidents in which relationship building with one or more of the instructional staff yielded a discernable outcome for the school or its members?

Questions I posed to members of the Suburban Middle School instructional staff include the following:

1. Tell me what it's like being a teacher at Suburban Middle School.
2. I understand this is a National Blue Ribbon School. What do you think are the distinctions that make it so?
3. If you have ever worked at another school, tell me about the differences between that school and this one.
4. Describe your principal.
5. How does he compare to other principals you have worked with?
6. Describe how you have come to understand your worth in this school.
7. What are the greatest strengths of this school? Weaknesses?
8. What does it mean to have relationships in a school?
9. Describe the relationships that exist here in the school setting?
10. Tell me some incidents that illustrate the presence of relationships in this school, particularly relationships between the principal and others.
11. I've heard people say that the sum total of all relationships present in a school are a reflection of the relationships between the principal and others. Tell me what that says about this school.

Appendix F

Letter of Permission for Access

Debra Bendick
313 Little Chisholm Circle
Edmond, OK 73003

Dr. Xxxx Xxxxxx
Superintendent
Suburban Public Schools
1001 W. Danforth
Suburban, OK 11111

August 19, 2002

Dear Dr. Superintendent:

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I am seeking your permission to gain access to the staff of Suburban Middle School. I have already spoken with the principal, Jess Edison, and, pending your approval, he has indicated his willingness to participate.

This fall I would like to conduct research that will involve interviewing the principal, eight teachers, one librarian, and one counselor. I will seek representatives from the staff of the varying ages, genders, races, levels of experience and areas of curricular interest present at the time of the study. The primary method of data collection will be tape-recorded interviews, supplemented with direct observation, documentation, archival records, physical artifacts and, as a school administrator myself, elements of participant-observation. While middle school students ages 11-14 may be present during observations during the school day, they will not be interview subjects. A copy of my Institutional Review Board application packet is attached to lend further insight. If you desire, I can also provide a copy of the entire research proposal.

Upon receiving approval of the Institutional Review Board, the study will commence in the fall of 2002. Data collection will extend through the early months of the school year. Any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted to ensure credibility; member checks of the transcribed interviews will ensure accurate representation of the subjects' words and ideas. Data gathering and analysis should be complete by December, 2002.

There are no anticipated risks involved in the participation of this research.

If you are willing to allow me to proceed with this research, please indicate so with your signature below. If you require additional assurances, please contact me for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Debra Bendick

Appendix G

Institutional Review Board Approval Form

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 9/12/2003

Date: Monday, September 16, 2002

IRB Application No ED0316

Proposal Title: "A CASE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL/TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS IN
BUILDING A SCHOOL'S CAPACITY"

Principal
Investigator(s):

Debra Bendick
313 Little Chisholm Cr.
Edmond, OK 73003

Kelly Ward
316 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

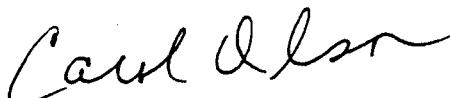
Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA²

Debra Kay McDonald Bendick

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

**Thesis: A CASE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL/TEACHER
RELATIONSHIPS IN BUILDING A SCHOOL'S CAPACITY**

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Putnam City High School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in May, 1969; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English education from Central State University, Edmond, OK in 1973; received Master of Education from Louisiana State University – Shreveport in 1980. Completing the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Higher Education from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2003, pending approval of dissertation.

Experience: English teacher, Powell Junior High School, Mesa, Arizona, 1974-1975; English Teacher, Jesuit High School, Shreveport, Louisiana, 1975-1980; English teacher, Archbishop Alter High School, Kettering, Ohio, 1980-1982; English teacher and Director of Student Activities, Desert High School, Edwards Air Force Base, California, 1987-1992; English teacher, Bishop McGuinness High School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1992-1994; Assistant principal, Summit Middle School, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1994-1995; Assistant principal, Sequoyah Middle School, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1995-1998; Assistant principal, Memorial High School, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1998-2000; Principal, Cheyenne Middle School, Edmond, Oklahoma, 2000-2003.

Professional Organizations: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development; Cooperative Counsel of Oklahoma School Administrators; National Association of Secondary Schools Principals; National Middle School Association; Oklahoma Middle Level Education Association