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GRADUATE COLLEGE

CORE KNOWLEDGE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS:

A PORTRAIT OF CONTEMPORARY CURRICULAR REFORM

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

By

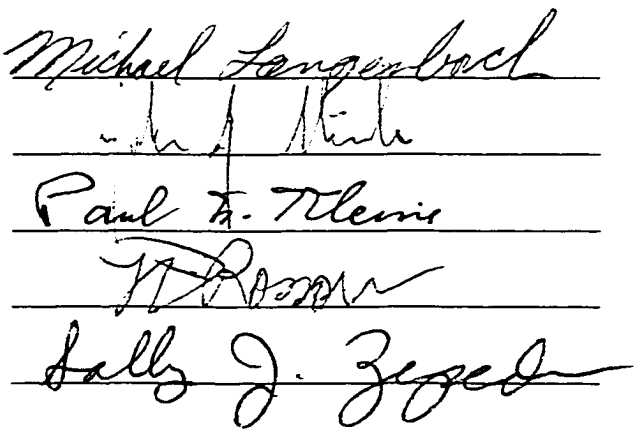
GLENDA MAY PETERS
Norman, Oklahoma
1999

CORE KNOWLEDGE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS:
A PORTRAIT OF CONTEMPORARY CURRICULAR REFORM

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY



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Five years ago, three school communities understood my desire to observe the presence of Core Knowledge in their midst. I am particularly obliged to the principals who gave freely of their time and introduced me to those who would help me see the

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This is a study of contemporary school reform in America. The object of the study is the Core Knowledge Movement, a content oriented curriculum reform initiative advocated by E.D. Hirsch Jr. and promoted by the Core Knowledge Foundation he founded. The study seeks to assess the potential of the movement as viable education reform, as described in an embedded case study. The elements of the case study are the Core Knowledge Foundation and three elementary schools in which the curriculum has become policy. The research seeks to assess the potential of the Core Knowledge Movement by examining its organizational infrastructure and its implementation in the three schools. The study is framed by reform theories derived from the literature. In particular, nineteen criteria for enduring education reform are applied to the analysis of the three Core Knowledge schools. The study concluded that the Core Knowledge Movement met, to a significant degree, all nineteen reform criteria, satisfying some more than others. The three schools were found to be continuously committed to implementing the Core Knowledge course of studies and to have been revitalized and accepted by their respective school communities as a result. However, because the Core Knowledge Movement is a grassroots movement, spreading from school to school through the initiatives of parents, teachers, and principals, doubt is cast on the potential of the movement to become policy in districts, states, or nationally. The study concluded with suggestions for further research to better assess the evolution of the Core Knowledge Movement and to apply its lessons in other settings.

Chapter One
CORE KNOWLEDGE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS: A PORTRAIT OF CONTEMPORARY CURRICULAR REFORM

Introduction

There are not many who believe American public schools should remain just as they are. Violence and illicit drugs cause fear and apprehension for many. Some question the competence, experience and professionalism of educators. Inadequate resources and too much bureaucracy frustrate even the most dedicated professionals within the field, while others are concerned about schools that are too large or poorly maintained and claim that such environments are not conducive to teaching and learning. And in an era during which debate rages over increased numbers of state mandates and numerous revisions of national standards and goals, distressed citizens are asking exactly what kinds of lessons students are learning in school and why some are engaged in learning while others are not. Writing in the early 1990s, scholar Toni Massaro noted:

> Apprehension about knowledge deficits among teachers and students has been enhanced by a worsening economy and by the growing sense that the United States has lost its competitive advantage over Japan, Germany, and other nations. Like the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the blast-off of the Japanese economy in the 1980s has quickened our national resolve to 'do something' about our educational system. (Massaro, 1993, p.2)

Six years later, the economic climate has improved dramatically; however, concern over public education remains a major issue on the national agenda. Polls indicate that education is the policy area of most concern to the public. According to a

January 1997 Gallup Poll, 93% of Americans regarded education as a top priority, high priority, or very important priority. Two years later, in June of 1999, 93% again listed education as a top, high, or very important priority (Gallup, 1999). President Clinton and the Republican congressional majority are at odds over the direction of educational policy, with the president advocating for national standards while Republicans favor local control. Still, everyone wants to "do something" about improving the American educational system.

E.D. Hirsch Jr., Professor of English at the University of Virginia, has "done something." Hirsch proposes an elementary school curriculum reform, which during the past decade, has come to be known as "the Core Knowledge Movement." (Hirsch, 1996, p. 13) Schools will change for the better, in Hirsch's view, only when they begin to offer standardized lessons, i.e., when they agree upon and consistently teach what "every child needs to know."

Thus, Hirsch and the Core Knowledge Foundation he founded, offer to schools a list of very specific topics, i.e., the Core Knowledge Sequence (1998). The topics are to be explored by students as they enter kindergarten, continuing through grade eight, as an educational foundation offered by every American school. Interested readers may wish to review a selected list of Core Knowledge topics found in Appendix A of this study. The gradual, steady growth of the teaching of "core knowledge" in schools throughout the country provides a distinctive and current case in education reform. The Core Knowledge movement is the subject of this research.

Statement of the Problem

How does the Core Knowledge experience advance what is known about the process of school reform?

While Core Knowledge provides its focus, the project's aim is broader. I explored how, why and by whom decisions about teaching a common core curriculum were made. The study also asks, "How does teaching Core Knowledge affect schools?" The rhetoric of Core Knowledge suggests that it contributes to the acculturation of children by virtue of its standardization across schools. The relationship between the teaching of a content specific curriculum and equal opportunity for learning as perceived by Core Knowledge proponents is also analyzed. Core Knowledge proposes to change schools, to provide America with "the schools we need" (Hirsch 1996) by prescribing topics teachers should teach and students should learn. Can a curriculum reform movement transform a school? Transform a "system" of education? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? This study provides a small window through which to view these broader questions..

Research Questions

This investigation was designed as description of a case in contemporary curriculum reform. The research subject was the Core Knowledge initiative as a reform effort and involved an examination of the Core Knowledge movement in three schools in which the curriculum had been implemented. The project revolved around three major inquiries:

- how is the national Core Knowledge reform initiative characterized?
- how do teachers, principals and parents perceive the influence of Core Knowledge

in three schools where the curriculum is taught?

- how does the Core Knowledge initiative meet or fail to meet selected criteria (Fullan, 1991; Kliebard,1988; Sarason,1990; Tyack & Tobin,1994) for enduring educational reform?

Secondary research questions include:

- In what ways does the Core Knowledge initiative differ or compare to earlier reforms? (Kliebard, 1995; Sarason, 1990; Tyack & Tobin,1994)
- What "percolating effects" of curricular change are found in schools where it is implemented (Sarason, 1990, p. 16)? For example, what roles do principals, teachers and parents play in the process? How are Core Knowledge lessons presented in the schools studied?
- What are the difficulties associated with this example of curricular change? The risks?
- What are the past and current forces in society (Kliebard, 1995) that shape contemporary curricula and how are they, if at all, related to Core Knowledge?
- What lessons are there to learn from the Core Knowledge curriculum reform or the study thereof?

These research questions directed the report of my interpretation of the curriculum policy that is implemented in each school as well as the overall impact the policy appears to have on the school's culture. The research includes description of the status of the Core Knowledge initiative, analysis of its effect on selected participating elementary schools and discussion regarding the likelihood of its viability as enduring education

reform.

The Research Opportunity

This case study examined Core Knowledge, a school curriculum reform initiative, during the early years of its implementation in three American elementary schools. There was no published, comprehensive chronicle of the evolution of the Core Knowledge curriculum reform initiative as this study began. Its effect in schools where the Sequence is taught, relative to the reform's purposes, had not been described. An individual interested in reading an account of how this particular program influences schools and what children learn, or one who wishes to learn about the nuances of the program's implementation, must currently rely primarily on literature published by the Core Knowledge Foundation.

All persons interested in current efforts to reform schools, especially those whose curiosity leads them to examine the impact of school curriculum on systemic reform may wish to review findings of this study. As Hirsch described his intent (personal communication, February 1995), Core Knowledge is designed as both social and educational reform, hence those interested in the impact of schools on society may also find the study useful. Privatization of the educational enterprise is occurring with increased frequency, as Koprowicz (1994) reports; educators who continue to work in schools, as well as future generations of educational reformers may find the report of the evolution of the Core Knowledge reform of interest.

The status of this movement and the controversy it has aroused can now be examined in light of the opportunity to observe what has occurred in schools where the

teaching of Core Knowledge has continued for a number of years. How and why did the curriculum become established as a characteristic feature of each school? Such an investigation was one goal of this research. Further, it was a baseline study that will be useful to other researchers, who may, in the future, wish to consider the program's effect on student achievement, write longitudinal case histories, or comment on the program's contribution or lack thereof to turn of the century educational reform literature.

Related to the central objective of understanding the essence of curriculum based school reform are issues of variability among schools where the curriculum is taught and the viability of the intended reform, i.e., the likelihood of its establishment as enduring change. In this case, the "change" is reflected in the teaching of a "shared, specific, sequenced, solid" curriculum *(Core Knowledge Sequence, 1995,* p. 257) in American elementary schools. Such factors are important considerations when dealing with complex issues inherent in improving the American system of educating youngsters. Why does the Core Knowledge Sequence make sense to some? What do they hope it will bring to students? To a school community? Why has this initiative not fallen by the wayside, as many have, during similar phases of expansion? What is it about some educational trends, fads, or fashions (Kliebard, 1988) that result in their establishment as enduring traits of the American system of education? Schools are rich venues for study of the instability of educational change and shedding light on contemporary curriculum policy, in this case, "a planned progression of specific knowledge in history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts, and fine arts" (*Core Knowledge Sequence*, 1998). Kliebard (1988) explained curricular ebb and flow in ways that reflect many of Hirsch's

(1987) concerns about what he perceived as unfairness and inequity. The present study sifted through common issues raised by Hirsch and Kliebard. Among Core Knowledge schools, reasons and models for implementation certainly varied, thus providing various settings in which to study the feasibility of teaching a common curriculum to children in many American schools.

The Research Setting

The individuals advocating, administering and teaching the Core Knowledge Sequence represent particularly suitable research participants for several reasons. First, schools engaged in curriculum change are meaningful units of comparative analysis from which observations regarding other schools and reforms may be made. New knowledge about the rescue of failed reforms may be gained and possibilities for how to influence those that appear to endure may emerge. Fullan (1991) challenged educators to deal with second order changes, i.e., those that reflect change in the way school personnel approach their work, including goals and roles. Because Core Knowledge exemplifies change in both curricular goals and educators' roles, it appears to represent second order change. The study also shed light on Sarason's problem of "the failure of educational reform" (Sarason, 1990) by addressing several reasons for why schools sometimes fail to achieve desired innovation.

Second, schools are suitable environments in which to explore relationships between reforms and the schools in which they are implemented. There is give and take; the school implements a given curriculum while the reform leaders ask of the schools, "How is it going? What's working? What should we change? Keep? Will you send us

your reactions?" (personal communication, faculty meeting, Northern Core Knowledge Elementary, October 1994). Tyack and Tobin (1994) emphasized the importance of recognizing such reciprocity:

> Over and over again teachers have selectively implemented and altered reforms. Rather than regarding such mutation as a problem to be avoided, one might entertain the notion that they are potentially a virtue -- reforms might be designed to be hybridized according to local needs and knowledge. (p. 478)

A careful observation of the early phases of a reform such as Core Knowledge provides an opportunity to examine teacher responses in implementing and/or altering this reform. Whether the Core Knowledge Foundation, or any emerging curriculum reform effort, attends to such responses and consequently "re-forms" or hybridizes, may also help to make clear what is necessary to enduring educational change.

Finally, the Core Knowledge Foundation and its coalition schools serve as recruiting and training grounds for others interested in reform. The Foundation provides seminars for teachers interested in adopting its principles, utilizing its materials and promoting the Core Knowledge curriculum in other schools. The Core Knowledge coalition schools are said to welcome visitation by others interested in learning more about the program. The Core Knowledge case, its potential for success or failure as attempted education reform, exists as an example for all who may desire to initiate and sustain future educational change. Teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum and teaching *about* the Core Knowledge curriculum appear to be common formative experiences of grassroots reformers associated with Core Knowledge. These experiences stand to inform scholarly debate about school and social reform at the turn of the century,

which may ultimately influence the profile of American education and, as Hirsch and others might argue, the fate of our democratic nation.

The Researcher's Perspectives

I was serving as supervisor of gifted education in Oklahoma City Public Schools when first introduced, in 1991, to the Core Knowledge network of schools. The then superintendent of schools suggested we consider the curriculum as an optional program of study for elementary students whose teachers identified them as especially bright, well-motivated, and capable of learning lessons other than the ones presented in the general education curriculum. Upon investigation, I learned the Core Knowledge Foundation director at that time, Henry Cotton, was available for consultation in our district. Meeting with him in February of 1992 began what has become, for me, an eight year period of direct study and observation of Core Knowledge.

During that time I have increased my knowledge of the Core Knowledge initiative through various professional experiences. As an IDEA fellow, I listened to Professor Hirsch speak about the research that had influenced his thinking (Chall, 1985; International Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA] Report 1988; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) prior to formulating his argument for a partially standardized national elementary school curriculum. In an interview following the presentation, we discussed the feasibility of a common curriculum and questions I had about the validity of relying on international comparisons of student achievement as Stevenson and Stigler, Chall and the IEA reports had done.

As supervisor of gifted education in Oklahoma City Public Schools, I organized

meetings where principals and teachers discussed the Core Knowledge program. These discussions sometimes included officials of schools in other states where the curriculum had already been implemented. While enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma I observed the reform movement at its national level, reading professional reports (Booth, 1989; D'Souza, 1991; Hirsch, 1987), major journalistic accounts (Eisner, 1991; Herrnstein-Smith,1990; Parini, 1990) and participating in annual Core Knowledge conferences (San Antonio, TX 1992; Ft. Myers, FL 1993; Williamsburg, VA 1994) where I presented units of study to teachers from schools around the country. I talked with many people at these conferences, learning reasons for their participation and listening to their ideas about Hirsch's proposals. As Strauss and Corbie (1990) explained:

> Choosing a research problem through the professional or personal experience route may seem more hazardous than through the suggested or literature routes. This is not necessarily true. The touchstone of your own experience may be more valuable an indicator for you of a potentially successful endeavor. (in Erlandson et al. 1993, p.47)

Since 1996 I have served as the founding principal of an archdiocesan Catholic elementary school in Norman, Oklahoma. While I have not been actively involved with the Core Knowledge Foundation since the school has been established, I have continued to study the Core Knowledge movement and the Foundation's activities. More importantly, I have been able to observe the implementation of a core curriculum in the setting of a new school. The school originally opened to serve students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 4, and has added grades 5, 6, and 7 in each subsequent year. While the Catholic elementary school is not a subject of the present research, my experience in facilitating the development of a new school's curriculum has enhanced my

understanding of the importance of its policy, origins, purposes and effect.

My previous experience with the Core Knowledge initiative is, in part, why I have chosen to write about it. Some of the questions I brought to this project were formulated as long as eight years ago. I have considered and reconsidered them throughout the years. a process that has generated a few observations and many new questions. For example, have earlier experiences interfered with the ability to act as researcher, where the case examined is one in which I have previously participated? For two reasons, I do not believe they have. First, the questions around which this study revolve are not answered in the context of my work in either Oklahoma City or Norman. Though I learned a great deal about how the Core Knowledge initiative was characterized while working as a central office administrator, the data analyzed in this study were collected in schools outside the state of Oklahoma. Moreover, the third primary research question related to aspects of enduring education reform, issues that are clearly unique to this particular study.

Second, as a teacher and administrator, I have prior experiences and views that inform my work, as we all do. I did not enter the principal's office or the teacher's classrooms in the field as a spokesperson for Core Knowledge, but as a researcher. I presented myself as a graduate student whose goal was to better understand how and why a given school's curriculum was being adopted, taught, modified, or rejected. Unless the subject came up during private conversation, principals and teachers involved in this study were not necessarily aware of my experience in facilitating the pilot adoption of the Core Knowledge Sequence in some Oklahoma City elementary schools. The reader may

wish to refer to the letter of introduction and appointment confirmation found in Appendix B for greater detail regarding my stated purposes as researcher.

I am prepared to conduct research in schools, in part because I have spent over twenty five years working in them. As we met, teachers and principals who learned of my experiences in the classroom and behind the administrative desk knew I had likely shared many of their own perspectives and struggles. Moreover, my academic preparation reflects the fields that are fundamental to the questions posed in this study, specifically, elementary education, educational psychology, and administrative supervision and curriculum. Professors had encouraged an early focus on potential dissertation topics; the opportunity for pilot studies presented itself at my university. Indeed, I conducted a pilot study (1994) for a course in qualitative research methods involving five elementary schools in which Core Knowledge was being considered or had been taught. The knowledge and skills I have gained in all aspects of my work inform this research and, I maintain, help to ensure an objective analysis of a case in curriculum reform.

> ...people's convictions about educational reform and the means needed to achieve it weigh heavily on the kinds of analyses they make. The analyses that follow reflect the authors' convictions as well as the facts of the case. Neither the authors nor I make any apology for their passion. Education is a normative enterprise and values are inextricably a part of any analysis. (Eisner, 1995, p. ix)

It is my hope that "Core Knowledge in American Schools: A Portrait of Contemporary Curricular Reform" will offer the reader an opportunity to reflect not only on interpretations of the facts of the case, but on the values, convictions, and passions associated with each of our interpretations as well.

The Core Knowledge Movement

The Core Knowledge movement began with the founding of the Cultural Literacy Foundation in 1986 and continues through the present day. The first Core Knowledge school began teaching the curriculum in 1990; today nearly 1,000 schools nationwide are listed as members of the Core Knowledge network (Core Knowledge Web Site, 1999). Much of the characterization of the Core Knowledge Movement derives from the ideas put forth in Hirsch's 1987 book, *Cultural Literacy,* and subsequent publications specifying "what children need to know."

What follows is a description of these primary elements of the movement, as well as a brief discussion depicting the relationship between Core Knowledge and the broader national dialogue over national curriculum standards. The intent of this narrative is to provide an understanding of the socio-political context for the reform's appearance and continued presence in some American elementary schools.

The Core Knowledge Foundation

"Given the atmosphere of controversy surrounding *Cultural Literacy*, this grassroots movement has perforce operated more on ideas than on money" (Hirsch,1996, p. 13). Having read much of what he has published during the course of the past twelve years, it seems fair enough to say that Hirsch *is* an idea man; one whose thoughts and investment of professional time have led him into the "Thoughtworld" (Hirsch,1996) of public elementary education. Hirsch seems to imply that opposition to the concepts elucidated in *Cultural Literacy* has narrowed possibilities for the scope of the work of his Foundation and perhaps, limited the rapidity with which the "Movement" might

otherwise have gained in popularity. In a sense, however, he seems not to complain about the limitations. Indeed, in his more recent edition, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996) Hirsch presses the argument for gradual, patient approaches to reform:

> ...and because ideas are slow to change, my colleagues and I have been pursuing a school-by-school grassroots effort in which the leadership of one group of parents or teachers, or of a single principal or superintendent, can revolutionize the ideas and practices of an individual school. (p. 237)

Originally established in 1986 as the Cultural Literacy Foundation, Hirsch hoped to promote through his Core Knowledge Foundation, the notion that shared common knowledge and a national discourse are important to the fabric of a democratic nation. Changes in American society and schools (e.g., immigration rates, reportedly poor progress in student achievement) he argued, warranted close attention to his perception of a national decline in cultural literacy. Perhaps due to the critical response to *Cultural Literacy*, which was grounded in psychological research, he soon shifted his focus from what "every American needs to know" to what children in American schools "need to know." Having reviewed the literature on international comparative studies of student achievement and reported that American students score more poorly than those in industrialized nations where national, common core curricula are offered, Hirsch was becoming successful in transferring his ideas from books to schools. As Hirsch explained, many of the earliest teachers involved in implementing the curriculum advised him that "core knowledge" seemed a more appropriate description of the foundation's purpose – "to introduce solid knowledge in a coherent way into the elementary curriculum," (Hirsch 1996, p.13), therefore, he changed the Foundation's name to reflect

their view.

The Core Knowledge Foundation, in Charlottesville, Virginia, is located near the campus of the University of Virginia, where Hirsch was, at the time of this study, a professor of English. The Foundation serves as the "nerve center" of the Core Knowledge Movement (p.13). The Foundation is involved in the theoretical and practical promotions of the ideas inherent in the reform Hirsch has initiated and is reported to be non-partisan and independent. The back cover of the most recent (1998) revision of the Sequence indicates these purposes of the Foundation: "conducting research on educational issues and ideas; developing books and other materials for teachers, parents, and children; providing training and support for educators implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence; and serving as the hub of a growing national network of Core Knowledge schools."

According to Constance Jones, Core Knowledge's Director of School Programs, the Foundation exists primarily to make some core of knowledge accessible to every student in America. The core the Foundation offers is the Core Knowledge Sequence. A sample of selected topics from the Sequence is included as Appendix A of this study. By engaging schools in its efforts, the Foundation hopes to accomplish its goal of re-forming what students learn through changes in school day schedules, such as provisions for common planning time for teachers, and variations in the resource tools they use in their instruction. "There is a recognized need to prepare teachers to know the content areas, to be able to teach the topics in the Sequence," said Jones (interview, February 21, 1999). The Foundation provides support in these areas through its publications and conferences.

What has enabled this network to grow from one to nearly 1,000 schools over the course of the last decade? According to the people I interviewed during the course of this study, which has now become somewhat longitudinal in duration, it is the activity of the Core Knowledge Foundation that provides the spark. Initial support emanated from the first meeting during which the Sequence itself was articulated and agreed upon by the 100+ people who attended. The first school to pilot the program, Three Oaks Elementary in Ft. Myers, Florida, did so in 1990, with only a skeletal outline of the content and no teaching resource package. The Three Oaks experiences led to other attempts inside and outside the state of Florida. A public school in the South Bronx, the Mohegan school, saw the program as an antidote to its problem of teaching disadvantaged youngsters not ready to learn. Its success was picked up by the national media and soon, other schools, for other reasons, took notice.

Attendance at annual Core Knowledge conferences has increased, from 350 in 1992 to 2,666 in 1998. The national conferences have given rise to a number of recent state and regional Core Knowledge meetings. Now, federal Title I monies have been made available to schools initiating reform, which seems to have further fueled the movement's growth, according to former Three Oaks principal, Constance Jones (interview, February 21,1999). The Foundation has made available to schools a booklet written by Jones, who outlined steps in beginning the implementation of the Core Knowledge program. One hundred thirty two Core Knowledge trainers across the country are available to provide in-service and ongoing mentor relationships to schools. These efforts, among others, have resulted in consistent and steady gains in the reform's

momentum.

The Core Knowledge Sequence

In a chapter section titled "Rise of the Fragmented Curriculum" (1987) Hirsch asserted that "It has been silently assumed that our recently fragmented school curriculum is a permanent and necessary feature of our educational system" (p.115). He traced the fragmentation to the 1893 report, Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, which he interpreted as having "rejected the earlier focus on subject matter" in favor of "producing good, productive, and happy citizens" (p. 118). The Core Knowledge Foundation, through its published Sequence, seeks to reinstate the educational purpose of teaching children common knowledge that is specific, sequenced, solid, and spiral.

Core Knowledge involves the teaching of a list of prescribed topics to students in kindergarten through grade eight. These topics reflect agreement of some one hundred plus educators who convened in March 1990 for the purpose of establishing what a model national curriculum might include. District school superintendents, elementary classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, officers of national educational professional organizations, science writers, scientists, representatives of ethnic groups and school principals "hammer[ed] out a working agreement on core knowledge for the first six grades" (*Core Knowledge Sequence,* 1995, p. 4). This consensus was reached after having categorized knowledge and skills learned by school students in grades one through six in France, Sweden, West Germany and Japan, countries where national, "core" curricula are taught and students are perceived by Hirsch to have "outperformed" American students on standardized achievement tests. Multicultural advisors submitted

a list of diverse cultural traditions they felt American school children should learn. The composite topics were then sent to approximately 150 individuals comprising three groups of scholars, teachers and scientists, who were asked to create a comprehensive list of the "core knowledge" American elementary students might learn. The initial Sequence has been revised seven times, with the most recent printing made available in 1998.

Hirsch contends that as greater numbers of schools integrate the Core Knowledge Sequence, or any common core of lessons, into their curriculum, our nation will, ipso facto, be teaching a national, standardized curriculum. This is desirable, according to Hirsch, because of the current fragmentation in elementary school curriculum which, he believes, leads to the schools' inabilities to transmit national culture to students. Hirsch contends that we ought to be worried about what is happening in American schools because some children are not being presented rigorous, challenging material, thus leading to a system that is both unfair and unequal, especially where disadvantaged youngsters are concerned.

Thus, Hirsch ascribes both cultural and scholastic benefits to the Core Knowledge reform. While the larger social effects of the Core Knowledge initiative are addressed only collaterally, it is important to remember that according to Hirsch's theory, the scholastic and social benefits are related. I searched for evidence of this relationship in the three schools that form a basis for this study.

Neither Hirsch nor his supporters contend that the Sequence is what is important. Rather, they claim that it is an agreement about what is to be taught to all students that is important. It is in offering all American students equal access to common lessons, those

represented in the Core Knowledge Sequence or others, that the American education system is advanced, Hirsch claims. The Core Knowledge Sequence offers a benchmark for grade specific content guidelines in language arts, American/world civilization, geography, visual arts, music, mathematics and science. Hirsch challenges others to propose revisions and alternative curricula for national adoption; he insists, however, on the critical importance of a *shared* national curriculum *(Core Knowledge Sequence,* 1998). Because Hirsch is often misunderstood on this point, some elaboration is warranted. It is obvious that there are a greater number and variety of worthwhile curricular materials than can be encompassed by any defined curriculum that could be taught in schools. By defining a substantive core curriculum through which students and teachers come to *share* knowledge, positive academic and social results are attained, Hirsch contends. His emphasis, therefore, is not on a specific canonical content [his], but rather that there be *some* shared body of knowledge, such as that offered by the Core Knowledge Foundation.

In schools where the Core Knowledge program is implemented, teachers do so with very few support materials. There are no teaching resource kits for purchase. There are no teachers' guides. Resource books edited by Hirsch, *What Your [Kindergartner - Sixth Grader] Needs to Know,* are available in retail stores; however, they offer only a limited amount of information on the topic to be explored and are designed for exploratory purposes. Thus, in the early years of Core Knowledge, schools teaching its curriculum did so recognizing their responsibility in developing, as well as implementing it. "The Core Knowledge Foundation is working to develop supporting materials, but

until such time as they are available, it must be stated plainly that it takes an extra measure of effort and commitment to implement a Core Knowledge program" (*Core Knowledge Sequence,* 1995, p. 256). The most recent revision of the Sequence lists four categories of resources available from the foundation, including a resource guide for parents and teachers; five titles of core literary classics adapted for emerging readers; the *Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence*; and lesson/unit plans made available on the Core Knowledge Web Site.

Toward a National Curriculum

This case study of the Core Knowledge movement does not directly address the myriad proposals for national curriculum standards and state frameworks; however, it does offer evidence relevant to the impact of a uniform curriculum in the schools that are examined here. Thus, it is useful to consider the larger national debate in order to understand how the Core Knowledge movement relates to it.

Several broad educational contexts surround and give meaning to an examination of a single case in curriculum reform. Goals 2000: Educate America Act, was enacted during the 103rd Congress, in March 1994. The legislation emphasized the significance of educational equality and was designed to improve academic achievement for all students. While the Goals 2000 Act reaffirmed that the responsibility for control of education is reserved to the states and local school systems, the Act established in law, the formation of three new federal groups. These committees are broad based and bipartisan; they are known as the National Education Goals Panel, the National Skills Standards Board, and the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council. For

a detailed description of the purposes, duties and powers of these federal groups, the reader is referred to Public Law 103-227, United States Code, Congressional and Administrative News, May 1994. Members of the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council are charged with several duties involving the certification of (a) national content standards, (b) national opportunity to learn standards, and (c) national student performance standards.

Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics via its National Assessment of Educational Progress suggests that Goals 2000 has accelerated standards-based reforms in many states (NEAP,1999). According to NEAP "...about half of poor school districts across the nation report that Title I is 'driving standards in the district as a whole'" (p.1). The report further reveals that higher standards, combined with accountability has brought real gains for students. Encouraged by these results, the Clinton administration has proposed in the 1999 re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to press further with standards-based reforms. The administration proposes to "use challenging state standards to guide classroom instruction and student assessment" (p.2). Not surprisingly, Republicans favor local, rather than federal control of what children are taught in schools.

Ravitch (1995) provides an extensive review of the policy debate, discussed further in Chapter 2, in *National Standards in American Education*. According to Ravitch, many ideas [reforms] put into place in schools during the 1980s have resulted in "a surprisingly wide agreement about the potential value of national standards and national assessments" (p.133). The Bush and Clinton administrations have indeed begun

the process of developing federal involvement in setting standards, e.g., Goals 2000, though the legislation appears to have fueled the debate over the desirability of federal control of education.

Core Knowledge, according to Hirsch, allows for standardization, which he equates with excellence and fairness (Hirsch, 1987), without negating total local control over school curriculum. Those who desire local control are pleased that his curriculum sequence is partial, leaving 50% of the school's curriculum open to local and regional requirements. Others who desire an element of consistency agree with Hirsch that at least a portion of what American school children study should be standard, thereby ensuring equal access to the foundational knowledge Hirsch thinks is necessary for continued learning and cultural literacy.

One force driving the move toward a national, standardized curriculum has been concern over low student performance as measured by standardized tests. Although Hirsch's initial concern was with cultural fairness and shared knowledge rather than with student performance per se, it is difficult for any reform movement to be sustained unless someone believes that children are learning more. Standardized tests are one way to measure learning. Recognizing this imperative, the Core Knowledge Foundation has begun reporting test data from selected Core Knowledge schools. In addition, an independent study of twelve Core Knowledge schools was conducted by the Center for the Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) at Johns Hopkins University. A summary article reporting the results of this study as well as electronic access to the full report is available on the Core Knowledge Web Site (Marshall,1999). The CSOS study employed

both quantitative and qualitative measures of school performance in a quasi-experimental research design using control schools where possible. Because the present study does not seek to address school performance, but rather factors affecting the potential for sustaining the Core Knowledge Movement as reform, I did not address performance data for the three Core Knowledge Schools that are the subject of this research. However, the qualitative data reported by CSOS are relevant to the findings of the present research and are considered in the concluding chapter.

Another aspect of the national debate is the increased concern over what Schlesinger (1992) referred to as "the disuniting of America," a concern that has reached the schoolhouse doors as well. "Should public education strengthen and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial subcultures? Or should it not seek to make our young boys and girls contributors to a common American culture?" he asks (p. 90). In Hirsch's view, and that of his proponents, the path to a common culture is best paved in our elementary schools, by teaching common core lessons to every student, thereby educating successive generations who will bond by virtue of what they each know: "...the basic goal of education in a human community is acculturation, the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults of the group or polis" (1987, p. xvi). In this context, the present study addressed the fundamental question of the purpose of American education as Hirsch sees it. According to him, this "acculturative responsibility of the schools is primary and fundamental" (1987, p. 18).

Teaching children about "the" American culture, however, does not address the concerns of the numerous proponents of multicultural education whose claims center

around the issue of honoring individual ethnicities. Apple and Beane (1995), for example, explain the distinction between democratic schools and schooling for a democratic society. Their implication is that a proposal such as Hirsch's is nothing more than a simplistic attempt to apply the rhetoric of democracy to a very complex traditional system of education and that it falls entirely short of providing a foundation for preparing students for living in a democratic society. Doll (1989) pointed to the increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking students in American schools, an occurrence which he said led to two major curriculum objectives: "fostering respect for the national background or ethnicity of each pupil and helping the pupil function effectively within the common culture, within his or her own culture, and within other cultures" (p. 110). Thus, Doll claimed that the teaching of a single "cultural literacy" in American schools is misdirected.

McLaren and Estrada (1993) pushed the argument for multicultural education farther in advising that "those of us working in the area of curriculum need to...take the issue of difference seriously and challenge the dismissive undercutting of difference by the conservative multiculturalists" (p. 32). Hirsch's appointment of members of various minority groups to his advisory board may be seen as a superficial effort to respond to early criticisms of his curriculum proposal as being entirely Eurocentric in orientation. Certainly Hirsch may be interpreted as not taking the issue of difference seriously. His concern about educational purpose and its concomitant sociological outcomes are firmly rooted in the idea of nation building, a concept which some may say precludes the teaching of critical perspectives of our own traditions and values or those of other groups.

The review of literature in Chapter Two includes a discussion of the issues inherent in these seemingly opposing views.

The conceptual issue of the ebb and flow of curricular change (Kliebard, 1988; 1995) remains. A primary purpose of this study is to examine the Core Knowledge reform as a representative case of curricular change. The last two decades have seen uncounted trials in school improvement, "rescues" in response to a nation and students "at risk." The conditions surrounding this purpose include the reality of murders in schools, a political shift to the right, increased home-schooling, magnet and charter schools, detracking, teacher autonomy, textbook-driven curricula, performance/authentic assessment, multiculturalism, site-based management, and national standards and goals, among others. It may be important to know how an educational reform initiative that is solely curriculum based fares in these conditions. As Kliebard (1995) reported on an earlier federal intervention in curriculum policy – vocational education, "As is typically the case with any curriculum, the effort to forge policy in this area became a battleground" (p.66). Until reformers address the social and institutional hurdles that render schools intractable, school reform and improvement are bound to fail, claims psychologist Seymour B. Sarason in his 1990 book *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform.* Does the Core Knowledge movement introduce the prospect of meaningful, whole school reform? Can it avoid the pitfalls that have led other reform efforts to failure? This study offers evidence bearing upon these questions. The next chapter provides a review of relevant literature.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction: E.D. Hirsch and Cultural Literacy

The writing of E.D. Hirsch Jr. is central to a case study of Core Knowledge. The Core Knowledge Sequence derives from the theories laid out in Hirsch's book about the relationship between cultural literacy and school change. Hirsch's ground breaking book, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know,* was published in 1987. It framed Hirsch's later argument for teaching a common, core curriculum to young students as a foundation for their future learning.

It is important to recognize that Hirsch offered a critique of contemporary American culture. His broad concerns were social, political, and moral. Hirsch contends that social literacy is a matter of social justice. Groups that are most likely to embrace multi-cultural alternatives are precisely those that suffer most because of their inability to function within mainstream culture. They cannot do so because they do not know much about it. They are "culturally illiterate." It is this broader cultural critique that seems to direct Hirsch toward American school reform. Unlike some critics of primary and secondary education in America, Hirsch is not concerned primarily with socialization, psychological adjustment, how students learn or skill acquisition. His is a "content" curricular reform whose aim is to level the playing field for all students.

In an effort to address the decline in cultural literacy as he perceived it, Hirsch initiated scholarly and public debate through the publication of *Cultural Literacy.* He defined cultural literacy as the ability to thrive in the modern world and to effectively

communicate with strangers. A stranger is a person that you have just met. If you and the stranger share no cultural heritage, it will be difficult for the two of you to communicate. If you do share a common cultural heritage, then communication is facilitated. The effectiveness of communicating, he argued, is dependent upon acquiring a body of shared knowledge--information that literate people possess and use as they go about their lives. Hirsch believed that such a body of knowledge should be considered as educational tools of information, not of skills. It is not just *how* one know things; it is *what* one knows. Hirsch and two colleagues developed a list to illustrate the kind of knowledge that is needed in order to forge an effective cultural community in the United States. "The List" is included in appendix form in *Cultural Literacy* as a preliminary illustration of the range and character of the knowledge to be acquired by literate Americans. It is multi-disciplinary in content and at its most recent printing, 1988, contains over 6,000 entries. Hirsch and his proponents contend that in order to reverse the general decline in America's literacy rate, as well as the level of cultural understanding of our past, it is good and necessary to codify a body of knowledge known to literate citizens. Toward this end, Hirsch published *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (Revised edition 1993), a vastly expanded list of the core knowledge content. Though comprehensive, even this reference text included facts without articulated pedagogical theory.

In fact, it was not until 1996, a decade after the appearance of *Cultural Literacy*, that Hirsch offered a comprehensive statement about schools in *The Schools We Need & Why We Don't Have Them* (Hirsch, 1996). This book marks an important step in the

evolution of Hirsch's thinking. Whereas his inspiration in writing *Cultural Literacy* was to address the broad issue of democratic culture in America, by 1996 he had developed an explicit critique of pedagogy and asserted his own pedagogical theory. *Cultural Literacy* suggested that citizens would not share in the fruits of a democratic nation unless they possessed cultural knowledge; *The Schools We Need* asserts that students cannot *learn* unless they are stocked with a repository of facts.

The argument of *The Schools We Need* is laid out in four phases: a critique of the mainstream "educationist" pedagogy that focuses on the student rather than on the content of the curriculum, including the research that presumes to support it; an interpretation of the roots of this pedagogy in the romantic intellectual tradition; an analysis of a body of research findings that suggests that content is essential to both learning and skill development; and a defense of objective standardized testing. In effect, Hirsch takes on the American educational establishment and indicts it for faulty theory, flawed research, questionable interpretation, and ideological narrow-mindedness. He presents a number of empirical studies in support of his affirmative argument for content-based learning.

It was perhaps inevitable that Hirsch would be led to develop a pedagogical theory. No matter how convincing his socio-political case for cultural literacy, the argument was bound to fall on deaf ears unless he could establish the underlying worth of the movement. It is not enough to train citizens by socializing them into a common culture; it is also necessary to educate them for careers and for life. The evolution of Hirsch's thinking poses significant questions for the current research, for it suggests that the potency of the reform effort is linked to the effectiveness of the Core Knowledge

curriculum in the education and development of the students who experience it. This can only be assessed at the school level. While this study does not seek to explicitly assess the Core Knowledge curriculum's impact on students as measured by test scores or other methods of evaluation, it does examine the relationship between the perceptions of participants about the effectiveness of the curriculum and the potential for the Core Knowledge movement to sustain itself.

The review of literature is divided into three sections. Conceptual issues regarding curriculum are discussed initially. Included are two criticisms of Hirsch, presented as a vehicle for exploring the larger social and political implications of his argument. The debate over *Cultural Literacy* and the general issue of national curriculum standards is considered. The movement toward national curriculum standards, drawing on Berliner and Biddle (1995),Gagnon (1995), Massaro (1993), Ravitch (1995), and Spring (1993) is addressed. The third section contains an analysis of various school reform theories, and emphasizes selected criteria for lasting educational change. Included are Fullan (1991), Kliebard, (1995), Sarason (1990), and Tyack and Tobin (1994). Here, my goal was to examine essential propositions about the nature and prospects for school reform to serve as benchmarks for evaluating the Core Knowledge movement. Because Hirsch proposed not only content-based education but also a national school curriculum, the Core Knowledge movement is relevant to the broader debate over national standards. Throughout, I have discussed the literature in relationship to Hirsch's argument and the central aims of the Core Knowledge movement.

The Question of Curriculum

Much of the popular and academic attention that Hirsch has received focused on his 1987 work, *Cultural Literacy*. Indeed, a review of citations suggested that Hirsch gained much more notoriety for his cultural critique than he has for his more recent (1996) work on schools. While the debate over culture that Hirsch spawned is peripheral to the present study, it is useful to consider the kind of criticisms that were leveled against him because there are implications for school reform. Among these critics, Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) and Booth (1989) are representative.

Proponents of cultural literacy offer an argument that is tied to a conception of community. In order to achieve full participation within the community, it is claimed, its members must share a common core of knowledge, manifested in language and information. This core is necessary, in their view, in order to converse and to debate, without which the democratic state would cease to exist. Because Hirsch is often accused of being anti-democratic and elitist, it is important to note that he begins by searching for equality of participation in the cultural, and hence economic and political life of the nation. Hirsch asserted we must share specific information with one another in order to build human communities (1987). This belief undergirds Hirsch's "anthropological theory of education" (p. xv) which he described as a necessary antidote to Dewey's "faith in children's ability to learn general skills from a few typical experiences..." (p. xv). Hirsch contends that we have lost our way in attaining the goal of acculturation because educators have traded emphasis on information for Deweyan emphasis on behavior and that, as a consequence, our education system and democratic nation are threatened.

Booth (1988) among others, (e.g., Hernnstein-Smith,1990; Kliebard,1988) takes issue. Booth argues in an open letter to Hirsch that the "listing" of knowledge, its categorization as "what every American *needs* to know" is, indeed, a dangerous antidote to what ails our education system. The danger, as Booth puts it, lies in the possibility that curiosity will die. That children will have "been taught" (p.18) but will not have learned. That "the list" will be turned to "the test;" that no student will read except that which has been assigned from the list, and perhaps most damaging of all, that the child, the learner, will have been overlooked as the focal point of American education. I examined the cautions Booth raised in the context of schools where teaching Core Knowledge has become policy. I also examined other facets of Booth's opposition to Hirsch, e.g., its superficiality as knowledge to be acquired, its significance to nation building, its potential for polarizing educators and for "training functionaries" (p. 15). Would evidence of such dangers and concerns manifest themselves in Core Knowledge schools?

Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) pose a critique of Hirsch's work that is grounded in the critical educational tradition. They evaluate his opinion of educational problems; his account of the relationships among power, language, and culture; the suggestions he offers classroom teachers; and his view of the history and tradition of schooling. This final aspect of their critique, Hirsch's analysis of schooling, most directly related to the purposes of this study. The significance of power relationships in schools, school culture, and the danger of building school programs around a type of academic knowledge that downplays the contributions of many of the groups represented in schools today may be reason enough for rejecting Hirsch's notion of a core curriculum, if one accepts the

reasoning offered by Aronowitz and Giroux, reasoning that Hirsch would characterize as functionalist in nature. Functionalism, Hirsch implies, undermines the traditional approach of educating all citizens so that they may recognize their full intellectual potential.

Aronowitz's and Giroux's argument addresses Hirsch's theory alongside that of Allan Bloom as developed in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). This is unsurprising since Hirsch and Bloom shared a public and academic spotlight when their respective books appeared amid the national debate over the quality of American education. And like most of the critics of Hirsch and Bloom, Aronowitz and Giroux classify and criticize them as conservative ideologues whose political agenda lies barely beneath the surface. Indeed, it is this shared political agenda that links the two authors, because substantively their projects are somewhat different, as Aronowitz and Giroux note. According to Aronowitz and Giroux, Hirsch and Bloom are out to "rewrite the past from the perspective of the privileged and the powerful" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, p. 315). Further, Hirsch and Bloom seek to re-marginalize minority cultures by arbitrarily asserting the superiority of the European canon. This political agenda is directly connected to pedagogy that seeks to deny the centrality of experience in learning. According to Hirsch and Bloom, experiential, hands-on, discovery approaches to learning have little to do with knowledge acquisition. On the contrary, they advocate learning through a pedagogy of transmission, with emphasis on particular literary works and historical tradition and catalogues of shared information.

"For Hirsch insists that schools be analyzed as sites of learning in which

knowledge, not merely skills, constitutes the most important consideration if public schooling is to fulfill its purpose as a transmitter of civic and public culture" (p. 316). According to Aronowitz and Giroux, Hirsch's critique of American schools traces its way to the manner in which colleges and schools of education train teachers. As outlined in *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch claimed that the American education establishment is nurtured in the progressive tradition of John Dewey. Progressivism embraces skill development and experiential learning as primary hallmarks of what schools are to accomplish – at the expense, in Hirsch's view, of transmitting a national culture to children through teaching a canon of knowledge.

Aronowitz and Giroux, of course, reject Hirsch's argument. Their main ground of criticism is essentially political, unsurprising for authors who identify themselves in the critical tradition. From their point of view, Hirsch offers thinly disguised ideology instead of a sound theoretical argument. They contend that he misconstrues the nature of progressive education, at least as Dewey defined it; that his curriculum is entirely too narrow, reflecting only the dominant cultural tradition; that his theory is in the end anti-democratic because it denies or would suppress the cultural pluralism that gives life to democracy; and that Hirsch's remedy would not solve the problems of the inner city schools where reform and improvement are most needed. Hirsch, of course, asserts that the Core Knowledge curriculum will promote democracy and is *most* needed in inner city schools.

While these authors acknowledge the essential elements of Hirsch's theory, they do not address the actual experience in schools that have adopted the Core Knowledge

curriculum. Because their article was written before Hirsch published his major writing on schools, Aronowitz and Giroux do not address Hirsch's recommendations for implementing the Core Knowledge curriculum, in substance or procedure. They deal with Hirsch entirely at the level of ideas and concepts, and not at all at the level of facts. Yet their critique does suggest a number of practical questions that go to the heart of Hirsch's contention. Because the purpose of the present study is to examine the Core Knowledge curriculum in operation, rather than to defend it in theory, these factual questions are important.

If Hirsch is right, one might expect to see that in schools adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum, student learning increases, student and faculty motivation is enhanced, curiosity is aroused, and the environment of the school is improved. Some continuity in knowledge acquisition across grade levels would become apparent, as well as the development of some degree of shared cultural understandings. At the same time, one would not expect to find exact uniformity in instruction because the Core Knowledge curriculum is to constitute only one half of the curriculum in any given school.

If Aronowitz and Giroux are right, Core Knowledge schools would be viewed as offering a quite narrow curriculum. Minority and female authors would be diminished. Student curiosity might decline rather than increase. Minority students may feel excluded. Any common cultural understandings that emerge in Core Knowledge schools would reflect only the experience and values of the dominant white, middle class culture. The Core Knowledge curriculum would be found most oppressive in inner city schools with large minority populations. Its adoption should do little to improve student

attendance and performance. Teachers should be especially unhappy, because they lose the freedom to teach what they want. Those teachers wanting to challenge the canonical tradition should be especially frustrated. Clear differences should emerge among parents, teachers, and students representing the dominant culture, and those representing minority cultures. This should lead to conflict. While I do not resolve the theoretical debate between Hirsch and his critics in this study, its findings do offer evidence upon which a reasoned consideration of these theoretical and ideological disputes might be undertaken.

The Question of National Standards

The debate spawned by *Cultural Literacy* came about in the context of a larger national dialogue over curriculum and standards. Questions about curriculum content, the influence of curriculum reform initiatives on schools and perceptions of the viability of educational change are all fruitful areas for exploration. This study cannot offer a definitive answer to the practical or normative aspects of the national curriculum standards issue; however, it is clear that Hirsch sees the Core Knowledge curriculum as a step in the direction of a national curriculum, something he heartily endorses. If Core Knowledge is to be a step toward national standards, it will have to be as a "bottom up" process that starts in the Core Knowledge schools. Thus, the present study may offer insight into the potential value of a standard school curriculum, in the schools where it is taught. This may contribute to conceptual clarity, and the findings may be "...used 'from below' as well as 'from above' by those who are targets of policy and who are pressing for change in their own situations" (Finch, 1986, pp. 230-231). In order to lay the foundation for these curricular policy issues, I briefly review several contributions to the

debate over national curriculum standards.

Many scholars have given attention to whether public policy such as Goals 2000, curriculum frameworks and national standards represent promise for improving education in the United States (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Gagnon, 1995; Massaro, 1993; Ravitch, 1995; Spring,1993). Some educators argued that national goals and standards have helped to create a consensus about what schools should do (Ravitch, 1995). Massaro called this phenomenon "a firestorm of commentary" and attempts to explain "this combustion in historical, education-specific terms" (p.69). Her analysis of the significance of national goals and standards is cast in constitutional terms. Recent studies tend to confirm evidence of both consensus and heated debate over what should be taught in America's schools (Gagnon, 1995). Spring (1993) argued that grassroots movements "can force federal involvement in education" (p.96) raising the question of how influential a movement like Core Knowledge might be if teachers themselves promote it as sound programming and policy.

Massaro, a professor of law, addressed the need for a "constitutional literacy" that would offer students a grounding in the constitutional foundations of American pluralism. She provided an excellent overview of three competing pedagogical traditions, associated with Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago universities. Harvard and Chicago stood for traditional emphasis on canonical writings, while Columbia, under the influence of progressive theorists such as John Dewey, developed the emphasis on skill development and experiential learning that came to dominate American pedagogy. It is against this progressive educational model that Hirsch argues. Massaro refers to Hirsch as an

exemplar of the move toward the establishment of a national core curriculum. She provided an accurate summary of his argument, and links it to other core curriculum supporters, such as Ravitch, Chester Finn, Lynne Cheney, and William Bennett. She suggested that the concept of a core curriculum struck a responsive chord among a variety of groups, including religious fundamentalists, objectivist philosophers, political realists, and educational traditionalists (Massaro, 1993, p. 38).

Arrayed in opposition to the concept of a core curriculum is an equally diverse group that includes educational progressives, multiculturalists, and political liberals. The multiculturalists offer a thorough criticism, finding the concept of a core curriculum a threat to the status of minority groups in society; they favor curricular independence for minority groups that would allow for the teaching of, for example, Afrocentric curriculum and feminist interpretations of history.

Massaro sought to walk the line between the advocates of core curriculum and the multiculturalists – her book is subtitled "A Core Curriculum for a Multicultural Nation." She argued that constitutional literacy can be grounded in the facts of constitutional history and interpretation, yet focus on issues and controversies that are most relevant to the creation of a pluralist society. A measure of Massaro's success in walking the line is that the book is endorsed both by Hirsch and Stanley Fish, a leading advocate of multiculturalism. Hirsch supports her argument because she grounds her notion of constitutional literacy in canonical texts of the U.S. Supreme Court. Fish supports it because of Massaro's substantive focus on multicultural issues. Yet it is not apparent that Massaro's argument is capable of offering a resolution to the larger issue of a

comprehensive national core curriculum. Because her concrete focus is on the U.S. Constitution, she has ready at hand an authoritative source upon which all can agree: the text of the Constitution and the Supreme Court cases through which it has evolved. However, Massaro's ideas apply rather narrowly when considering the complexity of what contemporary schoolchildren may need to know. The "constitutional conversation" is important to, but likely not sufficient for enabling "our children to assume the complex duties of citizenship." (p.153)

Gagnon (1995) offered an overview of the national curriculum debate that focuses on content. Like Hirsch, he argued that the trend toward affective learning is a twentieth century American phenomenon, the product of professionalized pedagogy in the education establishment. The serious move toward national standards of the late 1980s and early 1990s, in Gagnon's view, ought to have yielded results. He noted a widespread public consensus on the need for standards that included both Republican and Democratic administrations, the Congress, and large public majorities. Yet the education establishment has resisted concrete steps to create national content standards. Under the Bush and Clinton administrations, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned four projects to create core content in the arts, civics, geography, and history (p. 68). The projects were bogged down in ideological conflict, contained lengthy and burdensome requirements, and introduced packages of compromise rather than coherent content standards. As a result, they were defunct. A frustrated Education Department passed the matter on to the states for consideration.

The type of content standards advocated by Gagnon and sought by the Department

of Education are more general than Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum. According to Gagnon, four steps are necessary to implement content-based reform (pp. 71-72): (1) teachers and scholars must work together under public review to write content standards; (2) states should write curriculum frameworks; (3) teachers should do the course design and pedagogy; (4) states should set performance standards and write tests. Gagnon holds that the national standards should be "brief, scrupulously selected lists of what is worth knowing in each academic discipline." For example:

> In history, a typical standard asks students to understand the causes of the First World War, with an eye to the technological, economic, social, and political forces at work, together with the roles of individuals, of accident, and of ordinary confusion. It does not ask students to "master the concept of conflict in world history." Nor does it ask them to memorize the names of the twenty central characters in the tragedy of the summer of 1914. (p. 72)

Gagnon's concept of content-based curriculum is similar to Hirsch's, except that Gagnon addresses secondary curriculum while Hirsch's Sequence is offered to elementary students. The Core Knowledge Sequence takes up World War I in Grade 7. Hirsch would have students know that World War I was fought from 1914-1918 in Europe, and might expect that they know that it started in the Balkans when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Austrian Arch-Duke Francis Ferdinand. These are facts upon which a student might eventually come to a more mature understanding of the war. Students would also learn about nationalism, militarism, and colonialism as contributing causes of the war. Gagnon wants secondary students to master "technological, economic, social, and political forces at work" (p. 72) and Hirsch's point is that they will be better prepared to do so if they have a basic factual understanding of what occurred.

Hirsch's emphasis is consistently on facts, especially in the early grades. He assumes that in later grades those facts will be translated into more sophisticated conceptual understanding. He denies that the Core Knowledge curriculum requires rote learning of facts; he encourages teachers to give vitality to the facts by placing them in appropriate context (1996, pp.152-158). Gagnon proposes to restrict the national standards to a "brief list" of main topics, such as World War I. He would then leave the design and implementation of actual curriculum to the teachers. But this would appear not to satisfy Hirsch's demand for a national core curriculum, because what one might learn about World War I could vary considerably depending upon the paradigm within which it is taught. This raises a key concern that advocates of national standards such as Gagnon and Hirsch must address: if facts are embedded in interpretive frameworks, does it make a difference which framework is adopted? Hirsch stresses the importance of placing facts in context, but the context is an intellectual context. Thus, in his discussion of "higher order thinking" he stresses the importance of looking at facts in relation to other facts and looking at the same set of facts from different "angles" (1996, p.154). His critics would contend that the prior question is, what are the facts? If, as some of his critics contend, all facts are subject to interpretation, then one cannot escape the problem of perspective in articulating any core curriculum. To this criticism Hirsch replies that a grasp of what occurred, what was said, what was done, and what was going on at the time lays the foundation for any possible interpretation of an event such as World War I. If school children know these "facts" then they will be prepared to assess alternative interpretations of them.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) take Hirsch to task, not on the grounds that facts are always subject to interpretation, but on the grounds that mere rote learning of facts is not useful. They take Hirsch as an example of an "extreme" advocate of content-based national curriculum, and offer a caricature of his view. Perhaps because they did not have available to them Hirsch's 1996 book *The Schools We Need*, they appear to simultaneously misstate his position while agreeing in many ways with what he actually has argued.

> Hirsch urges, for example, that children should know about James Monroe, DNA, Tectonics, the Treaty of Versailles, Ichabod Crane, and so forth. These concrete bits of knowledge are to be learned by taking core courses in history, biology, earth science, literature, and the like; and high schools should encourage or require all students to take the courses that disseminate these "factoids." (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 300.)

This characterization of Hirsch's views compares to the following statement of them.

> Whatever the underlying psychological mechanisms prove to be, research has demonstrated that the teaching of a generous number of carefully chosen exemplary facts within a meaningful explanatory context is a better method for inducing insightful thinking than is any proposed alternative. These alternatives include 1) the teaching of the whole factual domain, 2) the teaching of the general principles only, and 3) the teaching of a single example in great depth (the less is more theory). None of these methods is as effective for inducing effective real-world thinking as sampling well-selected and consistent facts in a carefully prepared explanatory context. (Hirsch, 1996, p. 157)

It is clear that Hirsch does not propose the rote learning of "factoids." But it is also clear that Hirsch believes that his curriculum will achieve many of the results advocated by Berliner and Biddle in their new curriculum for the coming century. They outline (p.301) a number of qualities of the twenty-first century "well-educated high school graduate." These qualities include abilities to obtain and use information, to communicate

effectively, to reason sensibly, to solve problems, to engage in metacognition, and to work with people from other cultures. Hirsch would argue that the Core Knowledge Sequence will enable students to attain all of these goals. With respect to a final goal, cross-cultural communications, he would insist that the participation in a shared national culture is the prerequisite for intercultural understanding. We build bridges, Hirsch believes, on the basis of what we share in common.

Ravitch, too, offered a comprehensive overview of the national curriculum debate. A strength of her presentation is the overview of the political move toward national standards. In 1988 the Bush administration pressed for the adoption of voluntary national standards for American schools (Ravitch, 1995, p.138). The push for national standards was the result of a decade long series of findings that American students lagged behind their counterparts around the globe, and that American schools were not doing their jobs. America had become "a nation at risk."

The policy debate in Washington has centered less on whether there should be standards than on who should set them. The Bush administration favored voluntary development and adoption of standards. Republicans have always stood for local control of school systems, and did not want federal intrusion into local affairs on a matter as basic as what children should be taught. Democrats have been of two minds on national standards. Traditional Democratic liberals have generally opposed the idea. Perhaps under the influence of the National Education Association, whose members have been staunch supporters of the Democratic Party, Democrats have viewed the imposition of standards as an intrusion on the rights of teachers to teach what and as they wish. The

neo-liberal Democrats, as represented by the Democratic Leadership Council, have favored setting national standards and wanted to go further in making them mandatory. Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, a leader of the neo-liberal Democrats, played an influential role in President Bush's work with the National Governors' Conference in developing the America 2000 national curriculum effort. Later, President Bill Clinton made national standards a significant part of his education program, bickering with the Republican-controlled Congress over issues of federal versus local control. By the end of the decade of the 1990s, the national policy debate still leans in the direction of setting some sort of curriculum standards in the nation's public schools and Hirsch likely takes heart.

Ravitch provides an explanation of the relationship between the issue of core curriculum and the more general question of national standards. She defines three kinds of standards: content standards, performance standards, and delivery (opportunity to learn) standards. Content standards specify material to be known; performance standards specify levels of mastery of the material. Delivery standards refer to resources available to deliver or support the curriculum (p. 12). These first two aspects of standards are analytically distinct but functionally related. The performance standards must indicate that the content standards have been met. Thus, the concept of national standards implies some identification of core curriculum material. There is much confusion about the nature of standards because there are many possible ways to define standards. One popular trend of the 1980s, for example, was "outcomes based education," but this movement focused as much on skills as on knowledge and was opposed by many

conservatives who favor curricular standards.

There is a significant difference between Hirsch's concept of core knowledge and the broader movement toward national standards, that the affinity between the two may mask. The national standards movement aims generally to improve student performance. It is part of a broad educational reform program that encompasses teacher training and development, curriculum reform, and other reforms. The advocates of national standards do not necessarily embrace Hirsch's core curriculum or endorse his pedagogical theory. Hirsch does not specifically endorse federal educational standards. Indeed, his emphasis on grass roots reform is at odds with the very concept of imposing national standards by law. Still, the affinity between Hirsch and advocates of national standards has made them bedfellows in the ongoing debate with the opponents of core curriculum reform and national standards.

Ravitch arrays the main arguments of the opponents of national standards (pp. 18-25, italics in original).

- *National standards will be minimal, reduced to the lowest common denominator, especially if they are controlled by a federal agency;*
- *The government might impose controversial values and opinions;*
- *National standards based on traditional subject matter disciplines such as mathematics, science, and history will narrow the curriculum;*
- *National testing will harm children and will distort priorities in the classroom;*
- *National standards and national tests will do nothing to help poor inner-city schools;*

- *National standards and assessments will not expand equality of opportunity;*
- *National standards and assessments will not improve achievement because most teachers will ignore them and do what they have always done*
- *The failure of national standards and testing will undermine faith in public education and pave the way for privatization of education;*
- *National standards and assessments will accomplish little by themselves. Unless they are accompanied by better teaching, a better school environment, better instructional materials (including new technology), and more highly motivated students, student achievement will not improve.*

This compilation of objections to national standards is countered by an equally imposing list of arguments in favor of them (pp. 25-27):

- *Standards can improve achievement by clearly defining what is to be taught and what kind of performance is expected;*
- *Standards (national, state, and local)are necessary for equality of opportunity;*
- *National standards provide a valuable coordinating function;*
- *There is no reason to have different standards in different states, especially in mathematics and science, when well-developed international standards have already been developed for these fields;*
- *Standards and assessments provide consumer protection by supplying accurate information to students and parents;*
- *Standards and assessments serve as an important signaling device to students, parents, teachers, employers, and colleges.*

This list of arguments in favor and opposed to national standards provides a template for discussing Hirsch's relationship to the larger national standards movement. With respect to the arguments against national standards, Hirsch's core curriculum offers its own response. For example, as against the claim that standards will reduce to the lowest common denominator, Hirsch insists that his core curriculum will pull everyone in the school to higher expectations. He wants to foster a grass roots movement precisely because he does not trust the process of federal policy making to produce anything other than a politicized national curriculum. To the argument that the teachers will not teach the core, Hirsch responds by fostering a movement among committed teachers who believe in it. To the claim that the core will not promote equality, he argues that it is the only sure way to equality. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum and its manner of implementation thus speak directly to some of the more common criticisms of a national curriculum.

At the same time, the case in favor of national standards offered by Ravitch omits the main claim that charges the Core Knowledge movement. Hirsch believes that core knowledge is a prerequisite to fostering a national culture in which democratic pluralism can thrive. His case does not rest on skill mastery, "consumer" choice, or other such ancillary benefits. It is clear that Ravitch and other advocates of national standards do not necessarily embrace either Hirsch's larger cultural argument or his pedagogical theory.

How do we reach national standards? How can reform be brought about? Ravitch moved from the Bush education department to a private think tank to promote the idea of improving schools through the creation of national standards and assessments.

She is allied with a number of other neo-conservative advocates of school reform in the Center for Education Reform. This group published a self-styled "manifesto" entitled "A Nation Still at Risk" (1998), that argued for the dire necessity of radical reforms including national standards. The signers included Ravitch, William Bennett, Chester Finn, and notably, E.D. Hirsch, among others. While the report contains no direct reference to "core knowledge" or the Core Knowledge movement, it does suggest that schools teach a core of common knowledge to all students. Clearly, Hirsch has decided to ally himself with those advocates of reform with whom he has the most affinity, notwithstanding the fact that few fully embrace his movement. This alliance raises the question of how reform can best be brought about.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) develop an extensive critique of the national standards movement and the factual underpinnings of studies like *A Nation at Risk.* A full analysis of their findings lies beyond the present purpose, but several points should be mentioned. First, throughout their book Berliner and Biddle challenge the arguments made by critics of public schooling. With respect to national curriculum content standards, they observe that the defenders of national standards contend that the adoption of the standards will lead to improved student performance. Yet according to Berliner and Biddle, "such arguments have rarely, if ever, been confirmed by evidence" (p. 183). Second, Berliner and Biddle observe that when requirements are imposed, e.g., when a specified number of years of language or math are required, funding is typically not provided to offer the courses. This leads school districts and schools to offer watered down versions of core courses that do not serve the purposes sought by the standard-setters. Third, the

imposition of curricular requirements is always purchased at the price of omitting other curricular opportunities. If there is to be more math and science, then there will be less of other things. Some of those other things are useful. Why not psychology, human relations, or health science (p. 184)? Finally, Berliner and Biddle suggest that the imposition of a uniform curriculum cannot respond to the varying needs of students who differ from each other in many ways. Deciding "what children need to know," and then adopting this "what" as policy, as Hirsch and others suggest, is not sound educational practice and is potentially unfair to students if one accepts Berliner and Biddle's argument.

Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence is not the same thing as the sort of national curriculum standards that Berliner and Biddle criticize. Hirsch stresses the *specific* knowledge that students should learn – not the number of required courses or hours that students must take. Indeed, the kind of national standard that Berliner and Biddle (and many advocates of national standards) address relates to distributional requirements at the secondary level. Hirsch's work is recommended to elementary and middle schools, for which the Core Knowledge Sequence has been initially proposed. Hirsch would agree with Berliner and Biddle that watered down courses are no substitute for solid courses, but the nature of Hirsch's curriculum is not particularly dependent on expenditure of money. Berliner and Biddle's concern over the monetary costs involved in requiring secondary course work would not apply to Core Knowledge, which, the Foundation says, can be taught for very little monetary investment.

Teachers of students in kindergarten through grade eight are going to be teaching

something; and Hirsch wants to specify what they should teach. Hirsch, of course, believes that all students deserve an equal grounding in the shared knowledge upon which our culture rests. He also believes that the Core Knowledge Sequence offers a better foundation for knowledge acquisition and skill development than any alternative. However, Hirsch recognizes that Berliner and Biddle's first point is important; parents, teachers, and administrators must search for evidence of the effectiveness of any curriculum in enhancing the performance of students. The recent evaluation studies of Core Knowledge Schools referenced in Chapter One is a first step in this direction.

The Question of Reform

The study of reform in educational institutions has produced an extensive body of literature. While many scholars have explored various aspects of educational change, e.g., innovative schools, (Freedman,1990; Lightfoot, 1983; Smith, et al.,1987), the change process, (Finn & Rebarber, 1992; Fullan, 1991), school reform, (Bacharach, 1990; Barth, 1990; Glickman, 1993; Sarason, 1971, 1990) and curriculum reform, (Berman et al., 1991; Cornbleth, 1990; Klein, 1989; Tyler, 1988), I focus on four works: Kliebard, Sarason, Tyack and Tobin, and Fullan.

Kliebard (1988) offers four hypotheses regarding the "ebb and flow" (p. 16) of so-called curricular reforms. According to Kliebard, the "instability of curriculum change" (p.16) is rooted in an inability to determine what is and what is not curriculum, poor planning, the temporal nature of social and political climates, and ill conceived ideas about reasons for change. Specifically, Kliebard suggests:

- that the "boundless" scope of school curricula invites any "pretender" who can

ground a specific curriculum proposal in utility;

- that the "rhetoric of reform" pushes schools to adopt reform proposals without at the same time implementing the administrative changes that would be needed to sustain the effort;
- that what passes for reform is most often merely the "resurfacing" of old ideas under temporarily favorable political circumstances, making the reform effort hostage to context;
- that school administrators have a vested interest in adapting to new trends or fads because they can thereby claim to be "current" and on the cutting edge, which will please important constituencies. (pp. 16-17)

These four factors lead to an endless cycle of school "reform" in which one set of reforms gives rise to another.

Kliebard's argument has implications for the Core Knowledge movement. It might be held, for example, that Core Knowledge confirms each of these hypotheses. That is, that the Core Knowledge curriculum is but a wave in a boundless curricular ocean, that it is most likely to be adopted without the administrative infrastructure to sustain it, that it represents the ultimate in rehashing old ideas (back to the classics!), and that school administrators will adopt it as the most recent fad, rather than from any conviction that it is good. Yet it may be otherwise, for Hirsch offers a theory of educational reform that is in no sense at odds with Kliebard's hypotheses. Indeed, they share some assumptions.

Kliebard's typical reform scenario has a national movement being embraced by

reform groups and then by school administrators. The administrators embrace the reform because it is currently popular, without really believing in it. Then, they fail to implement the reform in a way that would give it some prospect of success over time. When the wind behind the reform dies, the schools easily return to their established ways. Then everyone waits for the next reform wave to come along to "re-move" the school system.

Hirsch seems quite aware of this possibility. In fact, he expresses skepticism about an ability to sustain any reform movement that is imposed upon a school from without or one that is embraced by a professional administrator who lacks conviction. Instead, Hirsch argues, lasting school reform can only come about if the reforms are brought into the schools by teachers and administrators who believe in them. The Core Knowledge movement, therefore, has remained very much a grass roots effort, as discussed in Chapter Four. Hirsch thus offers a solution to several of Kliebard's problems. The committed teachers and administrators who back Core Knowledge will be more likely to take the steps necessary to implement the curriculum over time. Further, because the Core Knowledge curriculum is spiral and sequential, i.e., building upon itself from year to year, there are strong institutional incentives to maintain it over time. Parents of second-graders and their children look forward to the benefits gained by accumulating knowledge over the years and will want the children to build upon what they have already learned. Or so Hirsch argues.

Kliebard's conclusions, in fact, appear tentative in nature; they are not tested by current cases of attempted reform, especially those cases of content-specific curricular change. If Kliebard were correct, one might expect an academic curriculum like Core

Knowledge to fall by the wayside. Yet so far the movement has endured. This suggests the value of a qualitative study of how and why it persists. It will be important to know what school personnel have to say about Core Knowledge as it relates to Kliebard's criteria associated with specificity in content; extensive research-based, field-tested planning; attention to social-political contexts; and clearly articulated views about the immediate need for a national core curriculum.

Sarason (1990) provided arguments against the likelihood of any enduring educational reform without attention to a number of obstacles to reform:

- the general unmanagability of schools;
- problems in diagnosing why schools are unmanagable or "intractable" (p. 108);
- reluctance to challenge the belief that schooling must occur in classrooms in schools; and
- non-acceptance of alternatives to "encapsulated classrooms." (p. 111)

Sarason probed into reasons for the persisting obstacles, associating any hope of successful educational reform with their recognition and attempted resolution. For example, he explains the importance of the passage of time, the publication of research findings, and a keen understanding of the essence of an organization's [school's] culture to effecting lasting change. He discussed internal and external perspectives of the concept of American education, power relationships within the current system and the question of the purpose for schooling. These are the aspects of Sarason's work that contribute to the conceptual frame of this study because they reflect important factors to consider in understanding the likelihood of Core Knowledge's endurance as curricular

reform.

Sarason stressed two related concepts in analyzing the potential for educational change: power and meaning. With respect to power, Sarason argued that any reform that does not address the reality of unequal power distribution in the schools is bound to fail. Teachers generally have less power than administrators who make policy decisions that teachers are expected to implement. With respect to meaning, he holds that the essence of any reorganization or improvement lies less in what is done than in what it means to the participants. In this connection, he argued that most proposals are grounded in the interests and perspectives of students; yet those who are asked to implement the reforms are teachers. What do the changes mean to them? The concepts of power and meaning are related because the teachers, lacking the power to participate meaningfully in the policy making stages of reform, are then imposed upon with concern given only for what the change will mean for the students.

Sarason's solution is to increase the participation of teachers in the policy making process so that reforms that are adopted will be meaningful to them. If teachers find meaning in what they are doing, then it is more likely that they will impart enthusiasm and inspire interest among the students, he claims. The key question then, is: how might teachers be empowered in the reform process? This question reaches Sarason's larger point, which is to stress the cultural foundations of education reform. Since his early work, *The Culture of Schools and the Problem of Change* (1982), Sarason has emphasized that the culture of the school is the critical factor in facilitating or preventing change. His more recent work extends that thesis with a dose of skepticism: Sarason

appears to have concluded that school cultures are intractable due to the power structure within and around them. Thus, reform efforts are "predictable failures." But what if the culture of the schools could be changed? Or more to the point, *how* might school culture change?

Hirsch does not address concepts such as power or meaning in his argument or in his curricular proposals, except insofar as such concepts may relate to his broader critique of the culture of the schools. From his point of view, a preoccupation with issues of power and matters of meaning may be precisely what leads the schools away from questions of substantive knowledge. But clearly, culture is a central concept for Hirsch. Of course he approaches culture in the first instance in broader social terms - thus, cultural illiteracy is his main motif. However, Hirsch was finally led to the conclusion that the seeds of national culture lie in the schools. What is taught there is of critical importance he argues. His focus on content is rare, if not unique, among reform proposals. Education specialists such as Sarason focus on matters of process: involvement, meaning, power, participation. Hirsch focuses instead on what teachers should teach and what students should learn. Still, Hirsch's reform proposals may carry an implication for analyses of Sarason's type. Whether the adoption of the Core Knowledge curriculum enhances prospects for reform in just the manner that Sarason proposes, by fostering involvement and participation; equalizing power relationships; fostering meaning among teachers and students; and generally improving the environment of the schools is yet unanswered.

Why do so few education reforms become established while others "fade or

become marginalized" (Tyack & Tobin, 1994, p. 453; see also Tyack & Cuban, 1995)? To answer this question, these authors investigated several cases of attempted education reform and drew upon political, cultural and functionalist modes of interpretation in reporting their conclusions. They conducted an historical study of the graded school and the Carnegie unit as examples of established forms of schooling, while the Eight-Year Study, the flexible high school of the 1960s and the Dalton Plan are cited as cases of "transient" (p. 463) reform. Each case conveys educational perspectives as well as socio-political conditions related to the attempts at education reform. Tyack and Tobin report key factors in "persistent" and "evanescent" reforms: timing; ability to enlist ideas and support from the community, thus acknowledging the school's *cultural construction*; turnover and burnout among reformers; and broad commitment to change, involving not only reformers, but the public as well.

The five reform efforts examined by Tyack and Tobin addressed the basic "grammar" of public schools, i.e., the manner in which they do business. While some of the reform efforts, such as the Eight Year Study and the flexible high school, had curricular implications, none of these reforms specifically addressed what was taught; instead, the focus was on how the school was organized to present the material. It would appear that for Tyack and Tobin, as for Kliebard, Sarason, and other scholars of professional education, the concept of reform is strongly structural in character. A "real" reform is one that alters power relationships, changes the manner in which schools are structured, revamps the way that people spend time in the schools, or alters the organizing principles of the curriculum. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Tyack and Tobin reach

conclusions that are similar to the other scholars. If changing a school or a school system means making the schools look different than they now do; if it means that the schools must become different from what most people expect them to be; if true reform means altering the power structure of schools and/or school systems, then reform is going to be an arduous battle. As "cultural constructions," schools are intransigent places.

The concept of cultural constructions is related to Hirsch's effort to bring about social change through school curriculum reform. Hirsch writes a great deal about culture; his primary theme is *cultural literacy*. He believes that the Core Knowledge curriculum will have broader cultural consequences because by educating all children in a common cultural heritage, mutual understanding and fairness will be enhanced. In order for the Core Knowledge curriculum to be effectively implemented in the schools, administrators, teachers, and parents must embrace it. If that happens, the culture of the schools will be affected. Tyack and Tobin state that:

> Cultural constructions of schooling have changed over time and can change again. To do this deliberately would require intense and continual public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling, including reexamination of cultural assumptions about what a "real school" is and what sort of improved schooling could realize new aspirations. To do so would require reaching beyond a cadre of committed reformers to involve the public in a broad commitment to change. (p. 478)

Hirsch believes that the Core Knowledge Movement has such potential precisely because it is a grassroots effort that relies upon the commitment of administrators, parents, and teachers. Together, at the local level, school by school, the schools adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum are culturally reconstructed, Hirsch and his proponents maintain. Teachers interact more; roles shift; parents become increasingly involved. One school

serves as the model for the next. In this manner, the culture of schools is reconstructed, potentially leading to a broader cultural consequence: the reinforcement of a national culture.

In a sense, Hirsch maps a steeper terrain to conquer than did the reformers that Tyack and Tobin discuss. For reforms of the more traditional type to succeed, it is necessary for reformers to gain a foothold in the schools to leverage organizational change. Teachers will likely do what they have always done, but their time may be differently organized, students will come to them in different streams, or the physical setting will be altered. For Hirsch to succeed, teachers will have to be convinced that the substantive character of his proposed curriculum is worthy, and they will have to be willing to assume some additional burdens in teaching it. They may have to learn as well as teach.

Tyack and Tobin stress burnout as a major obstacle to enduring school reform. Change requires effort, on the parts of everyone involved. Burnout is a challenge to the Core Knowledge movement, especially given the degree of teacher involvement required. Even the most dedicated leaders in reforms and in schools become weary, particularly if trapped in "intractable" systems or institutions. To avoid burnout, Hirsch appears to have taken several key steps. The first is his insistence that Core Knowledge remain a grass roots movement. By working alongside teachers, parents, and administrators within school communities, the movement builds upon the firmer ground of collective commitment. Another key step has been the establishment of the Core Knowledge Foundation. The Foundation serves as an "encourager" for the movement, a source of

information and support, an "endorser." The third key step is the move to develop curricular materials for the classroom. This may facilitate the work of the teachers and alleviate a few primary sources of burnout, such as fatigue and stress.

This discussion of reform literature will conclude by considering Michael G. Fullan's *The Meaning of Educational Change* (1991). Unlike those authors who focus on the concept of educational reform, Fullan considers reform under the more general heading of "change." Reform, for Fullan, is an aspect of change. *The Meaning of Educational Change* takes the reader well beyond its title. Fullan has provided a systematic overview of the nature and process of change as it relates to every level and aspect of education. Here, I focus on several main points that are particularly relevant to the present study.

Fullan differentiated two "waves" of reform: "intensification" and "restructuring" (p. 7). Intensification involves such things as "increased definition of the curriculum, mandated textbooks, standardized tests tightly aligned with curriculum, specification of teaching and administrative methods backed up by evaluation and monitoring" (p. 7). Restructuring "usually involves school-based management; enhanced roles for teachers in instruction and decision making; integration of multiple innovations; restructured timetables supporting collaborative work cultures; radical reorganization of teacher education" etc. (p. 7). Though the latter seems to be more closely associated with the reforms addressed by the authors discussed above, Hirsch is not simply an "intensifier." He does not favor the imposition of a "core knowledge rule" implemented and enforced by evaluation and monitoring. Still, Hirsch clearly insists on more definition of the

curriculum and has moved in the direction of providing curriculum materials, if not formal textbooks, with which the Core Knowledge curriculum can be implemented. It is interesting to note that the "intensification" reforms are historically prior to the "restructuring" reforms, according to Fullan. In this sense the Core Knowledge movement may be seen, at least partially, as a throwback to an earlier time.

Throughout, Fullan emphasized the myriad reasons why school reforms fail. Prominent among those reasons is the fact that many reforms are originally conceived within the ivory walls of the academy. Academicians, he said, tend to be driven by theoretical considerations. They may tend toward insensitivity to the impact of the proposed reforms on the more pragmatic positions of people who implement them. Citing Silberman (1970), Fullan said that reforms undertaken in the 1960s failed "because of faulty and overly abstract theories not related or relatable to practice, limited or no contact with and understanding of the school, ignorance of the lessons of the experiences of (earlier) reformers..., and above all the failure to consider explicitly the relationship between the nature of the proposed innovations and the purposes of schools" (Fullan, 1991, 22-23). Fullan extracted from Silberman the conclusion that the reformers lost sight of the main question, "what is education for?"

Hirsch may be an example of this point. He is, after all, an academician and not a professional public school educator. Though he is now associated with education and humanities departments at the University of Virginia, Hirsch was, in 1994, a professor of English whose main thrust may be thought of as critiquing what is occurring in colleges of education. He is presumably further removed from primary and secondary classrooms

than are the professors he criticizes. His central theoretical points take their departure from a broader social conception that he himself recognizes as being essentially political in character (Hirsch, 1987). Thus, in providing an answer to the question, "what is education for?" Hirsch offers a fundamentally political rather than pedagogical response. For him, schools are breeding grounds of culture. Given the relatively complex theoretical context within which Hirsch frames his argument, it would be unsurprising if his reform effort were to fall prey to the same maladies as those undertaken in the 1960s, ironically, the very reforms whose effects he seeks to counteract.

Unlike the other scholars of reform, Fullan discusses curriculum often. In reviewing the effects of curriculum reform in Canada, wherein curriculum guidelines were produced in each province, Fullan finds that the process of defining the curriculum was inevitably politicized:

> We can only infer where the ideas contained in the guidelines originated, but they seem to be a strange blend of public, political pressures (emphasizing core curriculum and basic skills) and the pet theories and ideas of progressive university professors and school teachers... . The latter groups were heavily influenced by the "theoretical" developments of the university-based curriculum reform efforts in the 1960s in the United States... . The results are the same - the premature adoption of programs that turn out to be questionable on the grounds of need, feasibility, or technical soundness." (p. 23)

Hirsch seems to qualify by this description. The public, political pressures in the 1980s were from the right and not the left, and were a reaction to the perceived excesses of the reformers of that earlier decade. Yet Hirsch may appear to commit exactly the same act from an opposite intellectual and ideological perspective. Might the Core Knowledge movement lead to further politicization of the curriculum and the "premature adoption of

programs that turn out to be questionable on the grounds of need, feasibility, and technical soundness?" (p. 23).

A major problem with reform, especially curricular reform, is what Fullan refers to as "bias by neglect"(p. 25). Bias by neglect occurs when a reform results in the disregard of other pressing needs in education. Just as Hirsch suggests that the emphasis on skill development arising from the many reforms inspired by Dewey's philosophy were purchased at the neglect of basic knowledge necessary to sustaining a common culture, Fullan contends just the opposite:

> Individual, interpersonal, and social attitudes and skills appropriate for a democratic society do not receive the equal attention that Dewey...so clearly argued they should and that the rhetoric of formal goal statements of schools and governments implies. Even within certain goal areas that receive emphasis and are desired, there are serious problems pertaining to the bias of relative neglect. For example, the major current emphasis on basic skills (factual content, reading, mathematics, etc.) and testing raises all sorts of questions about relative neglect...The emphasis on basic skills and factual knowledge may be preempting the rest of the curriculum, including higher order cognitive skills... .(p. 26)

Hirsch contends that the emphasis on core knowledge does not preclude the development of higher order skills, but that the development of higher order skills presupposes the more basic knowledge. Differentiating between what he calls "extensive" and "intensive" learning (1987, p. 127), Hirsch suggests that in the lower grade levels the "extension" of knowledge lays a platform for more intensive examination in the upper grades. During the latter phase of education, higher order thinking will be enhanced by the shared fund of core knowledge, he says. Furthermore, Hirsch prescribes only forty to fifty percent of any school's curriculum, leaving ample opportunity for teachers to cover other subjects or some Core Knowledge subjects in greater depth.

Fullan offers a complete discussion of teacher training and development, believing each to be critical to any serious reform effort. In discussing teacher training he emphasizes the process of "induction," i.e., the early preparation of new teachers. In discussing professional development, he emphasizes, on the one hand, its critical importance to improving schools, and on the other hand, its costs in terms of demands on teacher time and energy. From the perspective of Core Knowledge, Fullan's emphasis is both well and mis-placed. Hirsch agrees that the preparation of teachers is critical to the learning prospects for students. He offers a demanding curriculum that requires a great deal of time and effort from teachers. Notably absent from Fullan's formulation, however, is any emphasis on that which is central to Hirsch: knowledge itself. Fullan speaks in terms of "basic competencies of teachers," of "professional development," of improving "teaching performance," and of "promoting the personal well-being of teachers" (1991, p. ix). He appears to take for granted that which Hirsch finds most problematic - that teachers have mastered the disciplines they teach.

Core Knowledge expects teachers to have command of the curriculum the students are supposed to learn. Hirsch suggests that for teachers who are trained in colleges of education this may require substantial retooling (p.288, n.18). Their own educations may leave gaps in their knowledge of some of the topics students are to learn. Furthermore, teachers face the necessity of developing many of their own teaching materials and locating resources, at least until the Foundation's recent curriculum projects come to fruition. It will not be surprising, therefore, if many teachers resist the Core Knowledge curriculum, not from ideological opposition, as is the case among some

college professors, but simply because it lays too great a burden on them as curriculum developers.

Fullan concludes by emphasizing his main message: that reforming schools is work that must be achieved alongside school people:

> Thus, the workplace itself is key. Reform cannot be achieved without working with school sites. But school sites are going to need massive change. Everyone inside and outside the school is going to have to put great energy over a period of time into changing the culture of the school. This means new values, norms, skills, practices, and structures. (p. 352)

With this message Hirsch heartily concurs. His fundamental proposition is that change must take place from the bottom up. Accepting that reforms must be implemented one school at a time, Hirsch stresses the need for cooperation among parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Just as he hopes that Core Knowledge will have a profound impact on American national culture, so too will it have an impact on each school in which it is offered. To examine that impact requires one to study Core Knowledge schools.

Less promising for Hirsch is a related discussion by Fullan (1993). In *Change Forces*, Fullan offers eight lessons in characterizing the school as a learning organization. Here, Fullan stresses the complexity of the change process and casts doubt upon the potential of planned reforms. Seeing change as a continuous and dynamic process, Fullan argues for an incremental approach through which participants are encouraged to develop goals and strategies over time, learning from experience. What then, about the imposition of curricular standards that are developed by scholars such as Hirsch? Is not the Core Knowledge movement precisely the sort of "planning" that arouses Fullan's skepticism?

In response, Hirsch might suggest that his Core Knowledge Foundation encourages elementary school participation and involvement in the development of the core curriculum. Stressing the value of a nationally standardized curriculum as he does, Hirsch could hardly deny that such an adoption would indeed be curricular planning on a very broad scale. Perhaps Hirsch might argue that a planned curriculum is different from a planned school. Specifying what one wants students to know at each grade level still leaves to the school and its participants the task of deciding how the curriculum can be best implemented. This would be no different than a commitment to skills-based education or any of the other pedagogical "fads" that Hirsch denounces. Still, Fullan places the burden on Hirsch to demonstrate that a planned curriculum can be effective in changing the nature of the schools; and it is only by examining Core Knowledge schools that we can see what has happened in them.

Several important points emerge from this review of major discussions of educational reform. First, there is a widespread consensus that reform is needed. No author seems satisfied with the status quo. Second, it is generally agreed that there are many obstacles to reform. These range from political vested interests, to embedded culture, to bureaucratic intransigence. Third, there is widespread recognition that most reforms fail in the implementation stage. This is due to the fact that reformers are driven by theoretical visions rather than practical considerations. Reform cannot succeed unless those who are doing the work of the schools are prepared to implement it; yet all too often they are not. Fourth, educational reform requires structural change. Whether the emphasis is on the balance of power between teachers and administrators, or the

relationship between teachers and parents, or on those among the teachers themselves, function is expected to follow form. To change the schools is widely perceived to demand structural reform. Fifth, most reforms fail. Those that are most likely to succeed will be consistent with the long-standing conception of schools and will be compatible with the needs and aspirations of the participants.

Against this backdrop, Core Knowledge faces an uphill battle. An examination of the implementation of Core Knowledge in three schools provides an opportunity to test these propositions about school reform for their validity when applied to a grass-roots reform effort.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH PURPOSE, DESIGN, AND METHODS

Introduction

Nine years ago I "discovered" E.D. Hirsch and the Core Knowledge Sequence. I have watched it, to some degree participated in it, and studied it ever since. My purpose in conducting this research is to tell what I have learned about a rather unique case of "doing something" toward improving American schools. Intrigued by the movement's appearance on the educational landscape, I wanted to discover the reasons for its appearance and its seeming popularity with those who had jumped on the Core Knowledge bandwagon. Its claims about leveling the playing field for all students, particularly those who enter school not ready or prepared to learn, were appealing to me, especially given the context of my work in a large urban school district where very few children in inner city schools were recommended for participation in the program I directed - gifted education. In 1991, I asked the question, "Would teaching Core Knowledge make a difference?" I wondered if it could make a difference in what and how children learned. Teachers discussed concerns about helping students master the district's curriculum, *Essential Skills*, but some voiced frustration over the absence of a successive set of guidelines about "what" to teach. So, as outlined in Chapter One, this study materialized from both personal and professional concerns about the desire to improve learning.

Qualitative educational policy research describes the category into which this study falls. Core Knowledge curriculum has become school policy in over 900 elementary

schools. The research includes a chronicle of this movement and study of its impact on schools and potential as enduring policy.

> Acculturative responsibility of the schools is primary and fundamental...children enter neither a narrow tribal culture nor a transcendent world culture, but a national literate culture...this way of the modern world will not change soon, certainly not by educational policy alone. (Hirsch 1987, p.18)

Thus Hirsch (1987) advised readers in *Cultural Literacy*, the manifesto that subsequently resulted in the publication of the Core Knowledge Curriculum Sequence for elementary school students. Issues pertaining to curriculum decision-making, school and community culture, and the various factors influencing enduring educational reform were examined in this study.

Such inquiries fall reasonably into the realm of policy research – investigation into "the formulation, implementation and consequences of public policies and laws" (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994, p. 372). The study "maps the policy terrain" as Putt and Springer (1989, p.30) define various orienting research efforts. Policy stimulation, clarification, initiation, implementation, and evaluation comprise the "lay of the [policy research] land" in their view. It should be clear that the primary and secondary research questions revolve around these elements. The impetus for each school's adoption of the program, how staff members became acquainted with Core Knowledge principles, planned and implemented the Sequence, all contribute to lessons learned about a content based reform as well as the process of change within schools and systems. Though the study participants shared their views about the program's effectiveness with me, my purpose was not, in any sense, to evaluate the quality of

personnel, schools or districts associated with the Core Knowledge movement. Accordingly, descriptive demographic data pertinent to each school are reported as a backdrop to the reader's understanding of the schools in which this particular reform has become policy.

Educational Policy Research Models

Within the domain of qualitative educational policy research, three models prevail: the applied research model, the evaluation model, and the policy-oriented model. Here I describe all three, insofar as they are relevant to the case at hand.

Applied Research

Langenbach, Vaughn and Aagaard (1994) define applied research as "the use of theory and research to solve a problem, usually in a localized area" (p. 363). The educational theory and analysis delineated by Hirsch in his 1987 book *Cultural Literacy*, suggests research that converges upon the problem that American schools are not egalitarian. Hirsch speculates that because schools lack a specific core curriculum, some students receive a more substantial and challenging education, while others, often those from disadvantaged environments, are held to a lower standard. Hirsch maintains that a 30 year educational focus on skills training rather than the teaching of a content-based curriculum has resulted in low academic achievement and a declining rate in American cultural literacy. This concern has prompted his national curriculum proposal -- The Core Knowledge Sequence -- aimed at encouraging greater inclusion in our national literate culture. Applied research yields a useful study of a major social problem – disparity in American schooling, through examination of the role that reform plays in influencing the

formulation of fair and equitable elementary school curriculum at state and local levels. It asks if internal change in schools leads to external changes in communities or how consensus on curriculum content might level the academic playing field for all students.

The applied research model has been utilized in a related social problem area -- compensatory education. As an illustration, Arrow et al. (1979) report the mid-1960s focus on alleviating the plight of the "poor, or disadvantaged child" (p.18). Soon thereafter, large federal appropriations supplied funds to local schools in order that they might expand their compensatory education programs for disadvantaged children. Like Hirsch's proposal, these programs were to focus on expanding and diversifying programs for students principally in the early grades. Head Start, Follow Through, Talent Search and others were launched during this period.

There are other similarities. According to Arrow et al., it was uncommon in the 1960s for the federal government to undertake such major programs. "First, they were unusual actions for the federal government to take in the area of education. Second, they were initiated with little or no prior research or experimentation or even much assessment concerning effective methods and techniques that could be expected to redress educational deficits among the disadvantaged" (p.19). Similarly, Title I of the 1994 Goals 2000 Act, expanded current federal education activity by establishing National Education Goals as law, and providing "a framework for meeting the National Education Goals by":

establishing valid and reliable mechanisms for –

(A) building a broad national consensus on American

education reform;

(B) assisting in the development and certification of high-quality, internationally competitive content and student performance standards;

(C) assisting in the development and certification of opportunity-to-learn standards; and

(D) assisting in the development and certification of quality assessment measures that reflect the internationally competitive content and student performance standards..." (United States Code, p. 66).

General Electric Company's subsidiary, the TEMPO Center, conducted the first major evaluation of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1966. Fourteen school districts had been suggested as those who had made sound use of funds in designing innovative and effective programming. The researchers posed three questions: "Is Title I associated with school achievement gains, what types of compensatory education are most successful, and what factors are associated with success" (p.20)? The findings seemed to negate hopes that the federal action would have improved the status of learners from disadvantaged environments. "...what school achievement gains did occur were not larger than the several sources of random error and systematic bias in the study" (p.20). The Coleman Report, the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity evaluation, and other disclosures followed with similar reports documenting substantial inequity and educational deficits relative to many [minority] young children.

Thus, the applied research model is frequently utilized when investigating prevailing connections among recent federal legislation, actual policies, and school

practices -- and for learning whether the legislation will engender reform that, in turn, may resolve or diminish a problem resembling unfairness in American schools. Perhaps by extending the methodology beyond quantitative measures reported in the TEMPO study discussed above, these early researchers might have been more likely to discover potential resolutions, or pathways to partial resolutions, to the problem of inequitable compensatory education.

This research design does not fall primarily into the applied research realm, however. Though such research does speak to Hirsch's motivation for convening a group of educators who ultimately created a curriculum program and prompted a subsequent reform initiative, the incubation period for studying its potential as a problem solution has been too brief. While as indicated in Chapter One, initial steps are being taken to evaluate the impact of the Core Knowledge curriculum on schools and on learning (Marshall, 1999), my goal is not to evaluate the Core Knowledge curriculum but to assess its potential as a reform movement by considering, in three schools, factors that bear upon its prospects.

Evaluation Research

Aoki's article on curriculum evaluation in *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (1986) explains a model for detailed scrutiny of curriculum policy at the national level, while testing philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of curriculum problems and change. Aoki was prompted by the German scholar Jurgen Habermas, author of *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971) to appeal "to philosophical anthropology to reveal knowledge constitutive of human interests embedded in basically different

paradigms" (Aoki, p. 27). Hence, Aoki and his research colleagues set about the task of evaluating the British Columbia Social Studies program, by assuming Habermas's paradigms and re-labeling them as: (a) "ends-means (technical) evaluation orientation, (b) situational interpretive evaluation orientation, and (c) critical theoretic evaluation orientation" (p.27).

This example of using multiple orientations (perspectives) in guiding curriculum evaluation makes sense. First, it provides a practical approach to determining "to what extent, if any, existing programs are working as planned" (Langenbach et al., p.368). Both Goals 2000 and Core Knowledge could be assessed in terms of their purposes as education reforms. The ends-means evaluation mode is framed, in part, within the orienting perspective -- in the ethos of control. Guiding questions might include inquiry into program purposes, efficiency, and how learning experiences are organized for mastery of knowledge. As Aoki phrases the questions, "How well have the ends been achieved? Which is a better program, Curriculum A or Curriculum B, in achieving its ends" (p. 31)? These questions are relevant to understanding the effectiveness of curriculum reform. Because I extended this investigation into "situations," i.e., classrooms where Core Knowledge topics are being taught, the situational interpretive mode in Aoki's evaluation approach applied. The framework gave meaning to the communication among the people who "dwell within a situation" (p.35). Again, as in the applied research model, the "phenomenology of socially constructed understanding, requiring investigation of meaning-giving activities in the everyday world [school room], is the main interest..." (p.35). Situational knowing, such as that experienced by teachers

and students working closely together to give structure to their instructional day, is the kind of knowing that lends itself to scrutiny. As researcher, I posed and probed into questions dealing with motives, common meanings, and the quality of [classroom] life.

The situational interpretive perspective allowed me to "gain insights into human experiences as they are experienced by insiders, as they live within the situation" (p.33). Interviews with key participants in the Core Knowledge reform movement enabled me to explore these issues. The participants' responses and my interpretations of their perspectives are reported in the fourth chapter of this study.

In critical theoretic evaluation, *praxis*, as referred to by Paulo Freire (1968) guides the evaluation. That is, the research is defined within a dialectical framework consisting of critical reflection and practical action. Within the context of the present study, critical evaluation concerns revolve around the theoretical assumptions that underlie Core Knowledge, knowledge about the nature of the learner, and metaphors that guide curriculum development and practice. Portions of the study, as framed in the critical theoretic mode, ask questions regarding the "world view" (Aoki, p.36) supported by a curriculum reform. These inquiries are not the whole of the critical evaluation model, however. The researcher enters into mutual reflection with participants, questioning participants and expecting participants to reciprocate with their own inquiries. From this type of interaction emerges another set of inquiries. One category of questions spawns another, which in turn, leads to continued reflective activity. Aoki captures the dual purpose for reflection: "Reflection, however, is not only oriented toward making conscious the unconscious by discovering underlying interests, assumptions and

intentions, but it is also oriented towards action guided by the newly gained conscious, critical knowledge" (pp.37-38). Thus, the research model suggested by Aoki progresses from technical through situational to critical evaluative analysis. I attempted to provide the same progression in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The focus of evaluation research is the program, event or entity being examined. If a definitive statement regarding the quality or effectiveness of Core Knowledge curriculum were my primary desired outcome, Aoki's model would, singularly, be a worthy design to follow. It provides for the type of comprehensive inquiry necessary for rigorous evaluation and the approach lends itself to a complex, fluid naturalistic method. Others, like Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1975) and Chen (1990) also advocate creative rigor in conducting evaluation research. Chen has provided a critique of method-oriented evaluations and an overview of theoretical evaluation in which he defines the application of theory-driven evaluations to program theory construction. This category of normative outcome evaluation would be particularly appropriate in the instance of verifying either the anthropological theory of education or the sociolinguistic aspects of cultural literacy professed by Hirsch; however, these aims lie outside the scope of this study. Thus, while "Core Knowledge in American Schools" is not designed primarily as evaluation research, some of its methodological constructs and strategies were used in this study.

As an addendum to the Summary Report, Aoki and his team submitted to the Canadian Ministry of Education, a section on critical evaluation called "An Interpretation of Intents of the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum Guides" (p.39). In this document, Aoki's explanation of the hidden curriculum undergirding the Ministry's social studies

guidelines was put forth. In a sense, the research procedures employed in evaluating the British Columbia Social Studies Program became a kind of research pedagogy. The project brought the subject of the research "into fuller view by revealing the tacitly held assumptions and intentions" (p.40) and included a recommendation that future copies of Ministry Curriculum Guides contain a full explanation of the developers' "knowing stance." Aoki concluded by offering an image of the "magic of the educating act," contending that is has to do "with the whole meaning of a society's search for true maturity and responsible freedom through its young people" (p.42). This perspective is very much akin to Hirsch's; the rationale for the curriculum he espouses derives from similar thinking. In time, a similar critical theoretic evaluation of Core Knowledge may be warranted. For now, a decade into the movement, another approach, an investigatory one that centers upon the history and the formulation of the Core Knowledge Movement as an educational curriculum reform, seems a more plausible step.

Policy-Oriented Research

"Policy analysts' focus on equity and excellence often crowds out other concerns, among them the impact of educational practices on the creation and maintenance of democratic communities" (Kohne, 1994, p. 233). I argue that what is required is a policy supportive of all of these concerns. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act is national legislation addressing academic excellence and equity, presumably with an intent to bolster a democratic society. The Core Knowledge reform has become public policy in many schools and several local school districts across the nation. The Foundation reports that over 900 schools are implementing the curriculum program during the 1999-2000

school year. The question of whether a fairly recent curriculum reform initiative might develop into widespread formal curriculum policy is addressed in this study.

Finch (1986) offers a model of policy-oriented, qualitative research. Arguing that qualitative research is a necessary supplement to other modes of inquiry, she stresses the "naturalistic perspective" that qualitative research offers (p. 164). Finch underscores the need for studying behavior "in context" in order to understand the real effects of policies. She holds that "a great strength of qualitative study in natural settings is to reflect the view of the participants... ."(p. 166). Finch believes that qualitative methods "offer an advance on the social survey in that they give direct, not second-hand access to social behaviour" (p. 166). Further, qualitative policy-oriented research offers a "greater capacity to reflect the subjective reality of those people who are the targets for policy decisions" (p. 167). The present study seeks to assess the Core Knowledge Movement as an example of curriculum policy reform through the eyes of those who are utilizing it; therefore, it conforms to Finch's model of qualitative policy-oriented research.

Finch articulates features of qualitative policy-oriented research that are especially relevant to this case study: (a) it [policy-oriented research] will not necessarily serve the agenda of those in power and those who "make" policy,... (b) it will emphasize the indirect use and the "enlightenment" role of research,... (c) it may well contain a specific commitment to the democratization of knowledge and the skills through which it is created,... and (d) it will be concerned with policy at all levels, including grassroots policy change"...(p. 228-232). Each of these features contributes to the conceptual framework that substantively guided my scrutiny of a specific case of educational reform. Among

Finch's characteristics of policy-oriented research, I identify in particular with the notions that the present study is rigorous, offers enlightenment, contains a specific commitment to the democratization of knowledge, and is concerned with grassroots policy change. I especially emphasize the necessity of theoretical grounding in qualitative policy research. Therefore, this study is placed in the context of several reform theories, discussed in Chapter Two, in order to advance knowledge about the process of educational reform in American schools at the conclusion of the twentieth century.

The Research Design

The Case Study

"Core Knowledge in American Schools" is a study of the Core Knowledge initiative as a current case in educational reform. Its purpose is to contribute to knowledge about the nature of educational reform by considering a useful and operative case. The study is limited in its scope, e.g., it does not seek to evaluate the Core Knowledge Sequence or the schools in which its implementation was studied. Its intent is not to provide data relative to student achievement or preferred methodology for teaching the Core Knowledge content. Nor is it aimed toward assessing the impact of the reform initiative on state or national policy.

Instead, this study sought to learn more about the nature of the school reform process by examining a single policy-based case. The study addressed the origins and development of the reform; its adoption as policy, implementation and impact in three schools; and finally, tests its viability against selected criteria for enduring reform.

The research may be described as a qualitative, embedded case study design

involving multiple units of analysis (Yin, 1984). This study of a case of curricular reform, the Core Knowledge Movement, features three schools committed to the teaching of the prescribed curriculum at all elementary grade levels. In contrast, were the study to examine only the global nature of the reform, a holistic, as opposed to an embedded design, would have been selected. By way of example, Yin (1984) cites *Union Democracy* (1956) as a highly regarded embedded case study conducted by Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman. These authors examined the inside politics of the International Typographical Union, including several units of analysis, ranging from individual members to specific groups to the unit as a whole. Similarly, in the present study the schools provide numerous opportunities for analysis of many details intended to create in the end a single portrait of a case of curriculum reform.

Yin (1984) establishes several reasons for conducting case studies as reliable and valid courses of research. In particular, "'how' and 'why' questions are likely to favor the use of case studies... ." (p. 19; see also Merriam, 1988, p. 9). This is because case studies offer the opportunity to integrate various sources of evidence by drawing upon multiple research strategies. According to Yin (p. 20), "the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence - documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations." Moreover, the case study offers what Merriam calls "thick description," a rich account of events. Thick description provides a foundation for heuristic findings. According to Merriam (p.14), a case study can "explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened and why" and can "explain why an innovation worked or failed to work." The present study was designed to offer just such analyses.

Merriam describes descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative case studies. Accordingly, "Core Knowledge in American Schools" is both descriptive and interpretive; but it is not an evaluative case study. The following chapters offer thick description, analysis, and interpretation of findings. The links to established theory are descriptive and analytical. No attempt was made to evaluate the movement, the schools, nor any of the research participants.

Merriam's emphasis on the descriptive and interpretive function of the case study approach is supported by Peshkin (1993), who arrays types of outcomes from qualitative research (p. 24). As descriptive outcomes, Peshkin lists processes, relationships, settings and situations, systems, and people. As interpretive outcomes, he lists explaining and creating generalizations, developing new concepts, elaborating existing concepts, providing insights that change behavior, refine knowledge, or identify problems, clarifying and understanding complexity, and development of theory. The present study offers outcomes under several of these headings. For example, I explored, in each of the schools, the key processes, relationships, and settings associated with Core Knowledge and its implementation. I discussed the people who made it happen, as well as the situations in which it happened.

Case studies are not without limitations, the most important of which may be the inability to generalize from the case to a larger universe. By definition, cases are unique. Yet Yin notes that the same problem exists for experimental research without inhibiting generalization. As Yin states:

> ...case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes... . In this sense, the case

> study, like the experiment, does not represent a 'sample,' and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization.)" (p. 21)

Thus, the limitation on the case study is statistical and not analytic. Similarly, sound qualitative research, and in particular, valid case studies, must be grounded in a body of research in relationship to which the broader meaning of the findings can be illustrated. The problem of external validity with respect to case studies is, for Yin, distinct from that posed in survey research (p. 39). In conducting survey research, the researcher seeks statistical generalization; in conducting a case study, the researcher seeks analytic generalization. The analysis is grounded in theory. In the present research, the results of the case study are interpreted in relationship to several major theories regarding educational reform.

Finch (1986) further elaborates on the problem of external validity in the context of policy-oriented research in particular.

> Both the small-scale and case-study emphasis of the methods and the interpretivist methodology are likely to contribute to a conclusion that the results of qualitative research are of dubious validity, not viable as the basis for generalization, quite possibly unrepresentative of the population in question, and therefore...unusable. (p. 182)

Yet like Yin, Finch insists that qualitative research can and must be theoretically informed. She goes on to explain that while qualitative research and the case study method may not be well suited to addressing macro-theoretical concerns, they may be utilized in addressing "more modest" questions at the micro-theoretical level (p. 173). For example, the present case study of the Core Knowledge movement does not offer broad theory capable of grounding an interpretation of all educational reform movements;

however, it does shed light on the meaning of educational reform for participants in it such as teachers, parents, and students. These narrower findings may inform larger theoretical debates about school reform.

Yin noted circumstances in which case studies are particularly relevant. "Core Knowledge in American Schools" fit all three. First, the Core Knowledge reform represents a *critical case* in testing well-formulated theories. The theories may be challenged or confirmed. Because much of the previous literature on implementing organizational innovations has focused on barriers to innovation (Yin,1984, p.42) I have chosen to examine the essence of what made innovation and reform possible in the three schools and have aligned my findings with criteria for enduring reform set forth by Fullan (1991), Kliebard (1988), Sarason (1990), and Tyack and Tobin (1994).

A second rationale for conducting a case study occurs when the topic represents an *extreme* or *unique case*. I characterize the study in this way because Core Knowledge is distinct in its spiral prescribed listing of topics, in its grassroots policy orientation, and because it is the only case in which grassroots reform is predicated on a model curriculum such as is presently under discussion at the national level.

Yin's (1984) third rationale, exploring the *revelatory case*, applies also. The revelatory case exists when a researcher has the opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to investigators. Though other reforms have been subjects of case studies, "Core Knowledge in American Schools" reveals findings from aligning selected criteria for lasting education reform with current curricular practice. The Core Knowledge case is indeed revelatory given its recent appearance on the

educational scene, its sole representation as a content based program and its unique characterization as a grassroots reform initiative.

The embedded case study design involves more than one unit of analysis (p. 44). For example, in *Union Democracy* the main case was the International Typographical Union, but the constituent elements of the study included the ITU as a whole, its locals, shops, the immediate environment, and the members (Yin, p. 46). Similarly, the present research poses the Core Knowledge movement as its case. The constituent elements are the Core Knowledge Foundation and its staff, the three schools that are the immediate subject of the research, the teachers, administrators, and parents, and the communities within which they operate. Thus, while the research focuses primarily on Core Knowledge as a reform movement, it also addresses the effects of the reform on the other embedded units of analysis and reciprocally, the influence of the participants on the movement itself.

Units of Analysis

The Core Knowledge Foundation

"Excellence and fairness in education," the foundation's motto, is said to represent its purpose. Founded in 1986 by E.D. Hirsch, the Foundation is a non-profit organization headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia, where Hirsch serves as Professor of Education and Humanities at the University of Virginia. As stated in a 1991 Foundation fact sheet: "The Core Knowledge Foundation advocates the teaching of a carefully sequenced body of knowledge in order to achieve excellence and fairness in early education, and works with elementary schools that want to teach the Core

Knowledge curriculum." Foundation publications state that thousands of educators and parents support the work of the Foundation through their memberships in the Foundation.

The Schools

Three school communities have been investigated. The first consideration in selecting the schools was to identify those in which full implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum was occurring. Though many schools were involved in exploratory phases of implementation, the number of schools having at least one year of experience in teaching the Sequence at all grade levels was limited. Also, I wanted to conduct field work in schools whose reasons for adopting the program varied and I hoped for diverse geographic representation. I asked to conduct my work in the schools over the course of two or three days. All of the three school principals originally contacted about the proposed research opportunity agreed to my presence in the schools (personal communications, August/September 1994), therefore, entry for purposes of field work did not become an issue. Hence, the sites for the study were established.

Eastern Elementary School is located in a rural setting in middle America. After their children had studied Core Knowledge for a period of time, parents in the public school had petitioned the local school board to add another grade (sixth) to the school to enable their children to continue what would otherwise have been an interrupted study of the Sequence. A new principal of the school had been named in the Spring of 1994, but the faculty of Eastern Elementary was adamant about continuing to teach the curriculum.

Pacific Elementary School was established and opened in the fall of 1993. Pacific's principal and staff offered the Core Knowledge curriculum as a point of

departure from other schools. As the principal put it, as a "catalyst for change" (personal communication, 9/27/94). Pacific Elementary, located in the northwestern region of the country, claimed to be dedicated to excellence for all its students, including the Hispanic population transported to the school to ensure its ethnic diversity. As implemented there, the Core Knowledge curriculum was in part, technology-driven.

Northern Core Knowledge Elementary is a public school of choice located in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. It was opened in 1993 as a parent initiative; parents and staff members share equal status on the school's governing board. The parents involved in hiring the school's principal sought a commitment to teaching a "traditional" curriculum; they had identified and agreed upon Core Knowledge. Because school choice was being widely debated, I was interested in the public policy aspects of a school opened by parents who specify their schools' curriculum [Core Knowledge] yet make use of public funds to provide it.

Methodology

I rely substantially on the work of Charles C. Ragin, author of *Constructing Social Research* (1994). Ragin suggests that qualitative research is a basic strategy of social research wherein cases are examined intensively through techniques designed to clarify theoretical concepts, fitting the researcher's purposes. According to Ragin, such research may serve three major aims: (a) interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena; (b) giving voice; and (c) advancing new theories. This research is interpretive (Merriam, 1988) because it offers an analysis of relationships among federal education law, a case in reform, and organizational [school] practice. The study "gives

voice" to a fledgling movement that has taken root in America by making explicit the elements of re-forming what is taught to students in elementary schools. From these two purposes emerge potential for meeting the third: that of advancing new theory. Toward understanding what a core "curricular spiral" (*Core Knowledge Sequence, 1995*, p.2) means for American schoolchildren and curriculum policy makers, I employ three compatible elements of research.

1. Analysis of documentation relevant to the work of the Core Knowledge Foundation and of the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum in the three schools. I drew upon substantial documentation of the development of the Core Knowledge Foundation. This included material produced by the Foundation itself, including publications, pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, personal correspondence and memoranda. With respect to the schools, I analyze official publications, news reports, meeting notes, newsletters and bulletins, internal memoranda, school board minutes, instructional materials, homework assignments, and other student work.

2. Focus group and individual interviews with leaders of the reform initiative and school administrators, teachers, and parents involved in its implementation. Focus groups were conducted among teachers and administrators. Interviews with key staff members of the Core Knowledge Foundation, including Hirsch, John Holdren, Tricia Emlett, and Mary Lusk were conducted (February 1995) at the Foundation office in Charlottesville, Virginia. I have also discussed the work of the Core Knowledge Foundation with E.D. Hirsch (1993, 1995) and Constance Jones (1993, 1999), former principal of the first Core Knowledge school, Three Oaks Elementary, in Ft. Myers, Florida. Jones currently serves

as Director of School Programs at the Core Knowledge Foundation. Administrators, teachers, and parents in the three Core Knowledge schools were interviewed. These are appropriate participants to help answer the research questions because they are parties in the reform initiative itself or are engaged in analyzing the broader issues inherent in education reform at the national level. The principals and teachers in the school communities I studied were experienced in learning about Hirsch's program and reported having changed their professional behavior toward students because of it. They were, therefore, in positions to share the outcomes of their decisions with others. I viewed their experience as especially integral to a detailed portrait of the Core Knowledge curricular reform.

3. Field work and direct observation in three schools in which the Core Knowledge Sequence is taught. In attempting to create a portrait of one example of contemporary curricular reform, I have recorded extensive observations of lessons on Core Knowledge topics and of group meetings in each of the school communities. I also administered a follow-up survey in August 1999 to the principals [still employed as administrators] of the three participating schools in order to update data, check interpretations of early data analysis, and inquire about the current status of Core Knowledge implementation.

The strategy of meshing purposive sampling, document analysis, interviewing, and direct observation (triangulation) afforded insights into the reciprocal relationship between a recent curriculum reform and select schools where it has taken hold. Focus group interviews serve two primary purposes. First, the groups discuss the preliminary analysis of Core Knowledge related literature and offer insight into the reciprocal

relationship between the curriculum and the teachers who are implementing it. Second, the focus groups (along with individual interviews) informed the subsequent classroom observations in the schools. In *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (1988), Morgan suggested the value of conducting focus group interviews. Originally developed as a sociological research technique, focus groups are "useful in generating hypotheses based on informants' insights and for orienting oneself to a new field" (p.11). Toward achieving these goals I employed a "hybrid approach" to conducting focus groups (Krueger, 1994) where "emphasis is placed on situational analysis and the selective use of nonresearchers" (p.ix). Within the context of this study, the researcher acted as moderator of a group discussion among administrators and teachers who have implemented the Core Knowledge curriculum in their schools. The Qualitative Research Council of the Advertising Research Foundation refers to this method as conducting a "phenomenological group" (p.13). The hybrid approach to conducting focus groups provides each participant the opportunity to reflect and comment upon his/her thinking, behavior and decisions in detailed language of the individual's choosing. In this type of group, discussants are asked to react to concepts, statements, programs or other stimuli of the researcher's choice (see Appendix C). In seeking and reporting problem solutions, reliable, valid action research includes direct focus upon the "core" of the problem itself.

Another author's theory regarding enlightening qualitative research informed this study. Though I have not employed her portraiture methodology, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's work, *The Good High School* (1983), provided inspiration in organizing and reporting what I have learned from this study of school reform. In Lightfoot's words:

> I tell the stories, paint the portrait—'from the inside out.' (p. 7)...I visited the schools with a commitment to holistic, complex, contextual descriptions of reality; with a belief that environments and processes should be examined from the outsider's more distant perspective and the insider's immediate, subjective view; that the truth lies in the integration of various perspectives (p.13)...Used in this way, social science portraiture may play a critical role in shaping educational practice and inspiring organizational change. (p. 378)

The design of and methods employed in this research have enabled me to tell the Core Knowledge story "from the inside out." It is my hope that the integration of the outsider's perspective and insiders' views contribute to a greater understanding of the significance of curricular policy, given its effects on school culture, school reform, and what children learn.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports findings from field research conducted at the Core Knowledge Foundation headquarters and in three Core Knowledge schools. Insofar as the work of the Foundation is public, names of Core Knowledge staff members are given. All school and school personnel names are pseudonyms. The schools in the present study are labeled Eastern Elementary, Northern Core Knowledge Elementary, and Pacific Elementary, reflecting the geographic regions in which the schools are located. The school data are reported in portraits of each schools. Each portrait attempts to capture essential features of the school as examples of the Core Knowledge movement "in action."

In reporting school data, the goals are to identify the common features of the three schools that derive from their staff members' shared commitment to the Sequence, and to analyze circumstances unique to each school that shed light on the scope and durability of the reform. The chapter is organized into five sections. The first characterizes the work of the Core Knowledge Foundation, especially as it relates to Core Knowledge coalition schools. Subsequent sections are devoted to portraits of each school, while the chapter conclusion offers comparative analysis and discussion of stakeholders' perceptions of Core Knowledge in their schools.

The Core Knowledge Foundation and Its Coalition Schools

"At Core Knowledge, our long-range goal is to ensure that every child in America's elementary schools gets a strong start by having equal access to the necessary foundations of shared knowledge" (Core Knowledge Foundation,1992). From this goal has emanated a network of schools that the Foundation attempts to support while engaging them in the national curriculum conversation. The nationwide network of schools committed to the ideas and requirements set forth by the Core Knowledge Foundation is known as the Core Knowledge Coalition. Elementary and middle schools are encouraged to apply for membership in the coalition, provided their commitment to teaching the topics in the Core Knowledge Sequence is a serious one. Eligibility requirements for designation as an official Core Knowledge school are described below.

The Core Knowledge Foundation contends that its coalition schools are likely to experience higher degrees of successful implementation of the Sequence by interacting with one another. The Foundation maintains that development and sharing of lesson plans, learning about resources useful in teaching the curriculum, and participating in Core Knowledge conferences is beneficial to members of the coalition. According to the Foundation's Web site and as Constance Jones, Director of School Programs confirmed during a 1999 interview, nearly 1000 schools currently belong to the coalition. These schools are referred to as "pioneers in an endeavor of potentially far-reaching implications for our nation's elementary schools" in the Foundation's coalition membership statement (1992). The Foundation builds relationships with its coalition schools through a number of activities.

Schools may enlist Foundation staff members or other Core Knowledge trainers to present workshops for teachers including an introduction and overview of Core Knowledge; integrating Core Knowledge with local guidelines; and "working" lesson writing sessions.

Becoming an Official Core Knowledge School

While all schools may join the Core Knowledge network, having demonstrated an interest in learning more about the curriculum and its implementation, only certain of its schools are designated as "official" Core Knowledge schools. Status as an "official" school means having met certain criteria set forth by the Foundation. Official schools must complete an application form in which the school profile is detailed. Assurance regarding the school staff's familiarity with Core Knowledge principles is requested. This assurance is reflected by indicating the dates on which various aspects of Core Knowledge programming, e.g., an overview of Core Knowledge; developing the school's monthly plan; writing daily lesson plans; and developing teaching units of study, have been discussed and completed by the school staff. The Foundation suggests a total of six to nine days be spent exploring these various aspects of its program (Core Knowledge Web Site, 1999).

One Core Knowledge lesson plan per grade level must be submitted to the Foundation, along with the school's month by month plan for when Core Knowledge topics will be taught. The Foundation encourages schools to include in their plans, both the Core Knowledge units of study, as well as local and state content and skill requirements. In official Core Knowledge schools, it is expected that all teachers in the

school will be involved in implementing Core Knowledge lessons. That is, the Foundation expects school-wide participation, verifying a "shared"commitment among school staff members. Documents published by the Foundation indicate its understanding that the Sequence may need to be "phased in" during the first year or two of a school's adoption of the program; however, the ultimate goal of teaching "shared" knowledge to all students in the school is the program's intent.

The Foundation expects its coalition members to remain faithful to two primary agreements: to cover all Core Knowledge topics and to teach the topics in the grade levels specified by the Sequence, which lists topics in the areas of language and fine arts, mathematics, science and technology, American and world civilization. The curriculum claims to be inclusive with respect to people, events and places. Unsurprisingly, the Foundation advocates consistent teaching of the core, advising schools to refrain from casting it aside, then returning to it again, from year to year. In this fashion, each year's grade level teacher may come to count on certain information having been conveyed to students the previous year, another hallmark of a Core Knowledge school. Hirsch refers to this concept as "velcro learning," whereby the knowledge a student gains at one point provides the "hook" for what s/he will subsequently learn, thus resulting in the "firm educational foundation" he seeks for students. How the knowledge is transmitted to students is left to teachers. Cooperative learning, didactic teaching, whole language instruction – all are viewed by the Foundation as potentially effective teaching methods.

Twenty-three of the official Core Knowledge schools, including the three schools in this study, agree to host visitors who wish to observe the curriculum implementation

(Core Knowledge Web Site, 1999). Others support classroom teachers who provide Core Knowledge workshops in other schools and districts. Staff from official Core Knowledge coalition schools are encouraged to participate in annual national Core Knowledge conferences, presenting lessons, participating in round table discussions and entering into dialogue with content specialists, many of whom are university professors. Staff members of official Core Knowledge schools are periodically asked to review materials, to respond to the efficacy of the Sequence, providing Foundation staff with information to use in creating revisions of the Core Knowledge Sequence. Coalition schools are featured, at times, in the Foundation's newsletter, *Common Knowledge*; in this way their experiences are shared with other coalition members and other readers. Official schools provide faculty with common planning time in order to prepare, gather and share resources and plan the implementation of the curriculum. This accommodation often requires restructuring of school time and increases the need for additional staff members. This study explored the ways in which three official Core Knowledge school communities viewed the presence of this reform in their midst. I move now to portraits of each.

Eastern Elementary School

> Mission: Eastern Elementary is a place where every child is recognized as being special and is acknowledged for successes in all areas of LEARNING. It is a place where LEARNING is motivating, meaningful, and made possible by actively involving students, family, community and staff.

The School Community

A new school year had clearly begun only shortly prior to my arrival on campus in

September 1994. Hand painted signs surrounded by fall foliage marked the name of the lane leading to the school. United States and world maps on the "black top" asphalt playground were outlined in freshly painted stripes and curves of many colors and were large enough for games of "hopping 'round the world." Bulletin boards framed in corrugated footballs and mascot panthers bore messages welcoming students back to school. Even by the third week of September, however, there was still "change" in the air.

Eastern Elementary is located in a city of approximately 40,000 people in a mid-eastern state. The community is historically industrial, although in recent decades its previous industrial base has diminished and been supplanted by a growing service economy. The city plays host to a regional state university campus and several smaller colleges, and regards itself as an "education city." In the year this study was conducted, Eastern's public school system served students in one high school, three middle, and eleven elementary schools, in which approximately 7,000 students were enrolled. The principal reported that the school district was "in the process of tremendous change in education...across the district, in various schools, one might find non-graded primary classrooms, a 4 ½ day school week, integrated learning, a whole language reading program, cross-age and peer tutoring and Core Knowledge." (interview, September 1994) Two hundred eighty six children in Kindergarten through Grade Five attended the school in 1994, where the Core Knowledge curriculum had been taught since the fall of 1992. In 1994, 12% of the students enrolled at Eastern were Black, 1.5% Asian, and the remainder White, not of Hispanic origin. The school employed, at that time, twenty-one adults.

Class sizes ranged from 19 to 24 pupils. Students in the school were expected to:

- acquire a solid knowledge base;
- show proficiency in communication skills;
- develop a positive sense of self;
- assume responsibility for directing their own learning.

Eastern Elementary, founded in 1972, is a self-described official Core Knowledge school. It was the first school in the state of its location to implement the program. It takes as its motto, "On the right track with Core Knowledge."

Core Knowledge at Eastern Elementary: A Revitalization

There can be little doubt that Core Knowledge would not have come to Eastern had it not been for the commitment of the teachers who first proposed it to the school's principal, hoping for "a new lease on life," as one of them told me. They had taught together for eighteen to twenty-two years. They were experiencing, in their words, "big-time burn-out." With principal Philip Kemp's blessing, teachers at Eastern proposed to the school board a visit by a team of teachers and parents to Three Oaks, the Core Knowledge pilot school in Florida. The teachers were successful in acquiring district approval and funding for the excursion. Upon their return, they set into action a plan for formally adopting, developing and implementing the Sequence at Eastern the following fall.

In July 1992 the entire teaching staff of Eastern Elementary went to Three Oaks to participate in workshops designed to initiate their Core Knowledge curriculum writing. In Florida, teachers who had been teaching the Sequence instructed the Eastern staff in how

to create a plan that would benefit their students, include the entire Core sequence, yet meet local and state requirements. These collaborative efforts led to many completed unit/lesson plans for the Eastern teachers. The teaching of the Core Knowledge curriculum was to begin in earnest as school opened in August 1992.

Two Principals' Perspectives

In talking with Kemp in 1994, I learned that an administrative obstacle he had earlier faced at the school had been motivating teachers who often complained about the scenario he said he had heard for years:

> The previous year's teachers never getting the job done, less than adequately preparing students, neglecting basic skills mastery, sometimes seeming to complete only minimum expectations during the course of a full school year. The teachers had worked alongside one another for many years. They themselves were looking for something to revive their professionalism and day to day teaching activities.

According to Kemp, at the same time the state was offering grants to schools implementing reforms, the district's central administrators were encouraging principals to adopt site-based, shared decision making processes; and it was at this same juncture that Eastern's teachers learned from a relative of someone on staff, about a new program they hoped would breathe life into their school - Core Knowledge. In terms of its promise at Eastern, Kemp was persuaded early on by the teachers. He explained:

> I had sensed for years what the teachers were telling me. Our exploration into Core Knowledge just clarified some thoughts for me. Say two kids live on the same street. In past days, you might be able to make an assumption about the things they had in common...a family car, parents in the home, their neighborhood school, interest in sports, and usually, around here, a dog. But that's not true anymore. Now, even though the kids in this school might come from the same neighborhood, they don't necessarily have that much in common. One might have no car because his single mom wants him to walk to school. In that same block, a kid with

> two cars in the garage may not get in either one of them to go to the library because his parents don't think it's important enough or they're too tired to drive him there. The kids in this school might look mostly the same to somebody like you, but in reality, the gap between them widens every year. Those kids without support are going to lose ground. They lose out because their knowledge base is limited by what they have and haven't been exposed to. That's the problem when you leave it entirely up to the teachers to decide who and what to teach. They might not expect the one with no transportation to the library to learn the lesson or do their homework. And you can't fault them for that. But what I have seen this program [Core Knowledge] do is eliminate a lot of that. Because now, with the Sequence and the topics, every one of our kids is exposed to the same interesting lessons whether their parents support them in it or not.

Though teachers had toiled diligently throughout the summer, preparing for the new school curriculum, they were excited to bring the lessons "to life" by involving students and parents. Initial reaction to the implementation of Core Knowledge was enthusiastic, as reported by Kemp.

From the principal's point of view, the curriculum had brought a newfound sense of collegiality among educators. Time spent in collaborating with one another increased and activities involving partnerships between elementary and secondary high school students evolved. Because the high school students were studying some of the same topics, though the assignments and degrees of analysis varied, teachers from both schools arranged for joint sessions for their pupils. As the teachers explained, this led to student teams who helped each other understand contexts, painted sets and designed costumes for a unit of study on Egypt. Students and teachers began making connections through this vehicle called "shared knowledge," Kemp asserted. People across the school community began to take note. The Grade Five teacher, who had taken leadership in introducing the Core Knowledge curriculum to her colleagues, was inspired by the community's interest

in what her students were learning. She planned a celebration of learning in the spring of 1993; students showcased the knowledge gained from Core studies. The school invited community leaders to the school to engage in thirty minute dialogues with individual students about their learning. Kemp stated that he had to put a stop to the evening, because it had gone on longer than planned. As he described:

> Here were elementary students engaged in conversations with central administrators and school board members, conversations that just blew these folks away. The feedback I got from the board members and various administrators was that they just didn't have enough time to absorb it all. I thought, 'What a dynamite way of saying to that political group that this is not a Mickey Mouse program; that it is really a significant way to educate our kids.' They were demonstrating proficiencies in science, writing, art, math – by talking about what they know and what they knew how to do. I think the communication was a lot easier because the kids really knew what they were talking about. They also presented the visitors with letters of recommendation about their citizenship from people outside the school. That was neat.

Some amount of shifting of roles and restructuring of the school day became necessary to the successful implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum, according to Kemp. Realizing the importance of teachers having time to work together and to obtain the background information pertinent to teaching many Core topics, Kemp volunteered to teach a new course to be offered at the school: CARE, an acronym for Creative Arts Enrichment. By slightly lengthening the school day four days a week, Kemp allowed for a half day collaborative team planning among teachers. To cover costs, he volunteered to teach the CARE class, in order to free teachers from classroom duties and to avoid passing added costs for instituting the program onto the district.

Other novelties were beginning to occur within the school. The principal reported that midway into the first semester of the 1992 school year, parents began to note changes

in their children's reactions to being in school. The parents noted changes in their children's teachers, too. And Kemp was noticing some changes in parents at the same time:

> Generally a PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) meeting is dominated by conversation that has to do with fund-raising. I attended a meeting a few months into our teaching Core. From the time the meeting started until I left, and hour and a half later, the conversation was all about what was taking place here at Eastern; how the kids were responding to Core and how it was affecting conversations at home. This incident has always stayed with me because they weren't interested in talking about fund-raising. They were interested in talking about learning, and you don't often see that in a parent, you know.

Soon thereafter, teachers requested monies for the purchase of resources associated with teaching Core Knowledge topics. The PTO gave teachers $4,000 for that purpose. I was shown by teachers a variety of these teaching resources during field observations and noted that they were frequently used by the teachers and the students during class presentations.

Core Knowledge Teachers and Lessons

Teachers on staff confirmed much of what Kemp had asserted. In an after school focus group meeting, eight staff members recounted memories of the first year of implementation of the Sequence at Eastern. There was open discussion of the difficulties associated with bringing the program to Eastern. These included a great deal of extra work; some concern over a reduction in the amount of time spent teaching state history; the difficulty in moving everybody in the organization toward "complete flow;" as well as being mismatched with some teachers' desires to offer multi-age instruction to clusters of students. These roadblocks were not considered insurmountable by the teachers,

however. Field notes reflect they dealt with these difficulties by continuously reminding themselves of their focus. They wanted their school to "get back on the right track" and they wanted Core Knowledge to help put it there. So the staff, with Kemp's enthusiastic support, had decided to do whatever it took to make the change effective. They spent more time than usual in discussion; faculty leaders assumed responsibility for "touching base" with other teachers, encouraging and supporting them in their efforts. As one teacher put it:

> The teachers in Florida had told us that in many ways teaching Core Knowledge was not going to be that different from what we had been doing all these past years. We feel that the program is both necessary and valuable for students at Eastern. And in some ways, it's not that different, but for us, it sure has made a difference. You really can't draw a line as to where the benefits begin and end. It's good for teachers; it's good for students. And here, it's been good for parents too.

Teachers' efforts in curriculum writing were bolstered during the summer of 1992 when they received a grant from a community corporation interested in the project. Kemp had written the proposal, which paid stipends to teachers involved in summer writing. Units of study for use at Eastern and in other Core Knowledge schools, e.g., "Native American Peoples," "China," and "The Middle Ages" resulted from this summer work. Their experiences with Core Knowledge, the teachers told me, helped them fulfill their obligations to achieve the school's mission.

The teachers speculated that as they became increasingly familiar with Core Knowledge topics, they arrived at many of the same conclusions regarding the most effective methods for teaching them. During the past year, several of the teachers from Eastern had been invited to participate in a panel discussion in the state's capital city,

along with teachers from several other official Core Knowledge schools from around the country. Having been asked to present artifacts and evidence of student learning from their classrooms, they were somewhat surprised that the visual displays were quite similar, even though the panelists worked with very different student populations in very diverse school communities. "The learning was very clearly very similar," an intermediate grade level teacher said. "And we began to see that what Hirsch predicted would happen, was in fact, happening. That rejuvenated us because we felt like we really were "on the right track."

The school's media center specialist was prepared with several observations. She claimed that during the two years of the program's implementation, student requests for non-fiction library books increased drastically. This was due to a greater amount of required reading for learning Core Knowledge, she thought, but believed that students were simply choosing to read greater numbers of books, too. This claim was verified to some degree; during the period of field study for this research, 86% of the books returned to the school's library were Core Knowledge titles. The media center specialist also stated that parents asked for book lists and inquired about particular titles for birthday and holiday presents, something she had not encountered prior to the adoption of Core Knowledge.

During my field work at Eastern one of the 5th grade teachers presented me with a scrapbook she had created during the school's first year of teaching Core Knowledge. In it were photographs of a Renaissance Fair; the school's celebration of learning; and drama productions such as "The Trial" by Tom Sawyer Day. In fourth grade, students in

one class were engaged in a discussion of Thomas Paine's booklet *Common Sense,* while the other 4th graders gathered around the computer screen for a lesson on compact disc entitled "The Boston Massacre." Two youngsters presented definitions of "redcoats" just prior to the class discussion of the effects of Revolutionary War soldiers having access to modern day guns and weapons. Third grade children seemed absorbed in a lesson about the life of Jane Goodall. On the chalkboard shelf were pictures and magazine articles depicting the story of her work with chimpanzees. Included in the explanation of the story of her work and life was a brief geography lesson by the teachers about where her work was conducted. The students seemed to take interest in the topic, as they gathered in clusters around several issues of *National Geographic.*

In grade two I listened to the conclusion of a tall tale about Paul Bunyon, followed by the students' transition to science class -- a lesson on the digestive system, during which the they discovered how food travels to various parts of the human body. A student named Megan shared with me her booklet entitled "My Body." In it were the sketches she had drawn of seven human organs: the brain, heart, spleen, kidneys, bladder, pancreas and gall bladder. Under the detailed sketches were brief definitions, e.g., "pancreas - a gland that helps digest food and help [sic] my body use sugar." In order to share teaching resources, the second grade teachers scheduled units of study in staggered fashion. Hence, the other group of children in grade two were reading and discussing Anasazi cliff dwellings, pit houses, kivas and pottery design. First grade students practiced printing brief sayings such as "Like a fish out of water," as the teacher explained, posed questions about, and elicited examples of its meaning. The children

enjoyed learning the phrases and sayings, she told me, for they asked often to learn additional ones. Without exception, the teachers claimed that each of these topics was new to their repertoires since adopting the Core Knowledge program. "It's a lot of planning and a lot of work," said one, "but it's worth it." Engagement in lessons like these appeared to bring not only the curriculum, but the students and teachers to life.

Other Views

Central administrative officers in the Eastern Elementary community in 1994 were keenly aware that parents supported the curriculum program for their children. I talked with PTO President, Martie Kale, during my stay on the Eastern campus, who opened the interview with the following story.

Throughout the 1992-1993 school year, parents of fifth grade students remarked to her that they wished their children could remain at Eastern in order to complete their studies of the then 1st-6th grade Core Knowledge series. Members of the school community, including a fifth grade student, presented to the district superintendent, their desire to "keep Eastern Elementary fifth graders for another year as sixth graders -- for more Core Knowledge." According to the PTO report, a grade five student, knowing she had the superintendent's ear during a student recognition ceremony, announced her plan. "The students wanted – no, *needed*, more Core Knowledge," according to the student. In explaining how she would accomplish the goal of persuading the superintendent, she said she would talk to Kemp, sponsor a student strike, if necessary [with only a day and a half of school left, this action might have been ineffective, as the parent indicated] and requested a meeting with the superintendent himself. The student's outcry was a sign to

parents, according to Kale. It had become clear to parents that students had also associated something of value with their Core Knowledge experiences and they felt an urgency to explore the possibility of bringing political pressure to bear on keeping the students at Eastern another year.

Indeed, according to minutes of the district's board of trustees meeting, the superintendent did seek the board's counsel. Trustees were open to the suggestion of expanding the grade levels offered at Eastern, but asked that the parents assume responsibility for meeting six conditions if the reassignment of sixth grade students was ultimately to be approved. According to members of the school community, in the end, the proposal was rejected, primarily due to the late date of its introduction, associated costs, and adverse affects on student - teacher ratios in other schools in the school district. Today, students from Eastern have been able to continue their study of Core Knowledge in at least one of the district's middle schools. It is interesting to note that Philip Kemp was named principal of this school.

Mrs. Kale had come to the interview prepared to discuss a wide variety of perceptions held by members of the Eastern school community. In her own view, the new curriculum had breathed new life into every aspect of the teachers' work. In a letter to staff members (Appendix D) by her account, Kale expressed not only her sentiments, but those of other parents too. Kale recounted ways in which the school had been rejuvenated:

> When Core Knowledge came to Eastern, things changed drastically. Teachers became nicer. The kids said so and we saw so. The students were doing more hands-on learning but somehow, their vocabularies increased too. One thing I noticed is that suddenly they [students] began

> to dream. Always before, they had wanted to be like their Uncle Joe when they grew up. As they got into Core, they started talking about becoming emergency room physicians after studying the human body, archaeologists, and dreaming of going to college. I think this curriculum helped our kids to learn that knowledge is power.

Kale's daughter had become so captivated by the third grade study of the Vikings that she asked her mother to send a letter to her grandfather that had been written in "the Viking alphabet."

When asked to speak to other parent groups about Core Knowledge, Kale reported having spent a portion of her time explaining what to expect should the school adopt the Sequence as policy. Copies of her notes list the four expectations she shares:

(1) your school will "feel" different, i.e., increased parental involvement; hands-on learning; teachers working harder, but feeling better about results;

(2) outside interest in the school will increase; be prepared for telephone calls and visits and letters of inquiry;

(3) conversations with other parents in the school will increase in number and in duration; you will be constantly amazed at the results parents must report about what's happening to their student this year;

(4) fewer complaints from students about homework; their curiosity increases, which has a variety of effects on parents.

Summary: The Revitalization

The 1994-1995 academic year brought shifts in several principal assignments in the district. Kemp was assigned to assume leadership at another school, a middle school, where many of the graduates of Eastern would enroll. During the transition, he worked

closely with the incoming administrator, Jon Boke, who had previously served as an assistant principal in the district's high school. Boke was anxious to learn more about the specified elementary curriculum at Eastern, he told me. He had heard a great deal about it at district central administrative staff meetings. It had been made clear to him by the teachers at Eastern that they had a firm commitment to Core Knowledge, wished to continue teaching it, and had garnered a great deal of parental support for its continuation. "I really had no problem in embracing it, even though I really didn't have much choice," he divulged. His impression was that much of the school's recent identity had been linked with the change from its skills to content-based curriculum. He had no desire to tamper with what appeared to him and other school community members to be a very positive influence within the school. Besides, federal legislation and state government were making grant monies available to schools involved in innovative reform, and Boke hoped the school's Core Knowledge curriculum policy might qualify Eastern for the funding. It was agreed among central administrative and school staff that the development and implementation of Core Knowledge curriculum at Eastern Elementary would continue.

By the date of our interview, Boke seemed ready to embark on a year of study. His office was "wallpapered" with the teachers' monthly Core Knowledge scopes and sequences. He told me about the advantage he perceived in coming in new to the school. "Ordinarily, it would take me a year or two of reading weekly lesson plans to get a handle on a school's curriculum. We've just begun the school year, and all I have to do is read my wall to know what's going on in any given week here."

An August 1999 follow up survey (Appendix E) sent to all schools in the study indicated that the school's commitment to the program remains intact under Boke's tenure. Clearly, the data collected in1994 indicated this might be so. Boke wrote in this most recent survey that the school is entering its eighth year of complete implementation of the Sequence. He stated, "The Core Knowledge Sequence is very significant to our school. We strongly believe in the Core Knowledge philosophy and are committed to its continuation." The school maintains contact with the Core Knowledge Foundation through telephone conversations, the Internet, newsletters and conferences. School closes for two days each spring so the entire teaching staff can continue to attend the national Core Knowledge conference. Boke believes the enthusiasm the students and teachers have toward learning is the most profound way in which the program's implementation has affected Eastern Elementary.

Thus, it seems Eastern has, in ways, been revitalized through efforts largely initiated by the school's classroom teachers. How the revitalization relates to the general picture at Eastern prior to the implementation of Core Knowledge may be viewed with mixed impressions. While the revitalization merits attention, no doubt, it seems likely that *any* change in the school looked favorably upon by teachers might have had a similar impact. The reported renewed interest in teaching and learning reported within the school may well have been motivated by the desire on the teachers' parts to change their ways and habits and on the principals' parts to see them renewed. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that five years beyond the dates of this field study, the same principal and teachers are still adamant about the school's livelihood, which they attribute to Core

Knowledge. Teachers wanted this reform. They worked hard to bring it about. The change seemingly brought about by the presence of the reform so motivated parents that they petitioned the district's trustees to allow their children to stay at Eastern an additional year for the purpose of completing their study of the Core Knowledge Sequence. The school's principal arranged for modifications in the school schedule, including reassigning himself as classroom teacher in order to effect the change. Even as leadership in the school shifted from one principal to another, the curriculum remained a stable feature within the school. And finally, though Eastern did not obtain state grant monies for their participation in the reform in the 1994-1995 school year, additional monies from the school's parent/teacher organization and businesses have been forthcoming in support of its implementation. New life, according to members of Eastern's school community, had indeed, been created.

Pacific Elementary School

> Mission: Pacific Elementary provides a learning environment in which all students will be able to reach their fullest potential by developing team spirit...; promoting positive participation in American society; meeting individual academic needs with high expectations for achievement; developing a positive self-concept; and creating lifelong learning skills.

The School Community

From windows in Pacific Elementary one could view foothills that rise a thousand feet above the new school, which opened in August 1993. The city in which the school is located was populated by over 45,000 inhabitants in 1994. "The dry side of the mountain" boasts "a balanced heritage of farming and high technology." (Chamber of Commerce, 1994). The reported average household income in the city was $35,792.

Enrollment at Pacific Elementary in the fall of 1994 was 484 children in grades kindergarten through five. According to the school profile, 20% of its students identified themselves as members of ethnic minority groups, primarily of Hispanic origin. Forty-four staff members were employed by the school. Each grade level in the school required three faculty members, i.e., there were three classrooms at each grade level. A maximum of 25 students were allowed to be enrolled in first grade classes; as many as 29 children could be enrolled in classes in grades two through five. Beyond those class limits, teachers were paid per student. The teacher's union was reported by the school's principal to be "very strong." Pacific Elementary was the first school in the northwest region of the country to implement the Core Knowledge curriculum, which they had been teaching for one year at the time the onsite study of this school was conducted.

Core Knowledge at Pacific Elementary: A Catalyst for Change

As shared with parents in an information fact sheet, and as written by the school's principal in an open letter to educators appearing in the Foundation's newsletter, *Common Knowledge*, Pacific knew that it "did not want to be a 'business as usual' school." The staff identified six essential Pacific hallmarks:

(1) the infusion of thinking skills into instruction;

(2) integrated instructional practices;

(3) ongoing collaborative planning among faculty;

(4) high academic expectations;

(5) school wide assessments of teaching and learning;

(6) teaching *with* technology, not *about* technology.

At Pacific, Core Knowledge provides the framework for the school's educational change. As Tim Malley, the school's principal, wrote in 1994:

> Core Knowledge is the wedge that allows us to break through the low ceiling of expectations our educational system has been accused (and, at times, guilty) of having for some children. Core Knowledge gives all [Pacific] children a high and equitable baseline of knowledge to share. For the most capable and motivated children, our teachers plan extension activities: we have no need to send our students out of the mainstream to be "enriched." Never before have I witnessed an entire teaching staff working in such a professionally collaborative environment. Because our teachers are not spending time planning (or disagreeing about) content, they can focus on planning and delivering quality educational experiences.

How did this initiative find its way into a newly established school, and with what effects? In sections below, I have described the steps taken by the school's staff in adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum as policy and reviewed perceptions of its implementation.

Principal's Perspectives

Pacific's principal, Tim Malley, had been introduced to Constance Jones at a principal's conference. Jones, former principal of Three Oaks Elementary in Ft. Myers, Florida, spoke with him about her experience in initiating the Core Knowledge curriculum. Three Oaks was the first school in the nation to have piloted the program which the staff accomplished during the 1990-1991 school year. Intrigued by her description of its impact on student learning, Malley decided to investigate the reform initiative. His early interest, he explained, was borne of his parental desire to provide enrichment in high achieving students' educational programs, including his child's. In time Malley came to see Core Knowledge as a program that would benefit, not only his son, but all students who would enroll at Pacific. "Enrichment for all," he called it. "It has

substance to it...as a teacher or as a student, you can really take it and go with it," he conveyed. Moreover, "learning excellence" and "curriculum renewal" were concepts that had been discussed during circle meetings in Pacific's school district. Members of circles, representative faculty and administrators, had been encouraged by the district's central officers to "become empowered" by introducing school programs aimed at improving student learning. This purpose, too, could be met through adopting Core Knowledge as curriculum policy. Malley had wanted to put it into place in the previous school in which he worked, but the staff resisted it; they were fragmented in their views and in their votes. This time, he was determined to sponsor the program for ideological reasons. Soon after he was hired, Malley set about recruiting teachers for the new school. In his words:

> ...I went after the risk-takers – people I'd taught with or supervised in other schools as principal. I told them early in the interviews that this was not going to be a school like other schools. I told them we were going to work differently to achieve our goals and part of what they had to buy into was effectively teaching this [Core Knowledge] curriculum.

Apparently, Malley was successful in his purpose. Once selected, the charter faculty members of the school-to-be wanted to venture into new relationships and responsibilities. They went on retreat to hammer out the questions and duties associated with opening a new school. They had made personal, individual commitments to teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum, among other assurances to the principal, but what did the commitment entail? How would they begin to effect such a change in their personal teaching plans? In what ways could they prepare for teaching a demanding new curriculum while experiencing the survival issues typically associated with establishing a

new school? Could a rigorous Sequence be made meaningful to all the kids? Malley wanted the faculty to decide. By the end of the retreat, Malley declared, the staff had reached agreement on several issues.

First, while they would teach the Core Knowledge curriculum, it would have to be understood by everyone that retrieving and organizing the background information required to teach the core content would take time to accomplish. Second, the teachers were adamant about accomplishing the additional work required during their "waking hours." Thus, a letter was eventually sent to parents of prospective students, explaining that at Pacific, students would be dismissed at 1:45 p.m. on Wednesday afternoons in order to allow for curriculum development, teacher study, and parent-teacher collaboration. Finally, teachers agreed that strong, positive relationships with parents would be integral to their success in a new school with a new curriculum. Methods of sharing information about the school's curriculum with parents and patrons were identified and described, with several formally adopted as part of a plan for communicating with school families. These methods were referred to as home-school connections, e.g., a month by month Core Knowledge curriculum outline for each grade; classroom/grade level homework bulletins; study skills notebooks; and a school newsletter featuring Core Knowledge articles and activities.

Moreover, Malley disclosed that the teachers felt strongly about all their students realizing interdisciplinary connections. They wanted the prospective pupils to assume appropriate levels of responsibility for their own learning and to some degree, for their own assessment of it. The faculty asked, "What is quality work? What are shared

standards? What can we do as teachers to ensure that our kids will apply what they learn? And finally, "How will we best serve our minority students, the ones who may speak little English, and/or struggle to learn?" These questions emerged during the course of the faculty retreat, with a view toward gradually arriving at some answers throughout the school year. "Many of us, teachers and administrators, had come to resent the 'do your own thing' era," Malley said. He stated emphatically:

> We were tired of a lack of continuity. Tired of no target to aim toward. Tired of the loneliness that comes from not knowing what your next door neighbor is thinking, teaching, or doing. For us, this curriculum program spoke to all of those needs. It gave us something to hold on to – to say 'this is who we are' and 'this is what we teach.' Yet two schools in this same district remain diametrically opposed to adopting Core Knowledge. They do not want to have anything to do with it. For some, it's the very antithesis of what ought to be happening in American schools. 'Oh, I've read that book,' [*Cultural Literacy*] they say. 'That's nothing more than a White Anglo Saxon curriculum.' Then I ask them if they've seen the curriculum. Most people haven't. They think the *Cultural Literacy* list is the Core Knowledge Sequence, and it's not.

Thus, Core Knowledge was to be the vehicle for Malley and his staff to create a new and different school where learning would be continuous, curricular targets would provide structure and teachers would get to know one another and one another's work. Core Knowledge, according to Malley, was looked upon as the common thread that tied everyone together in an attempt to offer something "special and significant" to the students who would be attending Pacific (personal communication, 1994).

The school's prospective students were uppermost in staff members' considerations as they planned the coming year. Students of Hispanic ethnicity would comprise 20% of the student population; 17% were considered by their parents to possess limited English language proficiency, and 23% would be eligible for free/reduced price

lunches. Many of the Hispanic students were known to Malley; they had attended the school in which he had previously served as principal. He was aware of many of their educational needs and wanted, he said, to provide for them. They would require special programming - bilingual language instruction and some remedial work toward mastering basic literacy skills; yet Malley sensed that in the hands of his teachers, the Core Knowledge topics could be the right tool. Many of his former students were very bright and extremely well motivated to learn. As he envisioned it, Core Knowledge would be a tangible set of lessons that would lay out for *all* Pacific teachers what *all* Pacific students would be expected to explore and learn.

A year into implementation, Malley had witnessed its impact at Pacific. First, he felt that the teamwork required of faculty and staff had caused them to take their work more seriously. That effect rippled to the children, he thought. Parents, his "easiest sell" when it came to generating support for the program, reported sustained dinner conversations at home on the subjects of their children's Core Knowledge lessons. They seemed to appreciate the diversity of study their children were being asked to learn. Students, too, seemed to flourish. As one fourth grade student told him, "Mr. Malley, I feel like I can learn anything if I can learn all about the Byzantine Empire. Now I know, I can do anything." His staff was uplifted in the knowledge that they were making contributions. "These teachers are pioneering; in a sense, what they say to our kids influences what they think, and decide, and do." It wasn't always simple or easy. In fact, as Malley saw it, facilitating the implementation of the curriculum while simultaneously creating a new school had been one of the greatest challenges in his career. The fine arts

strands, in particular, were problematic for Pacific teachers. As Malley said, "It was tough to get a handle on how to integrate all this material. The classroom teachers were expected to do it, and most of them just hadn't studied what the curriculum called upon them to teach. So I let them know it was okay to refine lessons in that strand over time." Malley concluded this portion of an interview by indicating his belief that this particular school reform would not likely fade away; due to the pervasive nature of its effects at Pacific, he didn't see it falling victim to other trends.

In a 1996 report on Core Knowledge at Pacific, principal Malley asserted his view about the curriculum's positive effect on students' abilities to apply knowledge when problem solving. Having described the state performance test as "really tough," he claimed that because Pacific students have already acquired "core knowledge" they have no need of learning it for the first time as it appears on the test. Core Knowledge schools, he says, offer atmospheres in which students learn to write about substantive ideas, and this, too, is advantageous for young students.

Core Knowledge, as Malley described it, is actually an "old idea,"one that had simply been regenerated and modernized. Malley had wanted to retrieve the old idea, and package it as curriculum cornerstone in his school. Malley is clearly a maverick; his leadership and ability to persuade others of its virtues surely were factors in its adoption as policy at Pacific.

Core Knowledge Teachers and Lessons

Early in my stay, Malley had mentioned a teacher whose work he had observed in Pacific and in another school, where they had both previously worked. As

Malley told it, although the Grade 5 teacher, Gary Byrd, was quite competent, he was negative about things a lot of the time. Core Knowledge had brought the teacher around to being more professional, in Malley's view. I visited Byrd's class, in order to observe his teaching of a Core Knowledge lesson and to learn more about his perceptions of the curriculum. What I learned reflected the principal's view. In Byrd's words:

> ...One of the things I like about this program is that I'm seeing other things of value. I'm looking at things more broadly. I'm learning to spell new words. I'm reading Shakespeare for the first time in my life. I'm enjoying it. I'm teaching [students] more than I've ever been able to teach them before. I know more. They're learning more. Another thing I like about being part of this Core Knowledge community is there's a concern, an expectation, about an end product. There is supposed to be something to show. I never really expected that of my kids before.

Byrd had also begun to explore the implementation of Core Knowledge in other schools through technological means. In 1994 only a few teachers, according to Byrd, were communicating on Core Net, a Core Knowledge web site, but he was one of them. He recalls electronic communiques with a man from India, who was also teaching the curriculum to his daughter, making their curriculum exchange an international one. From a teacher on Core Net, Byrd learned a method for integrating the teaching of Core Knowledge and spelling. Rather than his usual assignment of expecting students to write sentences in which they had accurately used words from the weekly spelling textbook list, he began featuring them within core content. This writing sample was shared by one of Mr. Byrd's students:

- Leonardo da Vinci was a brilliant artist and scientist.
- Rembrandt was the Netherlands' greatest artist.
- Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel.

- Raphael was influential as a painter and an architect.
- The Medici family was a wealthy Italian family involved in banking and art.
- Galileo was an Italian scientist who supported Copernicus' theory that the earth was not the center of the universe.
- Comedy and tragedy are two kinds of literature.

Later in the day Byrd met with his pupils in the school's technology lab. Each student had access to a computer where s/he was asked to demonstrate desk top publishing skills. The Core Knowledge topic being explored was meteorology. The students were building on knowledge about cirrus, cumulus and stratus clouds they had acquired in fourth grade; they were to compose explanatory paragraphs to accompany individually created animated art. This method Byrd called "power-graphing," a term gleaned from the school's Power Writing program.

Malley had implied that Byrd's involvement with Core Knowledge had influenced the manner in which he approached in his teaching and widened his areas of interest and service to the school. The methods Byrd employed in both the classroom and computer laboratory suggested that change had indeed occurred. Integrating text and Core lessons, utilizing hands-on tools and exploring "college prep" materials had become part of Byrd's new repertoire.

Pacific's media center specialist, too, reported specific changes noted during the first year of the program's implementation. She referred to a higher degree of collaboration among teachers than experienced in other schools where she had worked. She appreciated the teachers' monthly Core Knowledge plans because they permitted her

to add related books to the school's library collection. The media center specialist commented on the students' preference for biographies and for non-fiction in general, something she had not observed in other libraries. She said:

> I brought this book on Vikings from my last school. In all the years I worked there, it was never checked out. But here, look how many students have read it this year. In some ways it's frustrating for the students, because often they will want a book on some topic like the Civil War or castles or Johnny Appleseed, and I will have to explain that Mrs. So-and-So is using them in her class for the week. Prior to teaching this curriculum, I never noticed so many students having an interest in so many common subjects. Our school wanted to get out of textbooks, and we sure did. We've gotten a lot more into novels, and newspapers and library books.

The school's curriculum contributed to expanded procurement at the general education service center as well. Pacific's media center specialist said that regardless of whether other schools were teaching Core Knowledge they could still benefit from the additional videotaped documentaries, video discs, 16 millimeter films and instruction kits ordered for non-restricted use within the district. She commented that the availability of the "more rigorous, interesting" material had been advantageous to many other students and teachers in the district.

School rooms at Pacific are equipped with telephones and televisions. A group of third grade students was watching a Cable News Network program on Impressionism during my period of field study. The school's satellite dish enabled them to participate in an educational Satellite in the Classroom program. Students experience these electronic field trips in the school's "coyote den," a modified amphitheater room adjacent to the school's media center. During my visit, Pacific students were engaged in the study unit "Wonders Under the Sea." The lesson was on rays and skates. Teachers were provided

curriculum guides which assisted students in their preparation for dialogue with marine biologists from the Texas State Aquarium. "Without our attention to Core topics," one teacher commented, "we probably would not be aware of terrific learning opportunities like these for our students. People just don't know how much freedom the Core allows you. I think it also helps for our kids to be connected with kids in other schools; they see they are not the only ones who can discuss marine life in the Gulf of Mexico." A January 1994 news article featured Pacific's hour long satellite link with students from a school in Texas, where Core Knowledge is also taught. Children from each grade level made presentations on topics such as penguins, habitats, fairy tales, and why knights wore armor. Several Texas students performed a rap about the story *Beauty and the Beast.*

Other Views

Malley arranged a lunch meeting at which time I met with principals in three other district elementary schools. These principals reiterated much of what Malley had reported in regard to district circle meetings and their opportunities for involvement in school reform. The schools where these principals served were in various phases of implementing the curriculum. Where purposes of this study are concerned responses from this group of educators focused on three major perceptions. First, there was general agreement about the interface between Core Knowledge topics and inquiry learning. These people believed that the Sequence lends itself to a well-planned hierarchy of questioning of students by teachers. Second, its promise for minority students contributed to the teachers' willingness to accept the challenge of teaching a new curriculum in a new school. They wanted to believe that Hirsch was right, they said. "We won't know unless

we get it into the hands of our teachers and the minds of our kids" one of them said. Finally, these principals were giving some consideration to linking the teachers' commitment to teach Core Knowledge topics to their annual performance evaluations as a way of solidifying connections between what teachers are "supposed to do and what they actually do." One principal expressed his concern over the amount of work teachers were investing in making Core Knowledge work, without the benefit of proper acknowledgment for it (interview 1994).

Susan Paul, the school's secretary, wanted to discuss her views of Core Knowledge, especially because her employment at Pacific was her first introduction to Hirsch's concepts. "Fear was a problem," she said. "It's pretty overwhelming if you are not used to teaching it or talking about it to parents. And our principal made it clear that he did not want change for change's sake. We all knew we wanted change in a purposeful direction." I learned that parents, too, were informed of the school's "catalyst for change." A parent who was scheduled to volunteer in the school for the day, agreed to discuss her impressions although we did not have an interview appointment. She liked the "well-roundedness" of the curriculum, she said. At a different school, her fourth grade daughter had learned the basics, but little else from her mother's perspective.

> This curriculum is more integrated and more comprehensive and I love the dual language classroom. She's learning the sayings in both English and Spanish. We like that. I appreciate the personal edification I have received from my child and her teachers. Before moving here, we lived in the Bronx, and I can tell you, they were not learning these rich topics there.

Core Knowledge, at Pacific, represented change and reflected its distinction as a new school. The Core was the common thread uniting efforts of staff members getting to

know one another as they engaged in the challenge of creating not just a new curriculum, but a new school. The lessons themselves led to distinctive methods, too. The curriculum at Pacific is technologically driven, to some degree. Teachers reported modifying approaches to learning, e.g., power writing, integrated spelling and Core Knowledge assignments, and dual language presentations. Satellite distance learning, electronically transmitted school bulletins, and a computer laboratory for student use round out the emphasis. Principal Malley recently reported that referrals of students for special services have dropped at Pacific; he tied this phenomenon to the curriculum program that had raised the academic standards bar for all students. The risk-takers Malley recruited appeared to have lived up to his characterization of them. They bought into a program with which they were unfamiliar. They said "Yes" to a principal for whom some had never worked. For children whose first language was not English, they offered dual language instruction. The staff at Pacific found a vehicle for effecting change, and according to their reports, have succeeded in achieving it. How ironic that where Pacific saw change, Northern saw tradition.

Northern Core Knowledge School

> Mission: To provide excellence and fairness in education for elementary school children. Excellence in education means raising academic standards and achieving success for all students. Fairness in education means providing equal opportunity to learn for all students. We accomplish this by teaching Core Knowledge, learning skills, democratic values, character education, and student responsibility for one's own learning.

The School Community

Located half a continent away from Eastern and hundreds of miles from Pacific,

Northern Core Knowledge School offers a different portrait of Core Knowledge in action. Founded in 1993 as a parental initiative, the school is a public school of choice. It opened in one of the district's former high schools, where I conducted the field research for this study. Since then the school has moved to its new facility and has increased in student body population from 125 to 504 students. Over 600 student names were on the school's waiting list in October 1994. The school district is large, with thirty elementary schools, eight junior high schools, three comprehensive high schools and seven alternative secondary school sites. The school district is one of eight in the nation recognized for its implementation of computer networking in classrooms. Initially the school served students through grade five; now students attend through the sixth grade.

Eleven percent of the students were categorized as members of minorities, while ten percent were eligible for free/reduced price lunches. Kindergarten classes were capped at 18 students. As many as 24 could enroll in classes first through fourth grades. Students were admitted to the school by lottery, including those whose parents wrote the school's charter and covenant. In 1994 the school employed fourteen staff members. The school is located in a university city with population of 90,000 (1994) and is situated in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States.

Core Knowledge at Northern: A Public School of Choice

There exists at Northern a full and complete partnership between parents and staff members, who jointly govern all aspects of the school including the supervision of children, curriculum, budget, and classroom instruction. Parental involvement is key in the school's operation. Parents averaged over 1200 volunteer hours per month in 1994

and the principal, who is still employed at the school, recently reported that this average has been maintained. Fourteen volunteers per day are ordinarily found working in some capacity in the school, including providing some direct instruction with students.

Principal's Perspectives

Like his counterpart at Eastern, the principal at Northern was introduced to Core Knowledge by others in the school community, in this case, parents. A group of parents had identified Core Knowledge as the curriculum they wanted their children to learn. The state in which they resided had recently passed legislation allowing the establishment of charter schools. Though such a school may have been their original hope, Northern's school district guided the group toward the concept of an alternative public school of choice, a status the school still maintains. Principal Daniel Johnson, who also served as a colonel in the United States Army, has been employed at Northern since its inception. From 1993 to 1997 he served dual roles as instructional lead teacher in grade four and principal.

Johnson explained that the school community felt so strongly about Core Knowledge as one of its identifying features that it was decided to include the words in its name, Northern Core Knowledge School. Though the school has moved from its temporary campus into a new facility and has been renamed for two sisters who taught in the public district for a total of 81 years, it has retained the words "Core Knowledge" in its name. "To this day, Core Knowledge unifies us," Johnson said. "We enjoy a strong philosophical alignment with Core Knowledge, so it seems appropriate that we identify ourselves accordingly."

The story of how Core Knowledge came to Northern is told in greater detail below, because parents were the decision makers regarding curriculum policy at this school. While parents were busy creating a proposal for a new school, however, Johnson was busy reading Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy* and some of his other writing as well. On leave from the district, Johnson had enrolled at the Army War College to pursue a master's degree. While there he became interested in the national goals and standards issue, writing essays and position papers exploring his own notions in response to them. It seemed a good match – parents who were seeking a leader for a school where character education, democratic values and Hirsch's curriculum would be taught. Johnson said:

> My attitude toward the principalship is one of service. And a school of choice is the American way. I have a choice in buying a circular saw. I can get a Sears, a Black and Decker, and I take the responsibility for what I buy. So why not a choice in my child's school? Public education has been 'take it or leave it' for too long.

Johnson went on to convey his belief that parents are the child's primary teachers, a view he described as compatible with the parents who were key in Northern's establishment. The school's governance structure, he explained, is known as the site based management council. One team, the Parent Advisory Board (PAB), is made up of seven members who are elected by other parents in the school community. The other team, the Teacher Advisory Board (TAB), also has seven members. The teaching staff of the school elects TAB representatives. The council works on the United States congressional model, i.e., committees from both boards reach agreement, then bring issues to the full body for acceptance or rejection as school policy.

During the course of my field study, I attended a full faculty meeting, facilitated by Johnson. Four of the fourteen agenda items involved Core Knowledge. This was typical, according to Johnson. Teaching the curriculum is one of the five foundational pillars undergirding the school of choice:

- Core Knowledge Curriculum
- Parent Partnerships
- Character Education
- Student Responsibility for Learning
- Mature Literacy

Of the decision to feature the Core Knowledge Sequence so prominently in the school, Johnson says he was most comfortable. The reasons?

> We've cheated students by not teaching them about the courage the early leaders in our country possessed. Those people literally pledged their lives; some did lose them. Is there anything in our society worth that level of commitment? In searching for a school curriculum that would be the very best for their children, our parents settled on Core Knowledge because it teaches them where we've been in this country, where we are now and where we may have to go to maintain our democracy. I teach the kids here that a Wolverine (the school's mascot) never gives up. Core Knowledge teaches the courage, tenacity and perseverance that kids are going to need to live in the next century.

In discussing his views of the impact of the curriculum in the school, Johnson pointed to several factors he believed enhanced the effectiveness of the teachers' work with students. One was their enthusiasm for sharing ideas. The many resources and lesson plans created by the school's teachers were part of their reason for spending time together during the period prior to the school's opening. Another involved his perception of the curriculum as a more tangible tool. For Johnson, the Sequence was something the

staff could hold on to. They could show the list to parents, explain its essence and ask for their assistance in seeking out resources, guest speakers and supplementary materials for use in teaching. The topics were more rigorous and broad in scope than those found in most publishers' textbooks, he thought.

In the August 1999 follow up survey Johnson was quick to describe the school's continued commitment to Core Knowledge, which he characterized as "strong as in 1994, if not more so." He went on to talk about the Core Knowledge curriculum as the school's central pillar and predicts they will continue to refine and develop additional teaching units as a staff. Northern is "serious" about school reform, according to its principal. Having worked hard over the course of the past six years, he feels the school has now reached a "high plateau" of curriculum implementation. Over 90% of what is taught at Northern derives from the Core Knowledge Sequence. Current Parent Advisory Board members also remain committed to the original group's purposes according to Johnson. So much so, they provided funds for providing every member of the teaching staff with personal copies of Hirsch's book *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them.* Communication with the Foundation is frequent. In fact, Johnson reported a recent request from Foundation staff for Northern to assume responsibility for a presentation to educators in another large school district in the state, where they were to elaborate on the effects of Core Knowledge in their school. Three parents and one teacher collaborated with Johnson in this outreach. A small team of people from Northern was scheduled to participate in a regional Core Knowledge conference during the fall of 1999. Northern teachers will present units of study they have written at the next Core Knowledge

conference.

Johnson conveyed his belief that Core Knowledge gives Northern a high standard of specific content for all students to know. Reflecting the Foundation's use of several descriptors beginning with the letter *s*, (sequenced, spiral, solid and specific) he added that the curriculum is, for Northern teachers, a solid map of what to teach. Because it is "mapped out" it provides consistency and continuity for students in elementary school and this, Johnson claimed, creates a higher degree of accountability for both students and teachers.

Core Knowledge Teachers and Lessons

Teachers at Northern were slightly past the one year anniversary of their school's opening, which meant that at the time of my visit, they had experienced one year of having taught the Core Knowledge curriculum. This period of time was long enough for them to evaluate its effectiveness, they reported. As part of the school's pilot (two year) status they had engaged in a self-study of sorts, after which a progress report was submitted to the school board. Part of that report included standardized test scores, which were intended to establish baseline scores for Northern's student body. The teachers felt positively about the results, which they had only reviewed two weeks prior to my time with them.

Students responded well to the standards set by teachers and parents at Northern, faculty reported. Only several weeks into their second school year, they noted "less summer learning loss" than usual; they said they were pleased that the knowledge they introduced to the students their first year seemed to have been retained. Building year

upon year would be significant in terms of providing a very solid educational foundation if the first year had been any indication.

At Northern, students were expected to assume responsibility for their own learning. They were encouraged to accomplish the learning, not listen passively, or opt out of opportunities for active participation in lessons. Because the Core Sequence is so specific, Northern teachers claimed that they could more easily guide students toward the kinds of discoveries that interested their pupils. Once those interests were identified, individuals or teams of children worked together in meeting basic and extended expectations the teachers set for them. This approach, the teachers stated, had positive results in student motivation to learn while accomplishing the goal of teaching topics in the Core.

Though the curriculum policy had been established at Northern by parents prior to the hiring of any of their children's teachers, there was, nevertheless, seeming enthusiasm for the program within the halls of the school. As I discussed this policy decision making process with teachers during the focus group meeting, I learned that their perception of the school's governance structure was one they said they appreciated. There was no disagreement with the teacher who spoke:

> These are exceptional families. They have made a huge investment in our school, so we trust them. We do our thing; we are the professional educators. And they do their thing; they are professional parents. This kind of collaborative effort takes mutual respect. They give, we get. When we give, they get. We are all working for the benefit of the children. So there is no time or interest in pettiness. When you're opening a new school and teaching a whole new curriculum, you just roll up your sleeves and work together. So the fact that they chose our curriculum doesn't make it their curriculum. It's ours because we are the ones who present it in ways that will make it meaningful to their children.

Because the teachers had worked hard, they did not want the students' newfound knowledge to "be wasted." They did not wish to appropriate the curriculum's benefits to themselves only, one said. Rather, they wanted the children to appreciate the advantages available to them through diligent study and the pursuit of new knowledge.

The gains had not come without problems, however. Time was the main consideration and concern of the members of Northern's staff. One teacher told me she worked tremendous numbers of hours in keeping up with the topics she had not previously taught. "Not enough time" was the most common response to questions about potential roadblocks to implementation. At Northern, an issue discussed in another of the research schools emerged – Core Knowledge and cross-grade grouping did not mix, according to one of the teachers in the group. The ability to group children for multi-age learning at least for Core topics did not present itself as an option. "Life after Northern" was another concern. Their teachers wondered what would happen as students moved from Northern to middle school. Would the students continue to learn and to be excited about their subjects? How would an appropriate level of challenge be achieved after having experienced such a stimulating curriculum? Parents and students had options such as International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs at the secondary level, but where the students would go for similar middle school educations was a perplexing issue for them.

Near the conclusion of our meeting another veteran teacher spoke about her experience with various innovations during her career. Having watched the educational pendulum swing first toward and then away from a number of trends, she had settled on

Core Knowledge as a program she valued. In her words:

> Look, I'm...good at teaching skills. I've done it for years. I wanted to grow professionally...to move on. I also wanted to forge something new. That's why I'm here. If we don't keep learning as adults, how can we dare ask our students to assume responsibility for their own learning? I just wish Core would have been available to me as a new teacher. It's great. I don't understand why everyone isn't teaching it.

Principal Johnson followed with a related statement about his appreciation for Core as someone who served as both administrator and teacher. The curriculum made both jobs more manageable in several senses, he reported. Knowing what to teach and having the knowledge of what his colleagues were teaching was a great advantage to Johnson. Parents agreed to assist in reading the fourth grade literary selections to students from time to time. And because everyone on staff was simultaneously exploring the challenges and possibilities inherent in Core Knowledge, Johnson felt his first hand knowledge of the experience served everyone well. It enabled him to speak authoritatively about the school's curriculum policy and practical aspects of its implementation.

Northern teachers kept Core Knowledge resources handy. Hirsch's books, resource materials and a three ring binder filled with information relative to Sequence subjects were found on the table in the staff room. A review of photographs taken in the research schools revealed a copy room shelf filled with Core Knowledge books. A parent volunteer pointed to the "books for borrowing" lending library, where many titles reflecting the scope of Core Knowledge topics were found. The presence of Core Knowledge at Northern seemed pervasive in many respects, physically as well as intellectually.

Beyond the teachers' perspectives lay a host of additional ideas about Core

Knowledge at Northern school. I turn now to a discussion of several stakeholders in the school's success before concluding this chapter.

Other Views

It did not take long after my arrival on Northern's campus to discover the unique situation in which this school of choice found itself. The very high degree of parental involvement was uncommon. On the first morning of observations, I met eleven school volunteers, all of whom were parents. The father of one of the third grade students was teaching the class about his work as a senior park ranger. He had brought a visual prompt that interested the students a great deal – moose antlers. He engaged the youngsters in conversation ranging from the animal's habitat to its weight. This sort of classroom experience seemed indicative of the school's covenant with parents, who agreed to contribute not only to their own child's education, but to others' as well. Assisting in the teaching of the school's curriculum was a "good thing" the student's father said. "While I wouldn't want the sole responsibility, I realize the added detail I can bring to a discussion, given my experiences and interests. The licensed teacher could tell the students about the antlers, but I think we'd all agree that it helps kids learn when they can see the real thing." This view reflected a recurring theme: at Northern Core Knowledge School parents understood, participated in and governed operations of the school.

Northern's story cannot be told without some emphasis on its origins. Parents wanted the school of choice which the state's education funding act made possible. They saw its establishment as a chance to activate politically for the educational benefit of their children. Indeed, as Natalie Richards, one of the parents who spearheaded the plan

disclosed, their motive was to offer the kind of school that would elevate academic standards and provide for equality in learning opportunities for all students. Though a complete account of the school's creation is beyond the scope of this study, certain aspects of what occurred are pertinent to its purposes.

Numerous news accounts chronicle the school's evolution. Between November 1992 and March 1994 at least sixteen articles appeared in editorial and news sections of local print media. A curriculum based reform generated a lot of interest in the press, just at the time the state offered local districts the option of publically funded schools of choice. Topics ranged from Hirsch's ideas to the need for parental involvement in schools to the shift in district interest from cash to curriculum. The articles were written by Northern parents, one of whom was a state legislator, political activists, the school's principal and news reporters. The tenor of the articles was favorable, at first to the idea of such a school, and over time, toward its impact on the perceived success of having met its intended goals.

Another result of opening a school of choice in Northern's district was experimentation with new ways of governing schools. From 1993 until now, Northern was a school governed collectively by parents and school staff. Site based management took a new turn when this model was adopted. Now, parents said, even if district interest were to wane, there is sufficient knowledge among parents to sustain the curriculum and reap for their children the benefits they attach to it.

Further, where Northern's district once had no written curriculum guidelines to share with parents upon their first request for them, a great deal of effort has been

invested in ensuring that every school in the large district has clearly articulated its educational program to parents and patrons. This ripple effect, according to Northern parents, is something they acknowledge as a positive outcome of their having persevered in their interactions with the district's central officers.

Political pressure came to bear within the district, as one parent recounted:

> They [central administrators] accused us of being exclusive. On the contrary, people with money have always had a choice. We knew going into it that we had a lot of educating to do, but we didn't mind that. Now we have the experience of a beautiful first year in response to all the headaches, endless meetings, disagreements with the teacher's union (the principal had wanted to hire two non-union members), and absolute back-breaking labor that went into Northern's creation. The kids enjoyed it, the teachers find it a great challenge and parents are excited about the changes in their children's school and home lives. We know they will be well prepared, because our children don't study dinosaurs and rainforests to the exclusion of everything else. What is happening in most American public schools today is a historical misfortune.

As a school of choice parents knew exactly what their children would be learning even before teachers were hired and textbooks selected. The Core Knowledge curriculum was said by the school's principal to be very defining. "It's who we are; we've named our school for its curriculum twice now, and we take school reform very seriously," he said in an August 1999 telephone interview. Northern parents make investments of time (as much as 10,000 recorded hours per academic year) in their children's school where they assist in myriad ways, e.g., in classrooms as guest teachers, on the playground, in the library, as research assistants, in the school office, creating curriculum, informing other districts about Core's influence in their school community. The school is said to rest on five foundational pillars, Core Knowledge being reported as primary among them. Teachers report high degrees of satisfaction with the program, having commented on its

usefulness in terms of promoting their own intellectual development, encouraging greater degrees of collaboration among colleagues and exploring new working relationships with the people they believe to be the students' primary teachers – their parents. Northern Core Knowledge School has been chosen by many, including over six hundred, whose parents in 1994 hoped to one day become members of the school's community.

Conclusion

These portraits of Core Knowledge schools offer a number of theoretically interesting points of comparison. In concluding this reporting of findings I offer a summary of the more significant points. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I present interpretations and recommendations tied to these points.

The evidence from these three schools suggests that the Core Knowledge Sequence is a viable basis for an integrated cohesive school curriculum. The curriculum continues to be fully implemented in all three schools, providing as intended, a common core of knowledge to be acquired by all students and a shared curricular focus to be implemented by staff. Across the schools, various factors emerged as common traits: renewed interest in teaching; parental approval of and enthusiasm for the curriculum; benefits to students; teacher freedom from deciding what to teach; integrated units of study for students; no turnover in principal leadership; shifts in principals' roles; site based management; and high degrees of satisfaction with the school.

Similarly, the schools reported several key disadvantages and obstacles associated with successful implementation of the curriculum. These included: the time required for obtaining background information on many topics; the time required for planning school-

wide and classroom teaching plans; difficulty in acquiring age appropriate teaching materials; teaching "in a fish bowl;"and lack of Core Knowledge textbooks. Certain features appear to be present in Core Knowledge classrooms regardless of the school. With very few exceptions, I found the following to be part of the Core Knowledge classroom landscape: time lines on walls; sets of globes; many maps; class sets of Core literary selections; What Your [K-6] Grader Needs to Know resource book; and very similar artifacts of learning such as labeled human skeletal drawings, ancient civilization drawings, and students' paintings patterned after artists whose works are studied as part of the curriculum.

Thus, the Core Knowledge Sequence is being effectively implemented in these schools. What difference does it make? In order to answer this question it is necessary to assess the Core Knowledge Movement in relationship to criteria for reform, and to consider its prospects for future growth. It is to these topics that I now turn.

Chapter Five

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In *Core Knowledge in American Schools* I have asked the question, "how can our schools be reformed?" I have sought to answer that question by considering a specific reform movement, the Core Knowledge Movement, as it has been manifested in three schools that have participated in it. The selection of the Core Knowledge Movement as an object of study was driven by theoretical considerations. Policy approaches to school reform have typically been "top down," i.e., legislated or mandated from above by lawmakers, executives, or school boards. Implementation then falls to practitioners in schools. The reform literature thus has tended to focus on obstacles to reform that derive from this "top down" perspective. By contrast, the Core Knowledge Movement has from its inception taken a "bottom up" approach, seeking to take root "along side schools" and the people who work in them, rather than seeking to influence top governmental officials. This feature of the Core Knowledge Movement makes it somewhat unusual among current school reform efforts.

The Core Knowledge Movement takes a particular approach to reform, stressing content-based curriculum. School reform efforts often have addressed curriculum, typically by considering distributional requirements, by imposing outcome standards, or by offering alternative curriculum approaches. Such reform proposals have generally been policy-based and determined by policy makers. The concept of reforming schools,

school systems, and indeed the entire American system of primary education through a grass roots, content-based reform effort is strikingly different. But can it succeed?

In this concluding chapter I address this question by arraying nineteen criteria for effective school reform set by five different authors. These reform theories have been discussed at length in Chapter Two. Below, I discuss the findings from the field research at three Core Knowledge schools according to the criteria specified in the literature. Then, in the subsequent section, I offer my own analysis of the Core Knowledge Movement and suggest additional criteria that might also be considered. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research.

Reform Theories Applied

This section arrays criteria for school reform by author and discusses the criteria in relationship to the findings derived from the study of three Core Knowledge schools. While there is some overlap in the criteria (more than one author identifying the same criterion), I nonetheless consider each main criterion set forth by each author in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the manner in which the reform theories apply to the results of this research.

Kliebard

(1) The ability to determine what is and is not curriculum.

Kliebard stated that conceptual confusion plagues reform efforts because curricular issues get clouded by other issues. Clarity in specifying curriculum is necessary in order for curricular reform to succeed. The Core Knowledge Sequence satisfies this criterion. It has a specified content which is both "intensive" and

"extensive" using Hirsch's terminology. Because the sequence has already been determined, no institutional energy is spent in negotiating over it. Because schools elect to teach it, teachers are "freed" to focus on the best method and timing in conveying the knowledge to students.

(2) Adequate planning.

Planning in Core Knowledge schools appeared fluid, ongoing, and reciprocal. While the content of the curriculum is fixed, thus ensuring that teachers and students know what to expect from one grade level to the next, implementation of the curriculum is in the hands of teachers who collaborate in developing lesson plans and innovative approaches to teaching the "core." With the Sequence providing the focus, planning was enhanced. Further, there was reciprocity between the schools and the movement, each influencing the other.

(3) The nature of the social and political climate.

This criterion simply states that reform proposals that are in synchronization with prevailing social and political forces are more likely to succeed than those that are not. But social and political winds shift, and reform efforts can find themselves calmed or blown off course if they depend exclusively on the trends of the day. The Core Knowledge Movement has clearly benefitted from the national preoccupation with standards, the widespread perception that schools are not offering an adequate foundation of knowledge to American students and the availability of federal and state monies to enact reform. This is true especially as American students' performances are compared to those in industrialized nations where core curricula are standardized. In this sense, the

movement appears to be riding the prevailing winds and according to this criterion, should have better prospects for success. But because the Core Knowledge Movement seeks to spread from school to school, teacher to teacher, and principal to principal, it is less reliant on a favorable policy breeze. Social and political climate is the terrain of *policy debate*; the Core Knowledge Movement seeks to exercise its influence in the schools themselves.

(4) Ideas about reasons for change.

Core Knowledge proponents argue that the movement is not designed as reform for sake of mere change. Hirsch appears to agree with Kliebard who asserted that "curriculum reform...represents a never-ending process of making room for an emerging and presumably urgent kind of activity that needs to be reformed" (p. 20). Hirsch's reform has reasons and ideas. It is urgent, he claims, to restore the nation's ability to effectively communicate with one another, as well as to re-form schools toward that end by reversing the progressive approach to education.

Tyack and Tobin

(5) Timing.

According to Tyack and Tobin, successful reforms have been well timed. In effect, this restates in different terms Kliebard's concern for the prevailing social and political climate. But Tyack and Tobin also emphasized practical aspects such as the availability of funding, degree of consensus on the need for change, and the importance of gradual evolution of reforms. By these criteria, the Core Knowledge Movement appears well positioned. Because it is essentially a content-based curriculum movement, it is not

as resource dependent as are other reforms, requiring, for example, the marshaling of more teachers. Since it has arisen during a period in which there is a broad social consensus on the need for reform, it has struck a responsive chord with the public. By its nature, it is incremental and has spread gradually but steadily. It is well-timed.

(6) Community support for cultural construction.

Tyack and Tobin also discussed the cultural construction of schools, the social fabric woven among parents, teachers, administrators, and students. They argued that where there is broad support for a particular cultural construction of a school, that school is more likely to develop that culture. The Core Knowledge Movement proposes the cultural reconstruction of schools because the content-based curriculum will form the hub of a new school culture. Evidence from the three schools confirmed this expectation. At Eastern, the teachers wanted to teach the Core and they retained it even when the principal left. Parents petitioned to add a grade to the school so that their children could finish the Sequence. Participants all expressed great enthusiasm for the Core, and believed that it had revitalized the school. At Northern, the local school board allowed public school choice and a group of parents created the school and incorporated Core Knowledge into its name. There was unparalleled ownership of the school by its community and extensive volunteer efforts have led to its success. The school has a long waiting list and teachers from other schools sought to transfer to it. Strong parental support and an enhanced school culture were also reported at Pacific, where teachers were offered early release for planning with the support and assistance of the school community.

(7) Support among teachers.

Tyack and Tobin stressed that a main factor inhibiting reform is teacher turnover and burnout. These are discrete variables. A form of burnout occurs among teachers worn down in the implementation of a reform effort. Turnover occurs naturally for a variety of reasons, including burnout, and inhibits reform because new teachers must become acclimated to the reform effort and environment. The essential feature of successful reform, according to this criterion, is that teachers be supported in sustaining their efforts and commitments. At all three Core Knowledge schools in this study, teacher morale had remained very strong and teachers working in other schools sought employment in them for the express purpose of teaching Core Knowledge. It is clear that the very high levels of commitment and enthusiasm expressed by the teachers were directly related to the fact that they were teaching the Sequence. The curriculum had energized them, just as it had their students. At this date, there is little evidence of burnout.

(8) Commitment to reform within the school and among the public.

Commitment to the Core Knowledge curriculum was very strong in all three schools. It was also strong among the parents and that part of the community most directly involved in supporting these schools. It cannot be said, however, that there was widespread community support for the Core Knowledge Movement. It is not as if the school boards in these communities, reflecting the wishes of their constituents, were pressing for the adoption of the Sequence throughout their districts. Neither was it the

case, however, that there was widespread opposition to the presence of these Core Knowledge schools in their respective districts, although it was resisted by some in the Pacific district's circle meetings of principals and teachers, though even that opposition was to the spread of Core Knowledge rather than to its existence at Pacific. Instead of widespread support or opposition, there was general tolerance of the Core Knowledge schools as a legitimate alternative for parents, teachers, and students. Under this umbrella of toleration, the Core Knowledge schools discussed in this study were able to thrive.

Sarason

(9) Timing.

Like Tyack and Tobin, Sarason pointed to the importance of timing.

(10) Power.

Sarason wrote about schools as sites of power. Policy makers and administrators usually have relative power; teachers usually do not. Sarason believed that altering power relationships in the schools is a necessary, although not a sufficient, requirement for reform. Administrators, in particular, have many incentives to prefer the status quo to any step away from it; after all, they have power under existing arrangements. But as long as power relationships remain stable, new ideas are likely to be suppressed. Sarason believed that the teachers are the most creative and experienced cadre in the schools and that any effective reforms must enlist their energy and creativity. For that to occur, teachers must be empowered. Core Knowledge empowered teachers in these schools in some ways and not in others. In the first instance, it is the voluntary commitment of the teachers to the Core that brings it to the school. The Sequence is not imposed upon

teachers who do not want to teach it. Having opted for the Sequence, the teachers are obviously constrained by its content; it occupies one half of the curriculum and they must teach it. But the implementation of the Core and decisions about other curricula to be offered are left in the hands of the teachers who, as mentioned above, work collaboratively, within the schools and across the Core Knowledge network to develop appropriate lesson plans. All three Core Knowledge schools examined here practiced site-based, shared decision making. All principals entered into negotiations with teachers about how to make the curriculum work for them and for the students. Impetus for the Core Knowledge movement in these three schools varied. In one school it came primarily from the teachers. In another, the principal was the initiator. In the third, the parents took the lead. But in all three schools the teachers were empowered. Thus, the Core Knowledge Movement rested fundamentally on collaboration among school staff members so that power relationships were redefined, albeit somewhat differently for each.

(11) Meaningful participation of teachers.

This point is directly related to the one above. Sarason stressed "meaning" as a key variable affecting reforms. He argued that when reforms are imposed by policy makers from above, they may have very different meanings for those who are asked to implement them. Thus, for any reform Sarason asked: what does it mean to (and for) the schools? If the reforms are understood by the teachers as they are understood by the policy makers, then the teachers are more apt to implement them as the policy makers intended. If the reforms add meaning to the role of the teacher, then the teachers are more

likely to embrace them. Because the Core Knowledge movement operates largely at the grass roots level and seeks the voluntary participation of teachers, the first aspect of meaning, as Sarason defines it, "meaning to," is resolved because the teachers are drawn to the Core just because of its content-based approach. There is no imposition of policy from above, so there is no loss of meaning below. The teachers in the schools interact with the Core Knowledge Foundation, they interact with each other through it, and they share a common context of meaning. With respect to Sarason's second aspect of meaning, "meaning for," the Core Knowledge Sequence has clearly enhanced the meaning of work for the teachers in the three schools. They reported that their work meant more to them than it did before. This obviously relates to Tyack and Tobin's concern about teacher burnout, discussed above.

(12) Publication of relevant research findings.

Sarason favored a gradualist approach to reform in which the reform effort can be evaluated and reinforced by research and dissemination of research findings. Too often reform movements flounder because there is no way of knowing if they are working, and hence no basis upon which to build continuing support. Sarason here enters the realm of evaluation, which this study does not. But as a variable affecting reform, there is evidence that the Core Knowledge Foundation is aware of the need to encourage research and the dissemination of findings about the Movement and the schools that are participating in it. Thus, the recent Johns Hopkins study of Core Knowledge Schools, doctoral dissertations (including this one), and other inquiries are welcome by the Foundation and are proceeding. These studies should yield evidence that is responsive to

Sarason's concern.

Fullan

(13) Intensification.

Fullan featured intensification as one method of change, but cautioned about its potential for associated problems. Intensification, Fullan illustrated, occurs when a school's curriculum becomes more narrow. When mandated intensifications are implemented, they often lead to a narrowing of the curriculum as schools focus resources on the mandated subjects. Core Knowledge does involve a kind of intensification with its core sequence; however, it constitutes only one half of the curriculum and is not imposed from above by policy makers as a mandate. Because it does not automatically stretch resources, there is no need to reallocate resources in order to offer the curriculum. Core Knowledge thus offers the virtues of intensifications without the unintended side-effects that Fullan fears.

(14) Restructuring.

Core Knowledge does not require the kind of broad-based restructuring that would be required, say, by moving from a closed to an open classroom format, imposing 4 x 4 or other basic core subjects requiring reallocation of resources, or the implementation of new daily regimes requiring that the teaching schedule be turned upside down. There are structural implications as evidenced in the three schools. For example, in two of the schools early dismissal on some days was adopted in order to provide time for teachers to meet, plan, and coordinate the curriculum. In some instances school hours were also adjusted. These structural modifications were, however, modest and were not the central

feature of the Core Knowledge reforms.

(15) Practical over theoretical approach.

Fullan wrote that reform efforts often falter because the reform concept has been developed by academic theorists rather than having evolved from the experience of practitioners. In one sense, the Core Knowledge movement might seem to violate this criterion, because Hirsch is an academician and he is prescribing for the schools. Yet the extent of Hirsch's prescription is to simply specify the knowledge to be taught, without requiring particular methodology. In the three schools under study, the teachers incorporated the core sequence into the core of their teaching. They took ownership of it even though it required extra effort on their parts. They seemed to regard this curriculum as theirs, as much as E.D.Hirsch's. Thus, the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum was very much in the hands of practitioners whose approach to teaching it was practical and not theoretical.

(16) Bias by Neglect.

Fullan feared that all reform efforts have unintended consequences, among which is "bias by neglect," the tendency to allow the reforms to push other needed ideas and practices aside. In the case of the Core Knowledge Sequence, this would be a danger if Hirsch had over-prescribed the curriculum, seeking to specify it in its entirety or nearly so. Instead, he prescribed only one-half of the curriculum, leaving the rest to individual schools. However, in practice, schools may choose to address well more than one-half of the curriculum to the core. Two of the three schools in this study were new schools, where the core made up nearly the entire curriculum. Among the criticisms of the Core

Knowledge Sequence is that it leaves aside (quite deliberately) many purposes that current progressive curricula give attention to. These purposes include skill development, life adjustment, and other topics not covered in the core. Whether these or other subjects will be neglected will depend upon decisions taken in each school. Another aspect of bias by neglect is that Core Knowledge Schools will be so focused on the Sequence that they will not respond to the varying needs of individual students. The field research found no evidence of this, however. Students in the schools were of varying ability levels, as one might expect, but teachers sought to develop instructional strategies to respond to the learning styles and capacities of all students. Of course some, such as Berliner and Biddle, would argue that the Core Sequence itself is inherently incapable of addressing the needs of all students, and must therefore produce Fullan's bias by neglect. Their position appears frequently in the literature; it cannot be addressed by the findings of this study.

(17) Incrementalism.

Like other reform theorists, Fullan underscored the value of an incremental approach. This is consistent with the positions of Tyack and Tobin, and of Sarason. Core Knowledge is clearly an incremental movement. Because it seeks to foster change at the grass roots, it is incapable of proceeding swiftly through school systems or across the country. Instead, it has spread by steps, although those steps have rapidly accelerated in the past few years. Core Knowledge is incremental in a second sense as well. Just as it spreads from school to school, it is also developed within each school incrementally. Lesson plans are constantly evolving, new ideas are regularly introduced and shared, and

new approaches to teaching are constantly being developed. The data from the three schools is uniform in this respect: in all three schools the implementation of the Core Knowledge Sequence was evolving over time.

(18) Teacher training.

Because teachers play the critical role in any reform process, according to Fullan, teacher training is essential to sustain the reform effort. The Core Knowledge curriculum falls outside the parameters of most teacher training programs, be they in academia or through professional development sponsored by local school districts. To compensate for this, the Core Knowledge Foundation has itself come to offer teacher training through its conferences, its web site, and by making available professional Core Knowledge trainers for professional development workshops. This effort addresses to some extent the need for training that Fullan demands, but in the final analysis, the schools observed were still largely self-reliant with respect to Core Knowledge training. This is not without benefit, however, because the self-training and cooperative development that took place in these three Core Knowledge schools contribute to other criteria that Fullan and others find important, such as meaning, culture, ownership, and practicality.

(19) School culture.

Fullan joined other reform theorists in accenting the critical importance of school culture. The culture of the school can, and most often will, make or break the reform effort. Indeed, one way to think about reform is to say that school reform is co-extensive with the transformation of school culture. The results of the field research overwhelmingly support the conclusion that the Core Knowledge curriculum has had a

major effect on the culture of these schools. And though reasons for and leaders in its adoption differed, its effect was similar across the three schools. There had developed a high degree of commitment among the teachers, high levels of support from parents, enthusiasm among students, and solid support from principals. Cooperation among school constituencies was high in all three schools and has remained so over the past five years. In the two instances in which the curriculum was implemented in new schools, the culture was built from the beginning. In the one instance in which the curriculum was adopted by an existing school, a dramatic transformation in school culture was reported. I conclude that, independent of any direct effects on student learning or any direct consequences on the larger societal culture, the Core Knowledge curriculum has had a clear impact on the culture of these three schools.

On all nineteen reform indicators I have found evidence that the Core Knowledge movement has prospects to sustain itself as an effective reform effort. The findings are not uniform but are almost so. Among them, the most important to stress have to do with a simple idea. That idea is that school reform will succeed when the participants in the school - parents, teachers, principals, and students - believe in and are committed to it. In the case of these three Core Knowledge schools, that commitment was clearly evident. This raises the question of the causal path. Are these schools enthusiastic because Core Knowledge works, or does Core Knowledge work (for them) because they are enthusiastic? To answer this question directly one would need to conduct a controlled experiment in which the Core Knowledge Sequence would be introduced into a school in which the participants were hostile to it. We have no such example here. But it is the

essence of Hirsch's strategy for reform that the Core Knowledge Sequence only be adopted by schools in which the parents, teachers, and principals do so voluntarily. So there is an element of self-selection, or selection bias, in this study as would be the case in studying any of the existing Core Knowledge schools. In the face of this evident selection bias one can only offer interpretations based on observations and reasonable inferences. I believe that the Core Knowledge curriculum is an independent variable that has affected the culture of these schools, the attitudes of teachers and parents, and the learning environment for their students. In these schools, Core Knowledge "works."

It does not follow, however, that the Core Knowledge Movement will sweep the country or succeed in attaining Hirsch's ultimate objective of establishing a national culture based on shared knowledge. In fact, this study has exposed limits of the Core Knowledge movement as well as its strengths, and in the process offers additional criteria for effective school reform.

The Core Knowledge Movement and School Reform in America

Why has Core Knowledge spread as far as it has, and how much further might it go? The previous section confirmed that the movement satisfies many reform criteria specified by theorists. This bodes well for its prospects insofar as these theories are concerned. However, it would be naive to suggest that simply because this movement meets criteria set in the literature it will therefore flourish. In 1991 there was one Core Knowledge school and in 1999 there are over 900. There are over 65,000 public elementary schools in the United States and another 15,000 or so private elementary schools. Even at its present rate of growth Core Knowledge has a long way to go before

it can come close to realizing E.D. Hirsch's vision. In concluding this study, I would like to discuss two factors that seem to me to be critical in affecting the future of the movement. Each factor represents an additional criterion for reform. They are the role of leadership and organization, and the impact of learning outcomes.

Leadership and Organization

Reform movements do not spread spontaneously; they require leadership. As I have contemplated the reasons for the evolution of the Core Knowledge Movement to date, I have frequently returned to the role of E.D. Hirsch and the Core Knowledge Foundation. It is conceivable that the Core Knowledge curriculum might have been successfully implemented in some schools even had Hirsch not created the Foundation; but it is not conceivable that the curriculum could have spread to as many schools and as quickly without the support of the Foundation.

When Hirsch published *Cultural Literacy* in 1987 he expressed no intention of becoming actively involved in an elementary school curriculum reform movement. He only later decided that it would be necessary to develop an organizational infrastructure if the Core Knowledge concept were to gain any traction in primary schools. Hence, the specific relation between the Foundation and schools, national conferences, and development of curricular materials. He decided to contribute the earnings from his cultural literacy books to the Foundation, and he sought additional seed grants from private foundations.

The Core Knowledge Foundation is the catalyst for the Core Knowledge Movement. Its national conferences and web site provide vehicles for communication

and support that have proven critical to the spread of the movement. This was apparent in the experience of the three schools studied here. Core Knowledge came to each school by a different route; but their routes each emanated from the Core Knowledge Foundation. At Eastern, the principal, Philip Kemp, reported a nine year relationship; in his words, "We are always in contact with the foundation through phone conversations, internet, newsletters, and conferences. Our entire teaching staff attends the national conference each year."

At Pacific, Tim Malley reported in August 1999 that the school staff was active in the Foundation's work when asked and that teachers there also try to make presentations at each annual national conference. In response to the same survey, Northern's principal conveyed their school's frequent contact with members of the Core Knowledge Foundation. Parents made it possible for the school to provide staff members with copies of Hirsch's books and other Foundation publications; he viewed their commitment to the Foundation's work as a very strong one. The school budgets annually for costs involved in sending staff members to the national conference, where they, too, share Core Knowledge experiences and specific lesson and unit plans with others. Teachers and parents from Northern also attend the more recently organized Core Knowledge regional conferences. And, as discussed earlier, all three schools are "official" Core Knowledge schools, thereby experiencing the institutional [foundation↔schools] reciprocity and hybridization discussed by Tyack and Cuban (1995).

Movements require leaders. E.D. Hirsch has provided the vision for the Core Knowledge Movement, the content of the curriculum, and some degree of relevant

scholarly research and leadership. His colleagues at the Foundation extend his vision by working directly with schools, publishers and researchers in seeing that the Core Knowledge purposes of "sharing the knowledge" are accomplished. Hirsch writes for diverse audiences; that so many of his titles [*Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know; What Your [K-6th Grader] Needs to Know; The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them; A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know*] include the word "need" may be indicative of Hirsch's urgency in attempting to redress the imbalances he perceives in modern American schooling. Educators in over 900 schools have reacted to this perceived urgency by joining in the Foundation's efforts to provide a common core of knowledge to children in formative years.

Without Hirsch's leadership and the organizational infrastructure of the Core Knowledge Foundation, the Core Knowledge Movement likely would not have attained the success that it has. It seems reasonable to believe that, absent the Foundation, the movement would flounder. If true, this harbors an important implication. Hirsch contends that the Core Knowledge Movement has been and must remain a grass-roots effort. He wants it to take root "naturally" in schools where teachers, principals, and parents believe in it. He thinks that it is important that, as policy, Core Knowledge is embraced by committed parents and educators, rather than being imposed by administrative officers as policy mandates. But the Core Knowledge Movement did not extend itself naturally in the past nor is it likely to in the future. Core Knowledge is taught in increasing numbers of schools due to the work of Hirsch and Foundation staff.

Enduring reform, even that considered to be grassroots in its orientation, requires overarching leadership and organization. Without its "core," it is reasonable to assume the network of Core Knowledge coalition schools, i.e., the movement, would languish.

Results

This dissertation did not seek to evaluate the Core Knowledge curriculum or its effects on students as measured by learning outcomes. Instead, I have sought to examine Core Knowledge as a policy movement and to place it in the context of policy research. My assumption is that one path to policy development is a reform movement that seeks to bring about policy change through grassroots efforts. By studying the Core Knowledge Movement as a case of policy reform, a better understanding of the school reform process itself may be realized.

It is, however, necessary to consider results, even if not for purposes of evaluation per se. The success of any school reform movement depends upon its perceived impact on schools and the children they teach. A curriculum that fails to produce results that parents, teachers, and administrators favor, is unlikely to survive. This is in part why Sarason emphasized the publication of research findings related to the reform effort.

Hirsch implicitly recognized this. He has encouraged evaluations of the curriculum in schools where it is taught such as the Johns Hopkins study discussed in Chapter One. In *The Schools We Need* he defends objective tests, arguing that "in the American context such tests are necessary to achieve excellence" (1996, p. 177). Obviously, the existence of objective tests opens the possibility of evaluating schools based on the test scores of their students. Indeed, comparing elementary schools utilizing

standardized test results is one of the common tools of policy makers and evaluators. Assume, for example, that in any of the school districts in which the three schools studied here reside, comparative test results are available over time. Parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers will surely be attentive to how well students in Core Knowledge schools are doing on such tests in comparison to other schools in the district.

Strictly speaking, improving student performance on standardized tests is not a primary goal of the Core Knowledge movement. Hirsch's original goal was to establish cultural equity by creating a fund of shared knowledge. He believed that it is most important that students become culturally literate, not that they excel on standardized tests. But if students do not become culturally literate, then it is unlikely that the Core Knowledge movement will be able to sustain its momentum. Of course, Hirsch certainly believes that his curriculum will lead to enhanced student performance, especially if it is well taught by dedicated teachers. If Core Knowledge schools do surpass their neighbors on standardized tests, however, this will help fuel the movement.

There are a variety of ways to assess Core Knowledge schools, and the use of standardized tests is only one tool available to the evaluator. In whatever form, evaluation is a key criterion of successful reform. Reforms that are perceived to fail are unlikely to be sustained. This explains why the Core Knowledge Foundation has posted results of standardized test scores from some Core Knowledge schools on its web site, drawing comparisons to state-wide averages.

Recommendations

I conclude with recommendations for future research.

1. Evaluation studies of Core Knowledge schools are recommended. The Johns Hopkins studies will provide a useful benchmark to which future studies can be compared. Knowledge about the nature of a specific case of reform is limited in its use until examined in the context of data associated with improvement in instruction and learning.

2. Specific "Core Knowledge" assessments should be developed. If the primary goal of the movement is to improve cultural literacy, then the concept of cultural literacy should be measured. Though such an assessment is available at the secondary school level, there is none for elementary students, the population for which the current reform is intended.

3. Studies should be undertaken of the impact of curriculum policy on the educators who implement it. What is the relationship among what is taught, how it is taught, and the people who teach it? Such studies would contribute to knowledge about the process of reform as it influences school culture and/or the professional development of faculty.

4. Longitudinal studies of the movement and schools participating in it are suggested. In particular, studies grounded in Fullan's stages of reform should be undertaken. This study has addressed the first stage, initiation. What happens at the subsequent stages of continuation and outcome, especially in reforms that are grassroots oriented?

5. The implications for teacher education should be examined. Hirsch argues that pre-service teacher education at this time in the history of American education should reflect greater emphasis on content knowledge acquisition and less on methods and techniques of teaching. New studies of these variables as they affect student learning could shed light

on the question of how to prepare people who have lived during the last twenty years of the 20th century to work effectively with children who are being born as the 21st century dawns.

6. The benefits of any specified curriculum to disadvantaged students, especially racial and ethnic minorities and learning disabled students, should be researched. Hirsch's primary claim is that shared, sequenced, solid, specific [core] knowledge would ensure educational excellence and fairness for all students. This proposition should be tested to learn whether any curriculum reform would diminish the achievement gap Hirsch and others identify in American schools.

7. Comparative studies of grassroots reform efforts both within and external to educational systems are recommended. Sarason's work regarding shifts in power in professional relationships and Tyack and Cuban's concept of the hybridization of reforms by schools would provide meaningful theoretical frameworks for such studies. Research in this area should ultimately be tied to the purpose of education reform, i.e., improvement in teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The Core Knowledge Movement is a credible effort to reform America's schools. The Core Knowledge curriculum is being taught in a growing number of schools, and the evidence of this study suggests that it was well received in the three schools where it was observed. The key constituencies, parents, teachers, principals, and students, appeared to like it and planned to keep it in their schools. The Movement appears to satisfy a variety of criteria for effective reform. The Core Knowledge Foundation provides an

infrastructure to sustain the Movement's momentum. Its resources appear adequate to the task that it has set for itself. E.D. Hirsch has provided vision for the Movement and through the sale of the various Core Knowledge books he has provided a source of revenue to sustain the Foundation's work.

Even as it wins new adherents and is adopted by additional schools, the Core Knowledge Movement faces a number of obstacles that seem likely to prevent it from becoming policy at the state or national level. Theoretical opponents such as Aronowitz and Giroux, and Berliner and Biddle seem likely to continue to oppose it on ideological and political grounds. In local school districts, teachers at non-Core Knowledge schools may view it with apathy if not with antipathy. As the local school district environment becomes more diverse through the creation of charter schools, the adoption of voucher plans, the resurgence of parochial schools, and the infusion of other reform proposals, Core Knowledge schools will appear as simply one among a menu of choices, and the Core Knowledge Sequence one among several curricular plans. At the state and national levels, policy makers will focus on standards but not on specific curriculum content.

In these circumstances, the Core Knowledge Movement may continue to grow, but as it grows it will begin to saturate its potential market, which is not all schools but simply those schools in which parents, teachers, or administrators might come to embrace it for one reason or another. The Movement's challenge is not to sweep the country, but instead to be well regarded where it takes root. In this respect, the fact that Core Knowledge met so many of the reform criteria in the schools studied bodes well for its prospects. It is more likely to succeed where it is adopted, than to spread where it is not.

If Core Knowledge does not find its way into a majority of American schools, E.D. Hirsch's original vision will never be achieved. That vision was inspired by the value of "cultural equity," the belief that all American school children deserve to be educated to the culture in which they will be expected to make their ways in life. Hirsch's model is the French national curriculum, one that binds the nation even as it reinforces its culture. In order for the United States to adopt a similar national curriculum via the Core Knowledge Movement, it would have to become prevalent. This is unlikely to occur.

Assuming Core Knowledge does not fulfill E.D. Hirsch's goal of reaching all American students, it is nevertheless apparently meeting with favor in hundreds of schools in which it is being taught. It reaches to thousands of teachers and tens of thousands students. At this juncture it is expanding, not shrinking. It is likely to be a part of the American educational scene for years to come. It deserves to be taken seriously by students of American education.

This study concludes with the observation that Core Knowledge has been a viable school reform. It has maintained a presence on the educational landscape for the past decade, enough time to be deemed more than a fad, but far too fledgling to be considered a fixture. I close in anticipation of future studies; research that may address the more broad context in which this reform has been studied. The sample of schools here is small; three communities remain enthused about their affiliation with a program that has helped revitalize and define their efforts. It is entirely possible that the presence of Core Knowledge in these communities is less critical to their vitality than appears at this time.

Whether the curriculum maintains its "core" essence in these or any schools is but one unresolved question. Many factors, in addition to what a school teaches, converge to form a school's identity, and these factors must continue to be identified and assessed.

Core Knowledge coalition schools are now simply initiating change. It will behoove us to watch what occurs during continuation and outcomes phases, which only time will allow. Perhaps, in the end, what many of us *really* "need to know" is how to conscientiously "do something" about creating for children schools that change as readily and gradually as they, the children, grow. As we think beyond this or that particular reform, toward the idea that people in schools must always be alert to the necessity of change, let us resolve to understand how best to achieve it.

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APPENDIX A
A SAMPLE OF CORE KNOWLEDGE TOPICS FOR STUDY IN K-8
Selected Highlights from the Core Knowledge Sequence

These topics do not represent the Sequence in its entirety. It is included as a brief frame of reference for those readers who may not be familiar with the Core Knowledge content guidelines for students K-8.

Kindergarten
Literature: Momotaro; The Legend of Jumping Mouse; The Velveteen Rabbit
Geography: How to use maps & globes; the seven continents; North America
World History: The world outside the child's locality; varied civilizations; oceans & poles
American History: Native American peoples; 5 U.S. Presidents; Voyage of Columbus
Mathematics: Interpret pictorial graphs; add & subtract to 10; plane figures

Grade 1
Literature: The Knee High Man; Tales of Br'er Rabbit; Lon Po Po
Geography: The American West; Appalachian & Rocky Mts; Mississippi River
World History: Mesopotamia; Ancient Egypt; early religions; What is Civilization?
American History: Hunters & Nomads; Mayas, Incas, Aztecs; The American Revolution
Mathematics: 1step story/picture problems; counting money; measurements

Grade 2
Literature: A Christmas Carol; El Pajaro Cu; Greek myths
World History: Ancient Greece; the Great Wall of China; Alexander the Great
American History: The War of 1812; Abe Lincoln; Underground Railroad
Music: Kinds of musical instruments; Bach; Beethoven
Mathematics: Arabic & Roman numerals; simple multiplication; telling time
Science: Seasons and the life cycle; simple tools; Anton van Leeuwenhoek

Grade 3
Literature: Louis Carroll poetry; Alice in Wonderland; The Wind in the Willows
World History: Roman Empire; Byzantine Civilization; The Vikings
American History: Eastern Woodland tribes; Plymouth; Declaration of Independence
Art: Murals of Diego Rivera; art of Ancient Rome and Byzantine civilization; light/design
Mathematics: Division; multiplication of 3 digit numbers; identify angles
Science: John Muir; the food chain & the balance of nature; how an electric circuit works

Grade 4
Literature: Gulliver's Voyage to Lilliput; King Arthur; Frederick Douglass's life
Geography: Africa/Kilimanjaro; geography/development of Western Europe
World History: Middle Ages; King John & Magna Carta; Kublai Khan
American History: Constitution & Bill of Rights; Sojourner Truth; women's rights
Science: Earthquakes & volcanoes; fossils; continental drift
Music: Bach, Vivaldi, Handel

Grade 5
Literature: Langston Hughes; the Gettysburg Address; Midsummer Night's Dream
Geography: Climate & time zones; the Great Lakes of the world; Central/South America
World History: Feudal Japan; the Renaissance; the French Revolution
American History: Civil War; Ida B. Wells; Spanish-American War
Art: Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa"; Michelangelo's "David"
Mathematics: Rounding decimals; equations and variables; graphing functions
Science: Phases of matter; transfer of energy; atoms, molecules & compounds

Grade 6
Literature: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings; Romeo & Juliet; Martin L. King speeches
World History: Industrial Revolution; capitalism & socialism; apartheid; WWI
American History: Roaring Twenties; Harlem Renaissance; Cesar Chavez
Music: Modern American composers: Gershwin, Ellington, Copland
Art: Impressionism; Cubism; Frank Lloyd Wright
Mathematics: Probability & statistics; write and solve equations; geometry
Science: The human body; forests; astronomy/gravity, stars, galaxies

Grade 7
Literature: Cyrano de Bergerac (Edmond Rostand); Diary of a Young Girl; O. Henry
History: WWI; Russian Revolution; Great Depression; WWII
Geography: Western & Central Europe; Moscow/Petersburg/Vladivostok/Volgograd
Music: Jazz; Blues; Music & National identity (Dvorak, Grieg, Tchaikovsky)
Art: Post-Impressionism; Expressionism & Abstraction; Modern American painting
Mathematics: Working with data; geometry; solving problems & equations
Science: Genetics & evolution; Cell division & genetics; chemical bonds & reactions

Grade 8
Literature: As You Like It; works by Rachel Carson; Animal Farm
History: The Cold War; Civil Rights; Vietnam War; Middle East & Oil Politics;Civics
Geography: Korea; southern U.S. states & cities; Vietnam; Middle East states & cities
Music: Non-Western music; opera; elements of music
Art: Photography, 20th century sculpture; architecture since the Industrial Revolution
Mathematics: Presentation of linear data; calculations/rational numbers; spheres
Science: Electromagnetic radiation & light; sound waves; chemistry of food & respiration

APPENDIX B

MEMORANDUM

TO: **MR. JON BOKE, PRINCIPAL**
EASTERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FROM: Glenda M. Peters, Graduate Student
University of Oklahoma

DATE: August 22, 1994

RE: Upcoming Visit to Conduct Research Interviews

I write today to thank you for agreeing to host a research visit in your school. I am looking forward to our time together in September. As we discussed by telephone, I am collecting data in partial fulfillment of the completion of my doctoral thesis at the University of Oklahoma. I am studying the policy issue of a national curriculum for elementary school children, examining Core Knowledge as a case study. I have served as an elementary and middle school teacher for 15 years and director of gifted education in a large urban school district for 3 years. I am now serving as a student teacher supervisor while completing my work on the dissertation.

As a guest in your school, I will make every effort to be as unobtrusive as possible. My purpose is to discuss the history of your school's involvement with Core Knowledge and to learn the various successes and problems associated with it. Interview time with you, members of your staff, and parents, would be very helpful in seeking information about the implementation of Core Knowledge at Eastern. I am interested in observing teachers at all grade levels as they teach Core Knowledge lessons. Any work samples, assignments, lesson plans and the like would likewise be useful. Copies of news articles featuring your school's experience with Core Knowledge, board or trustee meeting minutes, demographic data relevant to your community and school, PTO meeting minutes and the like, are also requested. As we discussed, I would like to conduct a focus group meeting attended by teachers, parents and school and/or district administrators. This meeting would take approximately sixty minutes.

Please let everyone at Eastern know that my visit is to collect information regarding the Core Knowledge program as it influences your school; I will not be there for evaluative purposes in any sense. As you know, your school's name and the individuals who agree to interviews will be reported anonymously. The key questions I am pursuing relate to the purposes you believe this program serves, why you have chosen to continue its implementation, how various groups of people perceive the program, any roadblocks that may have presented themselves, and finally, some discussion of its impact on students, teachers, the school and school community.

Again, thank you for your kind assistance. I will telephone shortly before the visit regarding details of my stay in [city]. I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you, should you be interested.

APPENDIX C

CORE KNOWLEDGE STUDY
FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESPONDENT(S): _____

SCHOOL: _____

DATE: _____

==========

1. Obtain basic history on learning about, deciding to adopt, and implementing the Core Knowledge (CK) curriculum program in each school.

2. How do you characterize CK?

3. Do you use the terminology "CK" in your school? Probe.

4. Relationship between CK & rote learning? teaching skills? independent learning?

5. Pre or post-testing related to CK? Program evaluation?

6. Relationship between curriculum and school culture? CK & school community at large?

7. Do you or your students use the CK Resource books, e.g., <u>What Your First-Sixth Grader Needs to Know?</u>

8. Describe any change(s) that may have occurred in your school relative to CK.

9. Some characterize CK as a value-laden curriculum. What is your view of this claim? To what values, if any, does it seem tied?

10. [Possible follow up] What are the effects of these values on students? teachers? the school community at large?

11. How do students in your school characterize CK?

12. Any objections associated with the CK curriculum? to implementing it in your school? in your school district?

13. What problems are linked to the implementation of CK in your school? in your classroom?

14. CK & multiculturalism? CK or multiculturalism?

15. CK for all students. If yes, how/in what ways? If no, explain its limitations as special education programming.

16. Intended purpose of CK as you see it? Probe for awareness of Hirsch's purposes.

17. Discuss whether CK is achieving its aims. (school's; Hirsch's)

18. CK and student grades?

19. Comment on whether the CK Sequence seems developmentally appropriate.

20. Might the Sequence lay the foundation for cultural literacy as an adult? Probe for meaning.

21. Explore CK and Kliebard's 4 hypotheses regarding the ebb and flow of curriculum fads, fashions and rituals.

    a) absence of purpose in curriculum decision making
    -shopping mall curriculum; nothing can be left out

    b) change cannot be sustained unless the significance of the institutional culture is recognized

    c) fundamental ideas about curriculum mesh with social and political trends which lead to cyclic patterns

    d) change for change's sake; are there examples of this? the movement? the school's decision to implement? change in a purposeful direction?

22. The CK Foundation as a special interest group? media/agenda building? Response to a public outcry?

23. If a parental initiative, why? What explains the choice?

24. Is CK relevant to the interest of mass public education? Probe.

25. What is the school's vision/mission/goal? How does CK contribute to the plan for achieving the goal?

26. Is any part of the students'/teachers'/principal's performance evaluation associated with CK? Discuss.

27. "Dewey did not have to change an ongoing school; he created a school." (Kliebard, pg.26) React vis-a'-vis CK.

28. CK as curriculum reform? as social reform?

29. To what extent does grade-level consensus exist? School? District?

30. Comment upon methodology and CK.

31. What, if anything, was lacking in your school when the decision to implement CK was made? Why CK?

31. What questions do you/do others have about CK? Teachers, central administrators, parents, students, patrons, colleagues? [The intent here is not to answer existing questions, but rather to learn what unresolved issues may "lurk".]

33. Demographics of school/district.

34. Physical description of school.

35. Special populations; are they part of the program?

36. Fine arts involvement?

37. Percentage of Core Sequence taught?

38. Homework and CK. Parental involvement and CK.

39. News clippings. Board/Committee meeting minutes. Progress reports. Any other documentation? Scrapbooks?

40. CK seen as educational reform? What hopes/expectations were attached? Realized? Negated?

41. CK Foundation views different from your own? CK Foundation support given to the school?

42. How efficient are the means in achieving your curriculum goals and objectives?

43. What generalizations can be made about CK?

44. In what ways do you/others find CK appealing? Unappealing?

45. What perspectives underlie CK? Root interests, assumptions, approaches?

46. What is the implied view of the student as learner? Teacher as professional?

47. Whose interest, at the root level, does CK serve?

48. What is the philosophical perspective of the author [Hirsch] of the program?

49. What elements of the prescribed sequence of topics do you plan to teach this year? Describe your primary methodology. Unit/lesson plan organization.

50. What is the CK curriculum's supporting "world view?"

51. Any metaphors that guide curriculum development? Implementor? Evaluator?

52. Explore factors that emerged from pilot study conducted during Qualitative methods course:

    a) rigor of the curriculum (teacher responses)

    b) mobility (teacher responses)

    c) defining culture/American culture/cultural literacy (teacher responses)

    d) time (teacher responses)

    e) content vs. methodology (teacher responses)

    f) empowerment vs. mandate/consensus (teacher responses)

    g) leadership (principal & teacher responses)

    h) motivation (principal & teacher responses)

    i) parental involvement (principal & teacher responses)

    j) district/external support (principal & teacher responses)

53. CK & external funding, e.g., grants?

54. CK & CK conference participation? Presentations?
    CK & other state/national conference participation? Presentations?

55. Your thoughts regarding future of CK initiative?

56. Issues not covered? Comments? Questions? Surprises?

APPENDIX D

Letter from PTO President

Note: This letter is typed from a hand-written photocopy the author gave the researcher, with only school and individual names changed.

June 1993

Eastern 1992-1993 Staff,

How do I thank you for what you've given to our students this year? You've shown them that you can take risks and with effort you can succeed! You've opened opportunities for them to dream, create and feel the excitement of learning! Eastern was ALIVE with learning this year! It's success can be measured by the wonderful spill-over into our homes.

You've given parents and friends of Eastern a shared responsibility by welcoming us into our school. Various educational opportunities and encouragement of parent involvement in and out of your classrooms gives us REAL HOPE for the future.

Your investment and commitment this year have been well worth your efforts. You can open learning opportunities for students, but you can't make them learn. This year, Core Knowledge is opening those learning opportunities and our students want to learn! You make/made that possible! You are opening the world of opportunity to ALL of our students!

To only say Thanks can in no way let you know how valuable each one of you is to our school and our future! A mere THANK YOU IS DEFINITELY NOT ENOUGH!

Martie Kale

PTO President

APPENDIX E
CORE KNOWLEDGE STUDY
FOLLOW UP SURVEY - August 1999
Please respond by September 7, 1999

Name of individual completing this form: _____

Responses need not be lengthy. This is a brief Core Knowledge "check up." Note: Names of schools are changed in dissertation data. Your school's name is not being reported. The description is general and the name of the school changed. Likewise, your name is reported as a pseudonym.

1. What is happening with the Core Knowledge curriculum program in your school now?

2. Please explain any significant changes in the implementation of Core Knowledge that may have occurred in your school since September or October 1994.

3. Predict your school's plans for teaching Core Knowledge as part of your school's curriculum in the future.

4. How do you rank Core Knowledge with other components of your school's educational plan? In other words, is this program significant overall? If so, how?

5. Please comment on the accuracy of this statement about Core Knowledge in your school in the fall of 1994:

   [Statement reflecting major findings in each school.]

6. How does your school currently participate in the work of the Core Knowledge Foundation, if at all? Do teachers attend national/regional Core Knowledge conferences?

7. What is the most profound way you believe Core Knowledge has affected your school?

8. Please list any comments or questions here.