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BUILDING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS THROUGH LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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BUILDING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS THROUGH LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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Finally, I'm grateful I'm done. Enough is enough. God, Please allow this work to be a blessing in my life and bless all who contributed to my research.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mama and daddy, Robert and Helen Bronniman, whom I loved so very much. I treasure those days with my older brother, Tom, my sister, Patsy, and my younger brother, Rod. We grew up on the farm ten miles north and four and one-fourth miles east from Woodward, Oklahoma in a two bedroom house. In that short 18 years I learned about love, honesty, integrity, family, and a desire to be the best that I can be.

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self centered;
Love them anyway.
If you do well people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives;
Do well anyway.
If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies;
Succeed anyway.
The kindness you show today will be forgotten tomorrow;
Be kind anyway.
Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable;
Be honest and frank anyway.
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight;
Build anyway.
People really need help, but many attack you if you help them;
Help people anyway.
Give the world the best you've got and you might get kicked in the teeth;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.
Author Unknown

Thank you Mama
Thank you Daddy
When times got tough, we lived life anyway.
It has made all the difference in the world.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AASL	American Association of Librarians
API	Academic Performance Index
AR	Accelerated Reader
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
ESEA	Elementary & Secondary Education Act
GE	Great Expectations
IDEALS	Inquiry, Discourse, Equity, Authenticity, Leadership, Service
K20 CECR	Kindergarten-20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
LCD	Liquid Crystal Dial
LIU	Lap It Up
NAESP	National Association of Elementary School Principals
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NESS	National Educational Standards for Students
NCREL	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
OETT	Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust
OK-ACTS	Oklahoma Achievement Through Collaboration And Technology Support
PASS	Priority Academic Student Skills
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PTA	Parent Teacher Organization
RIF	Reductions in Force
SEDL	Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory
TAGLIT	Taking a Good Look at Instructional Technology

ABSTRACT

BUILDING SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS THROUGH LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

BY: JO ANN PIERCE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: MARY JOHN O'HAIR

As in any other profession, schoolteachers, principals, and other administrators need a vision to help them toward their goals. The intent of this research was to examine schools that have connected their vision for technology and student learning with parents and the community.

This multiple site case study describes how two elementary schools in a south central state are building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development. The principals of both schools have completed a professional development program designed to assist administrators in developing professional learning communities at the schools they lead. Upon successful completion of the program principals and superintendents are provided opportunities for additional funding through a statewide technology trust. In August 2003 the two schools participating in this study were two of twenty-one schools receiving grants. The twenty-one schools would be responsible for implementing three of the ten practices of the IDEALS High Achieving School Model to become a professional learning community using their new technology as a tool. This research is based on Practice 8: School and Community Connections, one of the three practices chosen by schools participating in this research during the 2003-2004 school year. They must

connect with families and communities in many ways. They must involve families and communities in the work of the school while simultaneously, involving their schools in the work of their families and communities.

This multiple site case study shared through documents, a survey, and interviews how two elementary schools in the process of becoming professional learning communities facilitate connections with the community. Results indicate how schools facilitate technology, student achievement, leadership practices, parent involvement, and community groups in cultivating school and community connections. Conclusions, recommendations, and implications for leadership, technology, and professional learning community development are provided.

CHAPTER I

Introduction, Purpose, Rationale

Introduction

> Corporations and civic groups today are recognizing that a motivated, high-performing student population is in everyone's best interest. Furthermore, technology offers an excellent way to build bridges from schools to communities while helping students learn in ways that are relevant and exciting." It will take strong and determined educational leadership to invite the community into the learning environment and to find ways to contribute and benefit from shared mutual interests (NCREL, 2003).

With the overwhelming number of problems our nation faces as we enter the new century, schools cannot afford to function independently. Schools are under continual pressure to improve student achievement. Threats of state take over if schools do not improve test scores and dissatisfied parents and community members are requiring schools to be highly accountable to the public. Many schools are forced to reform the structure of their schools, improve curriculum, and be more inclusive in decision making procedures. School improvement initiatives include connecting with family and community to garner every available resource to improve student achievement. In schools that serve at risk students there is more accountability for developing school/family/community connections without funding, increased personnel, clear guidance, or leadership in establishing, maintaining, and evaluating such efforts. For

schools with high numbers of at risk students, community connections can suffer without positive school leadership (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Leaders of schools, like leaders of businesses and hospitals, want their organizations to be flexible and responsive. They want to grow and change as needed. "A school culture that invites deep and sustained professional learning will have a powerful impact on student achievement" (Brandt, 1998). The characteristics of organizations that learn are to be authentically engaged with the outlying community, offering leadership, but responding and behaving appropriately to social, economic, and political happenings. Schools seeking to be professional learning communities reach out to the community; partnerships will make the process easier.

Partnership has been a buzzword among parents, the community, and teachers for many years. In total isolation from each other they have tried to cooperate while operating on totally different turfs. Longing for better ways to resolve their differences they have talked, but because they have "varying points of view on and expectations of education" their actions produced completely different understandings (Stoddard, 1992, p. 26). Parents send their children to school every morning expecting them to receive a quality education; teachers send them home in the evening believing they have done an excellent job at delivering learning. When parents ask their children what they did in school today it is because they want to know and the only source to access is their own child (Bauch, 2003). Schools do try to keep parents informed, but "limitations of time, schedules, distance, and resources prevent home-school communication from being universal and comprehensive" (p.2).

Universal links between school, home, and community would provide every family equal access to information about their child's school experience. If this were possible, every family could be provided with everything that they need to know to provide a supportive learning environment from their home. These possibilities are already available for some, but the need to build partnerships between schools and homes is supported by research (Epstein, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Comer, 1996, and O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000).

The widespread consensus is that parent and community involvement is paramount to the success of our nation's children. Based on this belief, national, local, and state policies are being enacted to promote and increase parent involvement at all levels of schooling. From the federal government's "No Child Left Behind" Act to the neighborhood school, there is an increasing awareness that the success of education depends on how well the school, home, and community connect. Despite this knowledge, families are often the missing link in American education. Children thrive academically when the family and the school agree that they are stronger together than apart. When schools and homes share philosophies, goals, and beliefs about learning, they give children the stability and encouragement they need for academic success. High student achievement can then become reality.

As schools strive for higher student achievement, first-rate leadership is important. This leadership needs to be a balance of management and vision. The days of principals, "doing it myself," should be replaced by everyone stepping forward with, "I will, I will." Responsibility must be shared and stakeholders benefit when they understand the value of shared leadership. Expectations include the entire school

community and everyone must commit to a common vision of the school and to high academic standards. All players in the school arena must be clear about what students are expected to learn and what teachers are to teach. There must be a belief that all children can learn and everyone in the school community must be moving children to higher levels of performance.

Besides rigorous academics, students need a balance of emotional and personal supports. Schools should provide common areas of learning, knowledge and skills. Students need to know that someone cares about them at school. Students should feel safe and secure at school and the learning environment must engage them.

Successful schools are organized around student learning. Well-qualified teachers must be present to reach goals. Resources are available at these schools that ensure success. "These schools provide rigorous curricula and the instructional strategies support all students, particularly those who are low-performing. Classroom observation, continual evaluation of teaching practice and review and analysis of student work also ensure equity in the learning of all students," (NAESP, 2001, p. 4). Schools that are trying to raise student performance collect, study, and analyze data to improve instruction and promote student learning.

Schools operating as professional learning communities share effective strategies for school change and improvement. Administrators and teachers in these schools work together, which leads to a shared and collegial leadership in the school, where all grow professionally and learn to view themselves as "all playing on the same team and working toward the same goal: a better school" (Hoerr, 1996, p. 381). The literature on professional learning communities repeatedly gives attention to five attributes of such

organizational arrangements: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Rosenholtz, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Carmichael, 1982; Senge, 1990; Kruse, 1995). Hord (1997, p. 27) notes that professional learning communities are helpful in:

- reduction of isolation of teachers
- increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students' success
- powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice and that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- more satisfaction, higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- significant advances in adapting teaching to the students, accomplished more quickly than in traditional schools
- commitment to making significant and lasting changes and

- higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental systemic change (p. 27).

Engaged parents, business leaders, members of the neighborhood and other tax-paying citizens are essential to school improvement and change. All of these people have a stake in the success of the school and the students in it. When schools work with the community they can share the bad along with the good.

The rationale for this study is supported by the research literature which suggests that school and community connections play an important role in student achievement. Further, these school and community connections can effect positive changes that help schools become and sustain professional learning communities.

This study examined how two elementary schools using the same school improvement model have been able to connect with their communities. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that support the schools in maintaining effective community connections. In identifying these themes, educators, parent and community leaders, researchers, and policymakers can use the information to assist in designing their own programs.

Need for the Study

The benefits of good parent and community involvement are not always visible to this generation of caregivers, but we can't ignore the problem. We have to take this generation and lead it through the process helping students see the benefits of cooperation (Stoddard, 1992). Involving busy parents and community members actively in the singular and collective education of children is often difficult. Many parents have distanced themselves from the schools (Stoddard, 1992).

On the other hand, parents and the community want the best for their children, and are often unaware of the active role that they can play in children's learning. Principals and teachers can help parents to get involved. They can communicate to parents what their role is and how they can change their child's life through being involved at school. When parents take an active interest in their child's education it will help their child to be more successful. Besides improving student achievement, when parents see the positive side of school, they tell others. That is when the community support for educational programs and extracurricular activities change. Joyce Epstein (1995), a researcher specializing in family and community involvement notes that there are many reasons to develop school, family, and community partnerships. These partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide families with service and support, increase parents' leadership and other skills, and help teachers with their work. These partnerships help children succeed in school and later in life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students; their chances for success increase (Epstein, 1995).

This alliance: parent, family, school, and community are vital to the success of children's education. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley said,

> Research shows that all families whatever their income or education level, can take concrete steps that significantly help children learn. And yet families are often the missing link in American education ("Principal's Guide to Effective Family Involvement: Partnering for School Success, 2002 p. v).

As parent involvement is fostered, the schools must establish ties with other parts of the community. Schools, parents and community mutually benefit each other. Working relationships are born that can improve the school system as a whole. The "whole village" concept where everyone in the community works together to help a child learn, is widely accepted, but rare in practice. Business involvement has increased and more local educational foundations are providing outside financial help. "Some districts have increased family and community involvement, but this effort is still seen as a side show, not directly linked to school reform aimed at increasing student achievement and closing gaps in student performance" (Davies, 2002, p.2).

Davies (2002) cautions educators that partnership programs that are worth the effort, time, and money must contribute to increasing social and academic development of children in school. This means that family and community connections to schools should be:

1. Carefully designed with the participation of all those affected by them;
2. Based whenever possible on research evidence;
3. Faithfully executed;
4. Objectively evaluated; and
5. Sustained over time (Davies, 2002).

The process of schools making connections with families and communities in the work of the school is vitally important (O' Hair, 2000). As far back as 1984, the Gallup Poll identified the lack of parent involvement as the biggest problem facing schools. Parent involvement can be more effective than anything else at improving schools. Bill Gates (1997) states, "The vision here is of a connected learning community. The

connection between the school and the home is very valuable" [On line at htpp://www.thejournal.com/magazine on page one]. If parents and teachers begin to converse, they can improve the problems by bonding home and school turfs. Finding common ground can benefit student achievement. The most basic need then for schools to improve connection to home and community is a common information base with schools (Bausch, 2002). He describes the

> new uses of technology that can give schools, families, and students access to the same information on a regular basis. It is the emerging technologies that have the potential to enrich the linkage. As we approach the turn of the century, it is vital that the barriers and gaps between schools and homes become much more permeable. The free flow of information can be accomplished through current and future connectivity, and the emergence of integrated strategies can improve the ways that teachers and family members exchange information" (p. 2).

Bauch's research is indicative that technology can dissolve barriers and gaps connecting families and communities with schools. More research is needed that will show schools how technology can be used to improve family and community connections.

According to the research of Sanders and Harvey (2002) current school improvement measures "emphasize the need for schools, especially those serving poor and minority students, to partner with families and communities to create more challenging, responsive, and supportive learning environments" (p.2). High performing schools that serve at risk students find innovative ways to connect to parents and the community. They are professional learning communities that reach out and build bridges

to their communities. More research is needed on effective ways that schools can increase student achievement through connections to parents and the community.

Statement of the Problem

Although professional learning communities making positive connections to their communities have an impact on student achievement, the effectiveness of these professional learning communities leads to new questions. How can schools engage families and the community in improving student achievement? How can the school and its community make sure that every student succeeds at a high level? How can schools connect to community groups to develop more support for student learning? The literature has not sufficiently addressed what programs and initiatives among school staff, families, and community members are effective in creating and sustaining family and community connections with schools.

Significance of the Study

Federal and state policy makers, educator, parents, and the community consider collaborative efforts between family, school, and community important for the improvement of our nation's schools and critical to higher student achievement. This study will be important because it will help us to learn what strategies schools engage in using Practice 8: School and Community Connections of the ten practices of the IDEALS School Improvement Model (O'Hair, et al., 2000). This study will also be important because it will examine school and community connections that other schools can learn from. It will share specific community connections at the two schools that may improve student achievement. The findings will be useful to policy makers, school administrators,

teachers, parents, and families as they search to find better ways to help our children become successful scholars and productive democratic citizens.

Research Question

The IDEALS framework sets the stage for the ten research-based practices linked directly to high student achievement (O'Hair, et al., 2000). The eighth practice of this rubric will be studied.

> Practice 8: School and Community Connections of the OK-ACTS Rubric states: In order to be a professional learning community, a school must connect itself with families and communities in various ways. On one level it should involve families and communities in the work of the school, which is educating for democratic citizenship. On a second level the school should involve itself in the work of the family and community [On line at htpp://www.k20center.org].

This research will answer the question:

How can an elementary school in the process of becoming a professional learning community facilitate connections with the community?

- What technology is being used in the facilitation of school and community connections?
- What factors appear to effect student achievement in the facilitation of school and community connections?
- What leadership practices are being used by the school to facilitate school and community connections?

- What role are parents playing in the facilitation of school and community connections?
- What role are community groups playing in the facilitation of school and community connections?

Limitations of the Study

Any conclusions or implication of this study are limited by the following factors:

- Only two sites were studied
- Only those schools who were involved in Phase I and Phase II of the OK-ACTS program were involved in the study
- The data collection was limited to approximately one year

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study and need clarity for the reader:

School and Community Connections: In order to be a professional learning community, a school must connect itself with families and communities in various ways. On one level it should involve families and communities in the work of the school, which is educating for democratic citizenship. On a second level the school should involve itself in the work of the family and community (O'Hair, et al., 2000).

Community Involvement: Activities occurring between a school, a community member, or school and community organization that contribute to children's educational development.

IDEALS: A school improvement framework and acronym for Inquiry, Discourse, Equity, Authenticity, Leadership, and Service (O'Hair, et al., 2000).

Instructional Leadership: Principals as instructional leaders become servants to their vision of success for all students. They convey this vision to teachers, students, and parents through their actions. Because the interactions between teachers and students are critical, how principals influence this aspect of the educational process is important. Principals participate in the instructional process through their discussions with teachers about instructional issues, their observations of classroom instruction, and their interactions with teachers when examining student data [On line at http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues13.html].

Leadership: Rather than the traditional views of leadership defined as influencing the thoughts and actions of people towards the achievement of particular goals, directions or courses of actions (Angyris, 1976; Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985) view leadership as "acts" rather than "positions" (i.e. principal, superintendent) and that leadership belongs to everyone and should come from many different individuals-teachers, support staff, students, parents, community members, principals, superintendents (O'Hair, et al., 2000, p. 405

OK-ACTS: (Oklahoma Achievement Through Collaboration and Technology Support) is a project of the Center for Educational and Community Renewal at the University of Oklahoma. It's [On line at htpp://www.k20center.org]

OK-ACTS Phase I: A project supported through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for $1.2 million for three years with matching funds from the Oklahoma Technology Trust (OETT), Authentic Teaching Alliance

(ATA), and the University of Oklahoma to train 800 head principals and superintendents in the state of Oklahoma. [On line at htpp://www.k20center.org]

OK-ACTS Phase II: This project is supported through a grant from OETT in cooperation with the Center for Educational and Community Renewal for $5.25 million over a three year period. It funds technology equipment and professional development for Oklahoma public schools implementing practices of high achieving schools to improve student achievement. [On line at htpp://www.ou.k20center.org]

Parent Involvement: Activities occurring between a parent/caretaker and child or between a parent/ caretaker and the school which contribute to the child's educational development.

Professional Learning Communities: Schools operating as professional learning communities share effective strategies for school change and improvement. Administrators and teachers in these schools work together, which leads to a shared and collegial leadership in the school, where all grow professionally and learn to view themselves as "all playing on the same team and working toward the same goal: a better school" (Hoerr, 1996, p. 381). The literature on professional learning communities repeatedly gives attention to five attributes of such organizational arrangements: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Rosenholtz, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Carmichael, 1982; Senge, 1990; Kruse, 1995).

Student Achievement: Students learning the challenging content, concepts and skills needed to live, work, and meet intellectual and social demands. [On line at http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/SAI/messge.html on page one]. "Student achievement in the context of leadership capacity is much broader than test scores. Measures of student achievement include multiple measures of development and performance which in addition to test scores includes portfolios, exhibits, self-knowledge, and social maturity (Lambert, 2003, p.7)

Technology: The use of any recently created tool (within the last 10 years) used in the educational environment to improve student learning. This does not discredit older technologies, but place the focus on incorporation and integration of the new forms of technology [On line at www.ncrel.org]

Traditional Schools: Schools that cling to one authoritative principal, isolated teachers and staff, and student learning from a single textbook. Using the adopted textbook for content area teaching with a page by page, day by day, nonstop approach, involving sequential lecture, reading of the chapter, answering of questions, and seat work (Pierce,1989). (Also see Appendix F.)

Researcher's Perspective

This is my twenty-eighth year in the educational field. My first twenty years were spent in the classroom. During my fourteenth year in the classroom I wrote this philosophy of my teaching:

> My heart and soul go into my job because each September I become Mrs. Pierce. The name is far from famous, but my profession gives me honor and dignity...I'm a teacher. At present, I teach fifth grade Social Studies,

Language and Art. There's no place I'd rather be. Each year I stand in from of my three new classes, introduce myself, and silently pray for wisdom, creativity, and love, while the excitement of another year consumes me.

I try to keep a positive attitude and be a good role model for my students. It isn't easy. Daily, there are temptations, negative frustrations, and mistakes to be made. I realize that it is not a perfect world; there are no perfects schools, no perfect teachers, no perfects parents, and no perfect students. Above all else, I try to own up to my own limitations, learn from them, and just try to be the best I can be. I'm just me: I roll with the punches, smile, and find the positive in my peers, my students, and their parents.

I admit I have high expectations of my students. I dream big; but I do so in relationship to individuality. Children today are much more aware of the world; it takes a constant effort to keep them motivated and excited about learning. The ranges of ability in my classroom are so vast pinpointing student's needs and providing for success is time consuming. Yet, for a positive learning experience and higher self value, I feel I must accept each child as an individual, and build on the foundation that is there.

I believe that adding to each individual's foundation is best done through experience. Children do best when they are actively involved in whatever it is they are going to learn. The simple words of an ancient Chinese proverb have long hung in my classroom to remind all who enter that learning is much more than a textbook and a few workbook pages: Tell me, I forget; show me I remember; involve me; I understand.

In my class an integrated approach is used. Curriculum areas are interrelated and children's oral and written language became a positive force towards improving achievement and attitudes.

Upon entering my classroom you may see me up front or at my desk once in a while, but most often you will see small groups of children working independently and I will be meeting with students informally. Your eyes will record an abundance of trade books, newspapers, magazines, and other related reading materials. Writing paper, typewriters, pencils and pens will define a writing center. An art area with a variety of art mediums, a multitude of content area related materials including hands-on materials, collections, a computer and software are accessible. Display of students work throughout the room and down the hall will be a testimony to the inquiring, reading, writing, and creating done by my students.

In my classroom experiences will lead to triumphs and failures – that's the road to competence. When children learn that they can make mistakes and recover from them, they develop sufficient self esteem. Real life experiences, good books, expressive writing, creativity, and thought go into each unit I present. Hopefully, these units will challenge my students, expand their minds, and allow them to be a little more creative than before. A pat on the back for a job well done, a hug when they fall short, and opened door after school, a shared pizza for lunch, a giggle, a smile, a tear of sympathy, or a round of applause - - I'm there for my students. My effect will help to shape the future of each individual student in some way. That's

why I accept my role as teacher with honor and dignity; it's an important job and a humbling opportunity. Every September, I'm Mrs. Pierce, all over again. I'm excited about my new prospects. I'm lucky to be doing what I love...and that's cause for another celebrated year (Pierce, 1990).

Little changed in my teaching philosophy as I moved from first grade to fourth grade, to fifth grade departmentalized, and finally to gifted specialist during those quick twenty years. My role for the past eight years has changed; I now view teaching and learning from another angle...elementary principal. The children are still my first priority and I still struggle with trite traditional teacher roles and teaching practices. Now that I am the instructional leader of a building the same kind of challenges that led me into the classroom so many years ago keep me researching for better ways to help children achieve and encourage teachers to improve their practices.

I learned long ago that every child in the classroom has gifts and talents waiting to bloom. The leadership of great teachers and involved parents add to the culture and climate children need to bloom. The IDEALS model of school improvement has made my job as principal take new directions to help all children bloom and achieve academically. I must admit I was not a collaborative teacher; my philosophy needs updated to reflect current research and less isolation of our teachers will improve our whole school. The ten practices of shared values, authentic teaching, shared leadership, small school with a comfortable feeling, teacher collaboration, inquiry and discourse, supportive leaders, community connections, equity concerns, and external expertise have given me an opportunity to grow and improve. These ten practices for high achieving

schools are giving me and my staff opportunities for personal and professional improvement. We are honestly working together.

One area of the ten practices that has had a huge impact on our school has been a concentrated effort to involve parents and make community connections to our school. I have questions and concerns about what other schools are doing to create and sustain parent involvement and connect to the community in positive ways that help all children to succeed. I approached this case study research with open eyes and attuned ears to inform my colleagues and improve my professional practice.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter I introduced the research topic: School and Community Connections. The need for the study was defined. It also, stated the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The research question was stated. Limitations of the study and definitions of terms used in the study were listed. The researcher's perspective and an overview of the dissertation concluded the chapter.

Chapter II reviews the related literature of community connections. Chapter III details the methods involved in this case study. Chapter IV gives a view of Case Study A: Country Living and Chapter IV gives a view of Case Study B: City Life.

Chapter VI reveals findings and an analysis of all data collected at both case schools. The preliminary constructs of Professional Learning Communities, Technology, Student Achievement, Leadership Practices, Parent Involvement, and Community Groups when school and community connections using technology as a tool are implemented in the two case schools is shared. The emerging themes will be revealed revealed.

The final chapter, Chapter VII, shares reflections, conclusions and recommendations from this multiple site case study research. How this research might be used to help other schools building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development will bring closure to this study. Possible ideas to initiate further study related to this research will be shared and conclude this dissertation.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

As the "stakes for school accountability" (Serim & Hammond, 2002) have been raised professional learning communities of our nation must address the increasing numbers of educationally disadvantaged students in order to increase student achievement. Although the educational community has accepted the idea that parental and community involvement are important variables in helping all children reach academic success, new strategies to increase involvement in our schools have been limited. Parental and community involvement doesn't just happen. "Reaching parents and community members and gaining their support can be a difficult assignment for any school" (Canter, 1991). However, if the school connects to family and community recent research reveals that students will achieve more (Comer, 1996). A growing number of failing schools are using school reform measures that engage significant numbers of parents (Giles, 1998). These schools are changing their culture; the quality of relationships of educators, parents, and children; and focusing on student achievement. In these schools everyone works together toward "systemic change in the school and within the surrounding community" (Giles, p.1). Since schools cannot solve all of the societal problems they encounter as they seek to educate students for democratic citizenship and academic achievement, they move beyond the school; they draw upon the power of the community to "improve their school and aspects of life in the community that impact education" (Giles, p.1). These systemic initiatives often result in an increase in the quantity and quality of parent involvement. In this chapter, the professional

literature impacting school and community connections is examined. Specifically, the examination includes: traditional schools, student achievement, schools as professional learning communities, communities as professional learning communities, and connecting schools and communities.

Traditional Schools

We are losing our best teachers. Sarason (1996) noted that the idealistic visions of young teachers who want to make a difference in the lives of their students have not come to pass. Even dedicated idealists have burned out he concludes. Marsh (1999) describes a traditional classroom where the teacher arrives to a classroom that was built long ago, lucky to have fresh paint, enough desks, a TV, and maybe a VCR. The teacher will be in front of her class of 25-30 children talking. If her students speak to each other it will be frowned upon. When she is not with the class she is at the copy machine or filling out paperwork. She works in isolation except for lunch when she complains about her discipline problems to fellow teachers. She has few choices about books or curriculum, but she is on her own in the classroom with little reflection on her own teaching and no validation or insight from peers or superiors as to her successes or failures. She is evaluated one time a year by an administrator that constantly misspells her name. At the end of the year, she goes home with a sigh and is glad to have three months to recover (p. 186-187).

The traditional teachers in the traditional school described by Marsh are what Wenger (1998) calls dominance model schools. Someone wins and someone loses in the traditional school. "Consensus, collaboration, and cooperation are not normal operating values in these schools," (Barth, 1990). Sustaining these schools requires obedience,

duty, and consequences for mistakes. Cynicism and withdrawal are programmed into teachers who stay in the system. Teachers who try new methods are criticized by peers and parents who are comfortable with the school looking and behaving the way that it did when they were students there. The isolation dominates and teachers are frustrated because their opinions are not important; their defense mechanisms are walls built by bricks of distrust. Teachers are to get along with parents and the community, but contact is not promoted or applauded by the administration.

Marsh (1999) argues that this dissatisfaction of teachers, "Highlights the need for schools to establish a way of working that honors the experience of all participants and lets everyone feel ownership of ideas or changes intended to improve a school," (p.188). Teachers want to be professionals, but they are told what to do, how to do it, and when to get it done.

When principals are authoritative, they look for weaknesses. This causes teachers to keep their feelings to themselves. Teachers trust and talk to their colleagues much more when they feel that they are participating in decision making and are working with an authentic principal who does not manipulate their worth (Busman, 1992) and promotes their inclusion in decisions about their job that ultimately improves student achievement (Glickman, 1993; Meier, 1995; Wood, 1993).

Student Achievement

The jobs and lifestyles for which we are preparing our children require knowledge for which schools of the past are not suited. Traditional schools made children "feel powerless, they are treated like mindless sheep" (Darling Hammond, 1997; Newmann, 1996; O'Hair, McLauglin, & Reitug, 2000; in Allen, 2002). With all of the

demographic and societal changes, schools of today have to teach much more than the basics. This is far more ambitious than the farm and factory model which still persists in our traditional schools (Danielson, 2003). Despite the needs suggested by *A Nation at Risk,* twenty years ago, direction by every president and candidate for political office, student achievement has not significantly improved since 1983 (Danielson, 2003). In traditional schools, classrooms are teacher-centered while in learning communities classrooms are student-centered with students expanding their learning opportunities by making connections to rich learning environments. Expertise in learning communities flows in many directions; students are empowered to participate. Learning communities are more democratic (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000) while traditional classrooms expect the teacher to deliver the knowledge to everyone. In traditional classrooms competition wins over collaboration and individual work is more important than teamwork. To add to the dismay, curricular activities in traditional classrooms rely heavily on textbooks and worksheets while the learning communities rely on primary sources of data and hands-on materials (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

In *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement,* DuFour and Eaker (1998) state 5 assumptions to guide curriculum development:

1. Teachers should work collaboratively to design research-based curriculum that reflects the best thinking in each subject area.
2. The curriculum should help teachers, students, and parents clarify the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students should acquire as a result of their schooling.

3. The results-oriented curriculum should reduce content and enable all parties to focus on essential and significant learning.
4. The curriculum process should enable an individual teacher, a teaching team, and the school to monitor student achievement at the classroom level.
5. Curriculum and assessment process should foster commitment to continuous improvement (p.34).

Organizational effectiveness happens when practices change. Leaders become effective when they model these needs for change. "This is the real key to change and improvement in schools because of the unshakable reality of *street-level-bureaucracy*" (Marsh, 1999; Wenger, 1998). Schools are where learning happens, but they define roles, qualifications, distribute authority, and if these don't change, neither will practice. Wenger suggests:

- Learning is a participation exercise
- Learning is more important than teaching
- Engage communities in designing their practice; become a learning place
- Give communities the resources they need to be successful

Teachers are in the classroom to help students become effective, independent learners who will become democratic citizens, not to provide large bodies of knowledge that will just be memorized for a test. John Dewey (1916) symbolized that learning be applied to life. Everyone in the school needs to be lifelong learners. Everyone; teachers, administrators, and parents must all learn together to improve student achievement (Wenger, 1998). Many researchers refer to this as a democratic school when all members

of the learning community are respected and included (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Newmann, 1996; O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Retizug, 2000). Students attain mastery of academics and knowledge constructed from exchanges of ideas and experiences from everyone in the learning environments. Experiences are authentic.

Teachers who teach authentically rather than with rote memorization of facts often use innovative technology that helps teacher develop and share authentic learning experiences that make learning more interesting and engaging for students, provide new approaches to complex concepts, and learn to solve problems both in a and out of school. Researchers have found that when teachers teach authentically, their students consistently outperform those that are taught in more traditional ways (Newmann and Associates, 1996). That is when teachers focus on comprehension and connecting learning to the interest and experiences of the learner, the students do better on standardized tests. The finding suggest that students who do in-depth studies reflecting personal experiences and involvement will remember the material and apply it during standardized testing (O'Hair, McLaughlin & Ritzug, 2000).

A fifteen-hundred school research study concluded that student achievement gains in the first two years were significantly higher in schools that are professional learning communities and that the gains were distributed equitably. The achievement gap between students in lower socioeconomic status and students in higher socioeconomic status were narrowed in professional learning communities (Lee & Smith, 1994). Although research supports the efficacy of these schools, such schools are rare (Newmann & Associates, 1996; Louis and Kruse, 1995). If schools move from where they are, to where they need to be, innovative uses of technology will begin to flourish.

Technology has swept the nation, but the schools are the exception (Smith, 1999). The lack of technology is linked to change; principals and other school leaders must lead the way for systemic whole school change processes.

There is much evidence for principals to ponder indicating student success in schools that function as democratic schools. These professional learning communities contribute to higher student achievement than in traditional schools. In studies of over 1500 schools, researchers found that students learn more in professional learning communities (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk; 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; and Newmann & Associates, 1996).

This high student achievement research will help teachers change and create more authentic learning experiences. In a professional learning community teachers teach every way possible to improve student achievement.

Schools as Professional Learning Communities

The growing body of literature as provided by those and others in the field about successful professional learning communities is conclusive:

- the principal must relinquish power to share decision making in the school
- a commitment to a shared vision by students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members is well understood
- the school staff works together to address improved student achievement
- teachers work collectively and individually to improve their teaching and learning
- physical conditions and capabilities of staff are supported (SEDL, 2003).

Research supports the principal's role, shared leadership, collective gifts and talents, shared values and visions, necessary support, and shared pedagogy as dominant in professional learning communities. An interdependence of these components is revealed in the related literature.

Principal's Role

The literature on educational leadership clearly points to the principal as the factor determining whether or not traditional schools can become professional learning communities. The leader's sanction and constant nurturing of the entire staff will develop a community of learners. A shift is needed from the principal's position viewed as authority and power to being viewed as lifelong learner (Carmichael, 1982). Kleine-Kracht (1993) stated that administrators and teachers must learn and work together to improve schools.

Principals who want to help change a school from the traditional role to a professional learning community need to move slowly and understand all levels of the organization. Michael Fullan (2001) points to five core capacities that principals or school leaders must have to lead in a climate of change: moral purpose, understanding the change process, building relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. The principal must learn along with others at all levels of the organization.

Shared Leadership

The traditional idea that teachers teach, students learn, the principal manages the office, parents stay home, and the community minds their own business, has to be replaced with collaboration. Hoerr (1996) stated that a shared vision, "all playing on the same team and working toward the same goal: a better school" (p. 381) was

professionally correct and a much needed improvement for traditional schools. Prestine (1993) defined three factors that would help principals to be change agents for school improvement: the ability to share authority, the ability to facilitate the work of staff, and the ability to participate without dominating. Senge (1995) pointed to the principal's job which is to create an environment of continuous learning by all staff. His research took a further step by stating it was the duty of the superintendent to find and keep principals who could lead by this example.

Sergiovanni (1994, p. xix) suggests:

> Leaders plant the seeds of community, nurture fledgling communities, and protect the community once it emerges. They lead by following. They lead by serving. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership.

Leaders of professional learning communities are proactive. "They turn action and visions into reality. Not only do they act, they are unwilling to tolerate inaction...engagement and experience are the most effective teachers" (DuFour, 2003). In the late eighties, Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers who have a high efficacy were more likely to change, grow, and stay in the teaching profession. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) supported his findings saying that teachers that seek continuous inquiry, collaborate, and try to find answers together, share the wisdom from that experience. Shared decision making is a major factor in curriculum reform and helping teachers continue to work and plan together all essential components of a professional learning community (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Collective Gifts and Talents

As Senge (1990) shared his book *The Fifth Discipline*, the term learning communities evolved. A learning community is demonstrated by a group of teachers, students, parents, and the principal learning together. As they inquire together they create a feeling of community. This breaks down walls and "promotes understanding and appreciation for the work of others" (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 154). As principals and teachers ask questions and answer them together they bond; they become a community of learners. By bringing their collective gifts and talents together they develop shared values and vision. Fullan (1991) recommended that teacher workplaces be redesigned so that they could be more innovative; places where improvement was daily. Places where shared values and vision were born.

Shared Values and Vision

A vision is more than a sentence agreed upon by a few people; it is a mental image of what is important to an individual and a collective group of people. It should be the beginning of the decision making of what teaching and learning in the school will become (Isaacson & Bamburg, 1992, Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Research tells us that schools can exist that are personal and collaborative. Respect for teacher and student knowledge, responding to the continuous teacher and student learning needs, and sharing leadership make a school more personal. When everyone works together in the daily operation of the school self interests are replaced by collective needs being addressed. Shared values begin to guide instruction, curriculum aligns, and everyone moves toward what is going to improve student achievement, not what is good for me (Glickman, 1993). This causes schools to connect to the community

and world beyond the school (Glickman, 1993; Meier, 1995; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Wood, 1992). The stakeholders are more interested in social conditions of their school (Apple & Beane, 1995). Bureaucracy is replaced by community building (Furman, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1994) and democracy (Dewey, 1916; Goodman, 1992). Because there is a level of comfort in these schools that is accepting of growth and change, these schools become facilitators of technology literacy and integration. They want to reach beyond the school, make learning meaningful for their students, and make community connections.

In a professional learning community personal ambition and common good are on the same team. Each member of the group is responsible for their own actions, but caring and communication between members of the community build bonds of trust. Everyone is concerned about student achievement and the emphasis is on quality and ways to improve the quality of life, work, and learning (Brandt, 1995; Fawcett, 1996; Martel, 1993).

Necessary Support

For learning communities to be successful they have physical needs and capabilities. Physical factors that support learning communities include: time to talk, small size of the school and physical closeness of the staff, interdependent roles, structures that reduce isolation, communication structures, empowered teachers, continuous professional development (Boyd, 1992, Louis & Kruse, 1995). The research of Watts & Castle (1993), Donahoe (1993), and Raywid (1993) suggest that time together is of essence for school improvement. The capabilities of the group are dependent on a willingness to accept feedback and work toward improvement. Louis and Kruse (1995)

and Boyd (1992) cite approval from the school and district level, effective teaching and learning, and support from administrators as key to maintaining professional learning communities. Positive attitudes of teachers, their abilities to grow and change, their willingness to seek new information to improve, shared vision and purpose, readiness for involved decision making, collegiality among the staff, caring student-teacher-principal relationships are all capabilities that build support (Boyd, 1992). Boyd cites two additional factors that increase support: highly supportive community attitudes, and parents and community members that become allies of the school.

Shared Pedagogy

In a professional learning community, teachers share personal classroom experiences. The art and science of teaching becomes "peers helping peers" (Louis and Kruse, 1995). Teachers visit each others classrooms to observe and discuss learning and ways to improve student achievement. Mutual respect and trust are constant; warm relationships allow teachers to encourage, tolerate, debate, discuss, and disagree. They are comfortable sharing successes and failures. They praise and recognize one another's triumphs, and offer empathy and support for each other's troubles" (Wignall 1992, p.18).

Summary

Changing from traditional schools to schools that are professional learning communities will take time and effort. The role of the authoritative principal will be replaced by shared leadership, collective gifts and talents, shared values and visions, and shared pedagogy which will help everyone to support each other. As warm relationships develop parents and families, community, and schools will change.

Communities as Professional Learning Communities

In professional learning communities learning is a collective endeavor. Parents and families, the community, and schools have an important role.

Parents and Families Role

Children move between two influential turfs that build positive attitudes and readiness for learning: the home and the school. Family involvement research clearly demonstrates that children thrive academically when the family and the school work together. Schools and families that share ideas, goals, information, and teaching give their children stability, consistency and the courage they need to achieve (Banks, 2003).

"Every family functions as a learning environment, regardless of its income level, structure, or ethnic and cultural background" states the Family Involvement in Children's Education Successful Local Approaches Idea Book published by the U.S. Department of Education (1997). This guide based on thirty years of research (Eagle, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; US Department of Education, 1994, & Ziegler, 1997), confirms that "when families are involved in their children's education, children make higher grades, score better on tests, have increased attendance, do their homework, demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school, and attend college more often than families who are less involved" (The Idea Book, 1997, p. 2). Although the Idea Book does not promote parent involvement as the only factor for student achievement gains, of the twenty programs researched for the booklet, strong parent involvement was shared by each school that succeeded in raising student achievement.

In a study about homework and parent practices that affect student achievement four factors evolved concerning parent involvement:

- Parent knowledge about homework assignments
- Parent perception of children's homework
- Child knowledge of how to use a dictionary
- Parent expectation for children's education (Clark, 1993).

These four variables showed a 47% variation between low and high-achieving students in his study. In a second study, Clark showed the impacts of out-of- school activities that were supported by the families of African-American students and other students as measured by standardized test scores to be:

- Spending 8-15 hours a week in out-of-school learning activities
- Parent supervision in these activities were adults with high expectations for achievement
- Knowing how to study, plan, and complete projects using a library and other reference materials (Clark, 2000).

In *Building Communities of Learners: A Collaboration Among Teachers, Students, Families, and Community*, Sudia Paloma McCaleb (1997) reflects from her teaching experiences that:

> most parents have a strong desire to become involved in their children's education, although they often feel ill equipped to give the needed support at home. Other times they feel ignored or criticized by the school when they try to advocate for their child (McCaleb, 1997, p. xi).

Caleb further notes the rejection experienced by parents who are not members of our society's dominant culture, including immigrants, limited English skills, and those who have very little formal schooling in their country of origin and other minorities.

Even though some of these minorities may have lived in the United States since birth, they are, "products of a historically racist system of education that never offered them access to quality education" (Caleb, 1997, p. xi). These parents, like most other parents have high aspiration for their children's achievement as well as a hope of promoting the family's culture.

Parent involvement is important because it acknowledges parents as an important part of children's lives, shows respect for diversity within the community, provides the possibility for collaborative problem-solving, and increases student achievement (Banks, 1998). Close communication between school staff and families benefits students, families, and school of every socio-economic family status, (Henderson & Berla, 1997). Further, schools can listen to families and try to increase student achievement by developing the curriculum so that it focuses on student reality and allows for true home and school and community partnership (Caleb, 1997). Specific kinds of family involvement, such as stimulating literacy and learning activities at home, communicating high expectations for student achievement, and helping with homework, result in completed homework assignments, better attendance, improved attitudes, and higher student achievement (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Hess and Holloway (1984) found that student achievement is determined by what degree parents model learning by reading or using math in the home. Eagle (1989) found that students with greater achievement came from homes that emphasized family reading.

Maccoby and Martin (1984) found that parents who are observed reading, improving themselves, and taking an interest in their children's education have a greater

impact on their learning than those who do not model these actions. Children respond to what their parents do, not what their parents tell them to do. "When parents help their children at home, students perform better in school" (Banks, 1998, p.404). Booth & Dunn (1996) came to the same conclusion.

When parent and teachers work together to reinforce learning and provide an environment consistent with learning expectations and standards families become more knowledgeable about the school, its policies, and the staff. When parents, teachers, and students spend time together, parents place a higher importance on achievement and develop a better relationship with their children (Banks, 2003).

Parent modeling of the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work by asking questions and talking about achievement resulting from hard work has had a positive impact on student academic performance and completion of tasks (Clark, 1993, Rumberger, 1995).

In an examination of over 50 studies on parent involvement by the Southwest Educational Development Lab (SEDL) there is

> a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students including academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages. Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior, (SEDL, 2002, p. 24).

The benefits for students included:

- Higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales;
- Enrollment in more challenging academic programs;
- More classes passed and credits earned;
- Better attendance;
- Improved behavior at home and at school;
- Better social skills and adaptation to school.

SEDL cautioned that it takes more than parent involvement to produce increases in student achievement. High standards and expectations by the school and community, effective leadership, and staff development for teachers are just as important. As the research indicates parent involvement is just one of many tools to help with student achievement, (SEDL, 2002). Community involvement also plays a role in the student achievement in professional learning communities.

The Community's Role

"Children's sense of self and achievement is tied to that of their parent, and the quality of parents' lives is affected by the resources and environment of the community in which the family lives" (Weissbourd, 1994). This interdependence can be quite different.

Just as parent involvement is diverse in its meaning, so is community involvement. Multiple definitions of parent and community involvement often make it difficult to fully understand. Researchers at the Center for the Study of Alternative Futures (CASF) report that there are definite distinctions between parent involvement and community involvement and volunteerism. Efforts that are directed toward one may be mistaken for the other causing frustration and lack of results. Table 1 comparison of Community and Parent Involvement draws the distinction (Cornick & King, 1996).

Table 1

Comparison of Community and Parent Involvement

Community Involvement	Parent Involvement
Storytelling to your child's class	Storytelling to your own child at home
School-to-work programs that lead to college, technical training, or good jobs after high school	Supporting the child's participation
Promoting responsible parenthood within the community	Working with the teacher to learn and apply the particulars of being a good parent to the child
Seeking to guarantee the availability of quality child care options for good health and safety	Securing quality child care and looking after the health and safety of your own child
Using grandparents, retired teachers, and seniors for tutoring/working with small groups	Establish daily routines--a time for chores, eating meals together, and firm bedtimes, homework,
Serving on school curriculum committees	Participating with the teacher in planning your child's curriculum
Keeping schools open until 6PM to allow parents to work without worry, knowing their children are safe	Ensuring participation of the child; upholding parent end of the bargain by prompt pickup, etc.
Chaperoning field trips	Taking your own child to the library, museums, plays, concerts, and other cultural events
Serving on school committees	Conferencing with your child's teacher
Working as classroom aides and office support staff	Supervising your own child's homework
Working to reduce truancy	Enforcing your own child's attendance
Working to improve school health & safety	Ensuring the health and safety of your own child
Mentoring and after-school programs that help with schoolwork, job skill, development, career planning, parenting, and providing safe havens from violence and drugs	Ensuring the participation of your child as appropriate
Supporting the school booster club	Supporting your own child's participation
Proctoring examinations	Helping your child prepare for a test
Working with the PTO/PTA	Discuss child's progress with the teacher on a regular basis; check homework every night; read to your preschoolers; etc.

Community Involvement	Parent Involvement
Employment leave policies and flex-time arrangement to encourage parent participation	Taking advantage of available leave and flex-time arrangements to spend quality time with the child
Adult literacy programs by libraries, employers, community colleges, churches , and volunteer organizations	Taking advantage of these literacy programs
Efforts by media, religious groups, student groups, county organizations, parents, law enforcement, and others to stop violence, alcohol, and drug abuse in schools and community	Ensuring that your own child is not involved in these activities
Making available basic health and human services--such as immunizations, eyeglasses and hearing tests-- for low-income families in our community	Ensuring that your own child take advantage of these services
Collecting information on, cooperating with and encouraging coordination and communication among housing, employment, welfare, and other services	Ensuring that your own child take advantage of these services
Involving individuals, organizations, or groups in the community for particular kinds of efforts (including governance, curriculum development, administrative services, apprenticeship programs)	Ensuring that your own child take advantage of these services
Linking the classroom to the home by operating a telephone homework hotline that students or parents can dial in the evening to get help with assignments	Taking advantage of these services

(Cornick & King, 1996)

School's Role

Next to the family, the school has the most significant impact on children's growth and development. In school, children acquire many of the psychosocial and cognitive skills that they need to realize and actualize their full potential to become productive and successful adults. A nurturing, challenging, and supportive school environment provides the nourishment that children need to be healthy, whole, and successful. Therefore, effective schooling cannot be a

unidimensional enterprise. It must be grounded in a holistic educational philosophy and must incorporate sensitive practices of authentic teaching and learning that are implemented according to sound principles of collaboration and empowerment and that are under girded by a respect for the dignity of all children (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996).

The National Education Goals Panel defined the need for more parent and family involvement as one of its eight goals to be achieved by 2000, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children," (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). This legislation made school practices to involve parents a voluntary goal for all schools in the nation (Chandler &Vaden-Kiernan, 1996). Although family involvement reached new levels of acceptance many schools did not implement programs designed to increase family and community connections to the school. As a result, policy makers pushed for more commitment from the schools to promote parent and community involvement as they pushed for schools to improve.

Connecting Schools and Communities

It is important to view school and community connections from a historical perspective. The research literature on diversity, accountability, student achievement, frameworks for connecting schools and communities, the principal's role, technology, and overcoming cynicism give an even clearer picture of possible school and community connections.

Historical Perspective

At the beginning of the twentieth century when immigrants poured into our nation, schools were used to "compensate for the perceived failures of parents and communities" (Banks, 1997). Since the schools were to solve the problems, parents were not welcomed in schools because "the way that they spoke, behaved, and thought was inferior" (Banks, 2003). Banks noted that Waller (1965) concluded in his study that parents and teachers of the 1930's distrusted and were even hostile to each other.

Over the years, the responsibility for learning for each new generation was transferred from home and community to the schools. Education became a job for trained professionals (Banks, 2003). Schools were steadily given more responsibility that had traditionally been the job of the home and community. Schools operated and assumed *in loco parentis.* Educators became teacher and substitute parent as they began their factory like process to turn out well-educated children. "They would learn the dominant social, political, and cultural norms of mainstream-and at the time, largely Anglo-America," (Lugg, 2003, p.1). Although no sign hung on the school door, the message to parents and the community was "keep out." Reformers of the early twentieth century viewed the public schools through themes of "child saving" (Lugg, 2003. p.2). Until the 1980's, efforts involving community outreach and communication to parents flowed one way. Teachers knew best and expected parents to comply. All information flowed from the school to the family.

During the 1980s and 1990s, researchers, educators, social service providers, and policy makers began to see the number of children in crisis. The social and economic turbulence of the times began to adversely affect students and their academic

achievement. As public schools were scrutinized, community leaders, policy makers, socials service providers, and researchers took an intensive look at improving public schools in order to foster better academic outcomes thus stabilize communities and revitalize the national economy (Crowson and Boyd, 1993). States and federal governments began to explore "systemic school reform" and coordinate policies that improve children's lives and their chances for academic success (Smith and O'Day, 1991). For public schools this meant involving various branches of our government in efforts to better link schools to the communities they serve. Several researchers suggest that increased leadership capacity that results form parents and community involvement in school reform efforts results in improved schools, and stronger social networks and capacity in the community (Lewis & Henderson, 1998; Shirley, 1997).

Diversity

Involving parents as the 2003-2004 school year begins, requires teachers to work with a diverse group of caretakers, from single parents, parents with special needs, low-income parents, parents with disabilities, and parents who do not speak English. Teachers must be sensitive to the changing ethnic and racial make-up of their students and parents. Besides the five major ethnic groups, (Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and African American) the ethnicity of U.S. schools includes an increase of Arab, Jewish, Eastern European, and African students (Pollard & O'Hare. 1999). In 1998, 5 % of Black Americans were foreign-born. Most came from the Caribbean (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999). For these parents ethnic identity is often more important than racial identity, so rather than say they are Black or White, they identify themselves as Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans. This creates a conflict for the traditional way that the United States

identifies race. Thus a Cuban American with brown skin may consider himself White (Banks, 2003).

In 1997 interracial marriage had increased from 651,000 couples in 1980 to 2.26 million couples (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1998). The interracial marriage increase has increased interracial children. Diversity in parents and community can be an asset to a school, but it can be a source of potential conflicts and tensions because they resist becoming involved (Walker, 1996). Often, they feel intimidated by educators and teachers (Banks, 2003).

All racial, ethnic, and income groups have chronically unemployed parents, parents with long-term illnesses, abusive parents, and parents with substance abuse problems, and other special needs. Although these parents have serious problems that the school cannot solve, teachers must work diligently with their children. Understanding and compassion for difficulties that children go through at home and in their community can help teachers create an environment that children thrive in while at school (Swadener & Niles, 1991). Teachers can appropriately intervene.

Single-parent families are on the rise in the U.S. according the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998, 64 percent of African American households with children under eighteen were headed by a single parent. Twenty-six percent of White and 36 percent of Hispanic families with children under eighteen were headed by a single parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). These families share the same hopes and joys as two-parent families, but these parents tend to have a lower attendance rate at school events and are seen by teachers as not supporting their children's education (Banks, 2003). Banks suggest that teachers:

- Provide flexible times for conferences such as early mornings, evenings, and weekends,
- Provide baby-sitting service when activities are held at school,
- Work out procedures for communication with noncustodial parents, and
- Use the parent's correct surname if student have different names than their parents (p. 409).

In 1995, 21 percent of the children in the United States lived in poverty (Population Reference Bureau, 1998).

> More than 25 percent of all children under the age of six (the most important years developmentally) live in poverty. The United States ranks eighteenth out of twenty industrialized countries of the world for childhood poverty, and nine times more apt to live in poverty in the United States than in countries such as Britain, France, Italy, Australia, and Finland (Children's Defense Fund, 1996).

This statistical information causes many concerns for the classroom teacher, but their low-income parents are often the strongest supporters of education. They see education as a means to a better life for their children (Banks, 2003). Banks encourages schools to "support low-income families by establishing community service programs" and that the values and attitudes of low-income parents in helping their children develop a strong desire to learn is a very important support to the school and teacher (p. 409).

Emerging Issues in School, Family, and Community Connections Annual Synthesis, (2001) states, "Attitudes and beliefs held by educators that facilitate

connection with family and community" (p. 50) must be caring, show mutual respect, and partner with marginalized parents with compassion.

> Researchers suggest that individual educators need both a supportive belief system about family and community and a repertoire of tools and strategies for how to make connections. For instance, educators can benefit from deconstruction of some of the myths about family and community involvement--that there is a "traditional" American family that is the "right" type of family, that family involvement is only critical to those students at-risk, or that poor and minority parents are not involved in their children's education, (p. 50 as cited in Lopez, 2001; Setisinger, 1996).

Accountability

"Just as parents want to help their children succeed but frequently don't know how, schools are often at a loss about how to provide meaningful opportunities for parent engagement" (Serim & Hammond, 2003, p. 2). The ways to have parents and the community involved are numerous as well as contradictory. Site-based management, which involves parents in decisions for their own children's school, may be impossible to maintain with the push for accountability and the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Schools have been issued a tremendous challenge to increase student achievement with the federal mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Centralized decision making promises to allow administrators to control the budget and maintain district wide accountability mandated by NCLB (Serim & Hamond, 2003).

The NCLB mandates family involvement, requiring Title I schools to make sure those school/family/community connections are happening, they are required to:

- Develop a written parent involvement policy created and approved with parents
- Notify parents and the community about NCLB
- Use 1 % of Title I funds for family involvement
- Describe and explain the school's curriculum, standards, and assessments
- Develop a parent-school compact, or agreement, about how families and the school will collaborate to ensure student progress
- Give parents detailed information on student progress at the school.

These demands from the Bush administration call for higher standards to be applied to all students, with annual testing in reading and mathematics to document results. "Sixty-seven percent of the Americans sampled in the 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2002) favor the use of annual testing to track student progress, and 68% support the use of a nationally standardized test," (Chadwick, 2004). This will be tough since most schools have experienced diminished parental and community involvement in recent years. Work by Robert Putnam (2002) and others has documented the fact that Americans are less engaged with their public schools than they were 50 years ago. This is due to a number of reasons that include "urban sprawl, pressures of time and money, the move to electronic entertainment, and post-World War II generations who lack the civic-mindedness of their elders" (Chadwick, 2004, p.viii).

Student Achievement

A New Wave of Evidence, authored by Henderson & Mapp (2002) found that programs that build trusting relationships among the school staff, families, and

community members are more effective in sustaining them if they support student achievement. Their research concluded on the basis of other researchers that:

- Successful community connections invite involvement, are welcoming and meet specific needs of parents and the community (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Sanders & Harvey, 2000; and Pena, 2000).
- Parent involvement that includes diverse families and their strengths are easier to sustain (Scribner, Young & Pedroza, 1999; Chrispeels & Rivero (2000), Lopez, 2001).
- When power is shared- the responsibility of children's educations is collaborative between parents, school staff, and the community (Want, Oates & Weishew, 1997; Smrekar et al, 2000; Moore 1998).
- Community leadership in low-performing schools are growing and leading to promising results in low-income urban areas and in the rural south (Mediratta, Fruchter & Lewis, 1997; Jacobs & Hirota, 2002; Wilson & Corbett, 2000).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) confirm that the involvement of family and community members has a significant impact on student achievement. "More involved parents and community members mean more adults working together to educate children both within and outside the classroom. An engaged public means more people working together to find the best approaches to meet the need for adequate funding for schools and accountability" (Chadwick, 2004, p. ix).

Frameworks for Connecting Schools and Communities

Dr. Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University introduced a framework that allows educators to understand several types of possible parent and community

involvement. Schools that encourage these six types of parent and community involvement stand a better chance of success (Epstein, 1996). They include:

1. Communicating: inform families and communities about school programs and student progress through effective communications. Communications with stakeholders will be frequent, clear and two-way.
2. Parenting: Offer classes in parenting and child-rearing skills, understand child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist school personnel and communities in understanding families and different types of parent involvement.
3. Student learning: Involve families/communities in learning activities for children, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
4. Volunteering: Create a sustainable process for recruitment, training, scheduling work of parent/guardians as volunteers in the school or community which supports students and school programs.
5. School Decision making and Advocacy: Include families/community members as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTO, school councils, committees, etc.
6. Collaborating with the community: Coordinate resources and services for the school, students, and family businesses, agencies, and other groups (Epstein, 1995).

Sanders & Harvey (2000) found that three factors contribute to successful community partnerships:

- The school's commitment to learning

- The principal's support and vision
- The willingness for two-way communication with potential partners about involvement in resources.

Wadsworth (1997) would argue that, collaborating with the community or engaging the public is,

> much more than informing the public or persuading them to believe as the experts do...public engagement presupposes a much more collaborative process in which individual and groups think through issues together in a struggle to arrive at solutions they can all live with, (Wadsworth in Chadwick, 2004, p. 7).

In *Reasons for Home, Voices for Change*, the Annenberg research team (Chadwick, 2004) describes communication or the persuasion referred to by Wadsworth much differently than they describe engagement or collaboration. Table 2. shows the differences between communication and community engagement.

Table 2

Differences Between Communication and Engagement

COMMUNICATION	ENGAGEMENT
communicate to	deliberate with
public hearing	community conversation
talk to , tell	talk with, share
information out	information around
seeking to establish/protect turf	seeking and finding common ground
authority	responsibility
influencing the like-minded	understanding those not like-minded
top down	bottom up
establishing a hierarchy for decision making	building a network of decision-making stakeholders
goals/ strategic plan	values/ vision
products	process
public relations	public engagement

(Chadwick, 2004, p. 8)

Collaboration and connecting are much more than communicating. Being involved or engaged will help all players in the community find common ground and solve common problems.

Another framework of school reform at the K20 Center of Educational and Community Renewal at the University of Oklahoma has involved over 800 principals and superintendents. The K20 Center framework is based around the IDEALS framework (O' Hair, et al, 2000). This framework sets the stage for the ten research-based practices

linked directly to high student achievement. IDEALS is an acronym for Inquiry, Discourse, Equity, Authenticity, Leadership, and Service.

I. Inquiry is the critical study of our practice by gathering and considering data, new knowledge and other's perspectives. The primary purpose of inquiry is the improvement of our individual practice and our school's practice.

D. Discourse refers to conversations, discussions and debates focused on teaching and learning issues. Discourse nurtures professional growth, builds relationships, results in more informed practice and improves student achievement.

E. Equity refers to seeking fair and just practices both within and outside the school.

A. Authenticity (Authentic Achievement) refers to learning that is genuine and connected rather than something that is fake and fragmented. Teachers who practice authenticity help students connect learning to life.

L. Leadership (Shared Leadership) in schools is the development of shared understanding that lead to a common focus and improve the school experience for all members of the school community.

S. Service refers to the belief that making a difference in the lives of children and families requires serving the needs of the community as well as the school. (O 'Hair, et. al., 2000).

These IDEALS for Student Achievement are based on a rubric of ten practices for high achieving schools. See Appendix B for the practices. The focus for this study is Practice 8: Connection to Home and Community.

Principal's Role

Principals are the chief executive officer of the school (CEO). As the CEO, they must be willing to engage the collaborative process of reform to succeed. "They must be educational leaders and entrepreneurs," (Cortes, 1994, p. 13). As an entrepreneur they must create an environment where teachers and parents feel safe enough to take risks, to fail, and to improve their school without blaming each other for the problems.

An important part of the principal's sustaining successful collaborative reform is to increase parents' and teachers' awareness and understanding of educational outcomes such as achievement scores, attendance, and dropout rates in every way possible (Giles, 1998). Again, the research clearly states that effective parent involvement can be more effective than any other strategy for improving the school.

Principals must know the recent research and use it. A U.S. Department of Education research report (National Association of State Coordinators of Compensatory Education, 1996) noted that high-performing schools serving economically disadvantaged children distinguish themselves by finding innovative ways to connect with parents and private-sector partners, (In Sanders &Harvey, 2002). The report urged schools to reach out to the community to strengthen their abilities at school. Toffler and Toffler (1995) argued that school-family-community connections add a touch of caring to today's traditional schools with their trite assembly line approaches. Sanders and Harvey (2002) in their case study on principal leadership in school-community collaboration cite "changing family demographics, demands of the professional workplace, and growing diversity among student populations as some of the reason that school and families alone

cannot ensure that all children are provided the experiences and support needed to succeed in the larger society" (p.1347).

Numerous schools are partnering with their students' families and communities to support school improvement initiatives and increase student achievement. A large number of studies on parent involvement and student achievement show that a student's achievement in school is not based on income or social status, but on the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning
- Expresses high expectation for their children's achievement and future careers
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

When schools, families, and communities work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more (National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, January, 2003, p.1).

SEDL's research effort, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* also found that students with involved parents despite their incomes or backgrounds were more likely to succeed in school, attend classes regularly, earn higher grades, pass their classes, and graduate and go on to postsecondary education (SEDL, 2002).

Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for students and schools to succeed. "Schools and communities are inextricably intertwined, and the principal is the linchpin, in creating a learning community that

integrates the work and expectations of the students, teachers, parents, citizens, community and business leaders and policymakers" (NAESP, 2001, p. 67).

Technology

With access to the information superhighway, schools now have opportunities to improve communication between parents, schools, and other members of the community through e-mail, bulletin boards, the Internet, and more. These new technological strategies addressing parent and community involvement allow for "innovation, adaptation, revision, and invention" (Drake, 2000).

The Technology Standards for School Administrators are role-specific in their technology leadership tasks:

- Leadership and Vision- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology typically participate in the process through which stakeholders formulate a shared vision that clearly defines expectations for technology use. They develop a collaborative, technology rich school improvement plan, grounded in research and aligned with the district strategic plan. They promote highly effective practices in technology integration among faculty and other staff.
- Learning and Teaching- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology assist teachers in using technology to access, analyze, and interpret student performance data, and in using results to appropriately design, assess, and modify student instruction. They collaboratively design, implement, support, and participate in professional development

for all instructional staff that institutionalizes effective integration of technology for improved student learning.

- Productivity and Professional Practice- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology use current technology-based management systems to access and maintain personnel and student records. They use a variety of media and formats, including telecommunications and the school Web site, to communicate, interact, and collaborate with peers, experts, and other education stakeholders.
- Support, Management, and Operations- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology provide campus-wide staff development for sharing work and resources across commonly used formats and platforms. They allocate funds and other resources to advance implementation of the technology plan. They advocate for adequate, timely, and high-quality technology support services.
- Assessment and Evaluation- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology promote and model the use of technology to access, analyze, and interpret campus data to focus efforts for improving student learning and productivity. They implement evaluation procedures for teachers that assess individual growth toward established technology standards and guide professional development planning. They include effectiveness of technology using the learning and teaching process as one criterion in assessing performance of instructional staff.

- Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues- Principals who effectively lead integration of technology secure and allocate technology resources to enable teachers to better meet the needs of all learners on campus. They adhere to and enforce among staff and students the district's acceptable use policy and other policies and procedures related to security, copyright, and technology use. They participate in the development of facility plans that support and focus on health and environmentally safe practices related to the use of technology (Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators, 2001).

Schools seeking to make the most effective use of technology need to look outside the school as well as inside the school for learning opportunities. "Successful organizations have many antennae to tap into and to contribute to the demands of change which are constantly churning in the environment (Fullan, 1993). Moving away from the school and inviting the community into the school where we find ways to contribute as well as benefit from community connections. Both community and school benefit; it is a win/win solution. The community is recognizing that a motivated, high-performing student population is the goal. Technology offers an excellent way to accomplish that goal while making learning relevant and exciting.

Seattle Public Schools is using technology to promote learning for all in their community. [On line at http://www.seatttleschools.org/area/ocl/comtech.xml] reports that the Seattle schools are not limiting learning to hours when teachers can teach. Help is available for students to meet standards as school doors are open during evenings and vacations. Families and neighbors can use computers and other learning tools to be

successful. Television, phones, and now computers and the Internet have changed the way we live, work, learn, participate, and play. Seventy-six percent of Seattleites have access to a computer while seventy-two percent can access the Internet. Forty-six percent have a wireless phone. Three out of five subscribe to cable TV. Ensuring technology access to all children is one way to help every child succeed in Seattle Public Schools. The Seattle schools are working with the community to create technology related projects that are:

- Focused on the district's mission of academic achievement to every child in every school
- Mutually beneficial
- Sustainable both in terms of ongoing community interest and ongoing resources to meet the demand.

Open lab times in schools and other businesses in Seattle are helping students and adults to work independently with computers, scanners, projectors, digital video and still cameras, along with a variety of software. Teachers, students, and families are finding top web sites to help every child meet specific academic standards.

According to the National Education Association's web site (www.nea.org/technolgy):

> There is widespread agreement among parents and educators that technology must be an integral part of the educational experience in order for today's students to fully succeed in the 21st century. With this broad support and understanding, progress has been made in recent years, yet efforts to bring the full power of technology to America's classrooms are just scratching the surface.

Sanders (2001) noted across the United States schools are connecting students' families and communities to help schools improve and increase student achievement. The data from 400 schools identified ten major links (a) businesses/corporations; (B) universities and other schools; (c) government and military agencies; (d) health care organizations; (e) churches; (f) volunteer organizations; (g) senior citizen organizations; (h) cultural and recreational facilities; (i) other community based organizations; and (j) individuals in the community. Obstacles were noted, but Sanders reported that many overcame the obstacles and maintained successful community partnerships.

Overcoming Cynicism

The demand for learning that is relevant and useful in a rapidly changing society comes from all corners. Employers charge that today's graduates are not ready to enter the workplace. Parents are upset, but they don't know what to do. Integrating technology allows the entire community time to rethink how parents, schools, and the community can work together for student success. Research shows that "a robust, highly interactive network of parents, community members, peers, and educators stimulates a child's learning and development. However, changes in social structures and increased economic pressures have reduced the time and energy some families can devote to school involvement" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Hopelessness and cynicism are pervasive in our society (Loeb, 1999), but technology integration, professional learning communities, effective leadership, and parent and community connections are contributions that can make a difference in our schools. They give a vision for a brighter future as we work together to help all children succeed (Chadwick, 2004).

The Public Education Network web site would argue that we must lessen the burdens of our social structures and economic woes to help our schools. The network clearly states,

> Freedom and opportunity are hallmarks of democracy, and public schools embody these democratic ideals. From the one-room schoolhouses of yesterday to today's wired classrooms, public education has always been about American values. There can be no government for the people and by the people without well-educated citizens...Now more than ever, Americans are affirming their belief in public education. People from all walks of life are getting involved in many ways...
>
> [On line at http://www.publiceducation.org/public.asp]

A school connecting to families and the community is about collaborating. Himmelman (1992) defines collaborating as "exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources, and enhancing the capacity of another for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose" (pp.1-2). For parents it might mean getting more involved in your child's day-to-day education. For businesses and community members it may mean more effective partnerships with our schools. For others it may mean volunteering, funding needed initiatives, or supporting new policies. Himmelman (1994) described these strategies for working together, this collaboration as complexity and commitment. Eventually as "commitment and conviction deepen, citizens will be in a position to advocate at the local, state, and federal levels for changes needed to ensure that each child has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 111).

Summary

The interplay of research involving parent, family, school, and community connections, collaborative efforts to sustain these connections, and emerging technologies to enrich the linkages are inseparable. The integration of these research strategies can be the basis for new and improved ways that home and schools connect to increase student achievement. When all stakeholders are involved in the education of our children we all benefit. Our schools are our responsibility and the education of children is our future.

Chapter Two has reviewed the related literature surrounding school and community connections. The literature reviewed school and community connections from a historical perspective. Next, the research literature on accountability and student achievement implicated change is needed in traditional schools. Frameworks for connecting schools and communities and the principal's role in connections were reviewed. Emerging technologies that are used as tools to family and community connections and overcoming cynicism were reviewed as the chapter concluded.

Chapter Three will describe the methodology of this research on school and community connections. A case study approach is described and the methods of research involving two case schools that are connecting to their communities in different ways will be shared. Case School A: Country Living and Case School B: City Life are the two case schools that are building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct this multiple site case study on school and community connections. First, the essence of a descriptive case study will be described. Data gathering and data analysis techniques will be discussed as well as a discussion of methods used to validate and verify how two elementary schools in the process of becoming professional learning communities can facilitate community connections.

Descriptive Case Study

According to Patton (1987), a descriptive case study is a detailed account that explored variations in experience and captured a range of individualized outcomes. This qualitative research method and design is a form of field research or ethnographics. Langenbach, Vaughn, and Aagard, (1994) define it as, "a research tradition or design that collects and analyzes qualitative data...it seeks the perspective about the culture of individuals, groups, or systems" (p.368). This research method aims to represent the real world. Ethnographers and naturalistic researchers go into the field to observe people and their actions. Specifically, these researchers talk to principals, teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

> Case study research focuses on one person or one thing, or a small sample of people to be analyzed. Case studies provide limited information that focuses on a single issue, individual, or organizational behavior, or outcome within a narrow context containing limited variables...the

researcher must relate his or her findings to theory in order for the work to be considered research (Langenbach, Vaughn, Aagard, 1994).

If this be the case then Patton (1987) proclaims research lead in a qualitative direction should show (1) the interest in descriptive data; (2) the focus on interactions and process; (3) the exploratory nature of the problem; (4) the concern with individualized experiences and outcomes (different community connections happening to two different principals with varying results); and (5) uncertainty about what interactions or variables may be most important. Patton (1990) listed several situations for which qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate, including (a) new areas of study where few hypotheses exist, and not much is known about the area of study, (b); when programs are implemented incrementally by a process of adapting to local conditions and needs, in which case the methods used to study implementation must be open-ended, discovery-oriented and capable of describing developmental process and programs changes; (c) for process evaluation , because depicting process (how the program actually operates) requires a detailed description, process is fluid and dynamic, and participants' perceptions are a key in process considerations; and (d) to confirm or add depth and detail to quantitative results. Many of these apply to this case study and will guide this research.

To accomplish this, case study methodology will be applied to this research following the research recommendation of Yin (1994). Yin's research has four stages:

1. Design the case study,
2. Conduct the case study,
3. Analyze the case study evidence, and

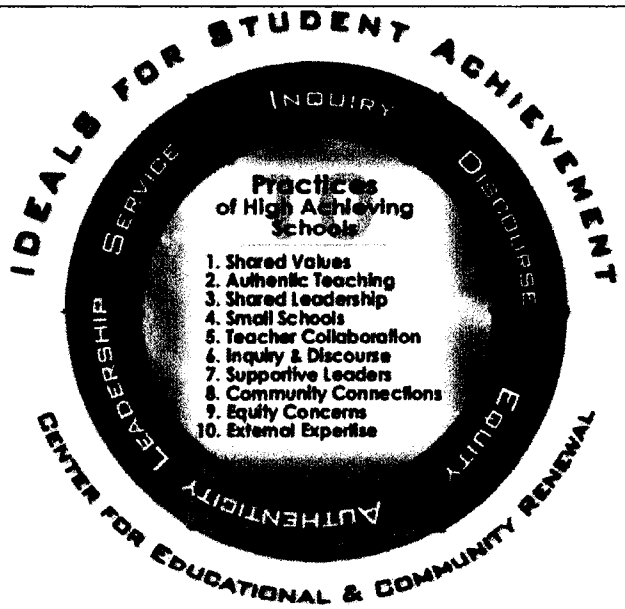
4. Develop the conclusions, recommendations and implications.

This multiple site case study on community connections consisted of in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents. A case study methodology revealed detailed information about Practice 8: Community Connections. Practice 8: Community Connections is one of the ten research-based practices linked directly to high student achievement that supports the IDEALS framework (O'Hair, 2000) at the K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal at the University of Oklahoma.

All work at the K20 Center is based around the IDEALS framework. This framework is based on systemic change and leadership development.

Table 3

IDEALS Framework (O'Hair, 2000)



An explanation of the framework is pictured in Appendix A and can be found on-line at: [http://www.k20center.org] which is the K20 website. The IDEALS (Inquiry,

Discourse, Equity, Authenticity, Leadership, and Service) framework sets the stage for the ten research-based practices linked directly to high student achievement. These ten practices, entitled the Rubric of High Achieving Schools, are in Appendix B and can be found on-line at [http://www.k20center.org], also the K20 Center website. The rubric is a guide for schools who are developing professional learning communities that integrate technology to improve student achievement.

OK-ACTS (Oklahoma Achievement through Collaboration and Technology Support) is a project of the K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal at the University of Oklahoma. Its mission is to develop leadership for school change using technology as a tool (On line at www.k20center.org/ok_acts on page 1). OK-ACTS represents a statewide partnership for leadership and technology development which seek to improve student achievement by connecting, supporting and educating Oklahoma head principals and superintendents. The OK-ACTS Model is woven with four major strands:

- IDEALS framework for developing professional learning communities
- High Student Achievement Research
- Leadership in a changing culture (Fullan, 2001)
- Technology Integration

The OK-ACTS Phase I project is supported through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for $1.2 million for three years with matching funds from the Oklahoma Education Technology Trust (OETT), Authentic Teaching Alliance (ATA), and the University of Oklahoma to train 800 principals and superintendents in the state of Oklahoma to carry out its mission.

OK-ACTS Phase II project is supported through a grant from OETT in cooperation with the K20 Center for Educational and Community renewal for $5.25 million over a four year period. It funds technology equipment and professional development for Oklahoma public schools implementing practices of high achieving schools to improve student achievement. This partnership to improve student achievement by developing professional learning communities that incorporate technology in their work, asked participants to submit action plans that (a) reflect a least 3 of the 10 practices of high achieving schools; (b) demonstrate an integration of technology; (c) develop a personalized, caring-enriched learning environment; and (d) encourage participation in a collaborative network designed to strengthen practices within the school and to share best practices among schools and districts. In turn, these schools and districts received up to $79,000 dollars worth of technology equipment and training. The outcomes of Phase II will be highly individualized; no particular hypothesis is evident.

Commonalities of Two Case Sites

This multiple site case study design focused on two elementary schools whose principals have completed Phase I of the OK-ACTS program. They are two of the twenty-one schools that were grant recipients chosen for Phase II of the OK-ACTS Program. The common thread chosen to examine in this research is that each school chose Practice 8: School and Community Connections as on of three action plans to implement. Practice 8: School and Community Connections is one of ten best practices of high achieving schools in the IDEALS model. Using technology provided by Phase II

grants, each school will implement their action plan to connect to parents, families, and their community.

The principals and their schools will be loaded with information. A great deal may be learned by studying these select community connection samples through qualitative case study methods. It will involve what Merriam (1998) named monitoring and casual explanations. This study will be able to capture individual differences and project variations at two different settings with two unique experiences.

The case study methodology is appropriate for "a holistic, in-depth investigation..." (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). Increasingly it is used in education where aims at finding and describing the central themes or principle outcomes that include similarities and differences. In the examination of these two case schools, I found structural differences in their action plans and their technological choices to meet these plans were totally different. Any common patterns that emerge from the many similarities and differences are of particular interest. Any centrally shared experiences will get to the core of community connections impacted by technology that are increasing student achievement. These multiple case studies will serve to strengthen the results by replicating patterns or themes.

Case studies are viewed as a valuable method for presenting information about educational practices in which little research has been conducted. One precondition for a case study is that the uniqueness of the project being studied must be established because a case study may be a database that promotes even further studies. When a researcher can't prove or disprove his findings, but the results may be scrutinized by their credibility, a case study is often used. The aim of this study will be to eliminate false

conclusions so that other researchers will receive the best possible interpretation of what occurred at the two case schools is a result of school and community connections via their action plans and choice of technology.

This multiple site case study will follow many suggestions of Michael Quinn Patton (1987). This research project is unpredictable so every attempt will be made to understand and inform others of the "can of worms" that can be opened during a study of any program. Qualitative case studies generate hypotheses. This multiple case study generated insights to many school and community connections. Information was gathered with accuracy and authenticity at all times. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two established a foundation for understanding the many possibilities for school and community connections and what other researchers have found that intensified this research.

At best, this research encountered what Guba (1978) describes as the "boundary problem." Was it better to question broadly with a few thoughts resulting or question a little with broader results? As the considerations for breadth and depth evolved much was revealed about the IDEALS, student achievement, leadership skills, and the growing use of technology in our schools in relation to school and community connections. Although this research starts with a loose design, it takes a more predictable form as revealed. The researcher revised and modified according to the research needs gathered for the two case schools. This research provides rich evidence that will give readers "something to talk about" as they get the "full flavor" of these principals/superintendents and their schools connecting to their families and communities with new technologies. The researcher's understanding increased as the research evolved.

The Two Case Schools

Each of these two schools is located in the South Central United States, but the identities of these communities will be protected and all original data will remain confidential. Pseudo names were chosen for the school and participants to ensure confidentiality. Written permission forms were signed by principals, teachers, parents, and community members for interviews. Each of these two case schools is implementing Practice 8: Community Connections using technology as a tool. The two case schools will be named:

Case School A: Country Living

Case School B: City Life

Data Collection Methods and Sources

In this case study the data collection consisted of three data sources: document analysis of Actions Plans for Practice 8, OETT/OK-ACTS Teacher Surveys placed on-line by SEDL, and a site visit to each of the schools where the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member were interviewed and recorded for later analysis.

Permission for this research was gained from all research subjects. A copy of the IRB and experimental permission form are in Appendix C.

Grant Applications/Action Plans at Case Schools

Case School A and Case School B are two schools of twenty-one schools receiving the OK-ACTS Phase II grant. As a prelude to Phase II, the principal has completed Phase I of the OK-ACTS program. Case School A and Case School B grant applications, consisting of three action plans, were written singularly or collectively by

teachers, parents, and principals of these schools. A copy of the grant application instrument is in Appendix D. Each of the actions plans of the two schools were reviewed, but specific interest was placed on Practice 8: School and Community Connections, the common practice for this research and one which each of the schools wrote as an action plan. One part of the grant application included how the technology purchased by grant monies will be used to enhance the practice. The Practice 8: School and Community Connections Action Plan for each of the case schools was a valuable data source because they shared the evidence, obstacles, and actions plans of the two schools; corroborating practices the researcher observed at the on site interviews. By themselves these documents would have left the researcher guessing, but because they were produced for reasons other than the study at hand, they proved to be a critical source of data when combined with the surveys and on site interviews.

Teacher Survey

A survey for teachers was compiled by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratories (SEDL). The survey was taken by the faculty at all twenty-one Phase II grant recipient schools.

The survey was titled *OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers*. It questioned the frequency that teachers use computers, access to computers, their proficiency using technology applications, and in class/out of class uses of technology. A copy of this survey is located in Appendix E.

The post survey will be available in April 2004 for both schools, but not in time for the deadline of this research. The survey was quite informative. It was a challenge to combine the action plans with all of the varying respondents' answers on the surveys.

New insights were generated as to how to classify the data. The process became creative and intuitive as the significant details began to emerge.

On Site Interviews at the Case Schools

A site visit was made to each of the case schools. All field notes-observations were scripted without editorial comment and then dated, as well as dated journal entries that will interpret the field notes contained in the researcher's journal. The principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member sharing in implementing Practice 8: School and Community Connections were interviewed at each school. All of the interviews at the schools were recorded. The researcher took digital pictures of the school and technology equipment purchased with the grant monies mentioned in the interview and saved e-mail exchanges among all parties. The researcher's journal was used to document questions, concerns, or frustrations with the process as well as outlines of plans and successes. The researcher collected comprehensively because of changing revelations of the focus on the final report; memos were kept as needed. The researcher couldn't possibly decide what would happen as the stories of these two principals and their schools were revealed as they become professional learning communities. The primary strength of case study research method is that the data collected in the field was where the action is, or in this case, on the site where the Phase II Action Plans of the grants were carried out.

Case studies may cause difficulties due to the bias of both the researcher and the schools being researched. Stake (1994) regards this area of research as dangerous, primarily due to the problem of subjectivity interpreting data after it has been written down. Bias is everywhere, but can be minimized. It is the primary duty of researchers to

be truthful in their testimonies. It is also, difficult to make sure the testimony from the observers is truthful because:

- They may not remember the details accurately
- They are inhibited about disclosing important feelings
- The suspicion individuals have about revealing information that might reflect poorly on them or their superiors.

The use of multiple sources of evidence can help substantially in improving the validity and reliability of the research. When viewed from as many angles as possible, and by using various sources of data such as the ones used in this multiple case study on school and community connections, the case study research is powerful research (Stake, 1994).

Data Analysis

In short, data analysis is making sense out of data collection. By itself data are just information. Preliminary constructs for this research helped to organize the data. These preliminary constructs were formed from the related research on professional learning communities, research on school and community connections, and the criteria for the OETT/OK-ACTS grant writers. From reading the grants alone, preliminary constructs included Learning Communities, Technology, Student Achievement, Leadership Practices, Parent Involvement, and Community Groups. It will take earnest thought, consolidation, reduction, and organization to produce an end product that will share emerging themes or conceptual categories using both convergent and divergent thinking (Merriam, 1988). The researcher needed to view the bigger picture as the

individual pieces or themes of school and community connections at both schools emerged from the preliminary constructs to complete the analysis.

Validation and Verification

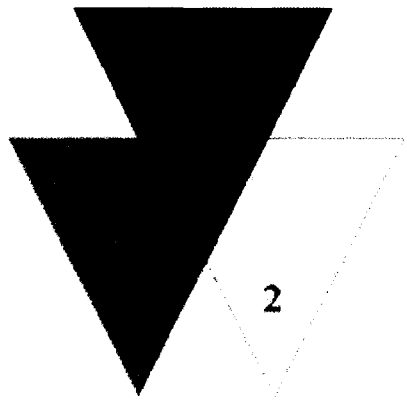
Validity and reliability were important considerations when the data from this descriptive case study were interpreted. Merriam (1988) stated that validity increases if repeated observations are made in the same study. Studying these two principals, their schools, and communities produced much information. Triangulation of this information verified and validated the researcher's results.

Triangulation involved the researcher using numerous sources to confirm the findings as they evolved. The researcher clarified any predictions or assumptions. Many interpretations resulted and reliability was difficult to standardize. The fieldwork was a tedious process, with many steps taken to ensure that bias did not creep into the research. Dependability and consistency in interpretation was the goal of the research analysis as the researcher tried to establish validity and reliability.

Validity and verification are validated by triangulation among all the varied data collected. Triangulation is the overlapping, diverse pieces of evidence and perspectives (Jacob, 1990; Maxwell, 1996; and Wiggins, 1998). The researcher gathered a wide variety of evidence because the dependence on one form of data may impact the validity.

Table 4

Triangulation of Resources for this Study



1=documents 2=surveys 3=on site interviews

The credibility of the program descriptions documented through interviews at the two schools depended on "engagement and triangulation as well as the ability of the evaluator to create collaborative non-threatening context" for the interviews (Kalafate & Illback, 1998, p. 22). The site interviews framed an opportunity for the principals and stakeholders of these two schools to "tell their story." Listening for tangible indicators such as attitudes toward teaching and learning that create the social climate of a school were highlighted as the researcher was visually and structurally guided by this research. The researcher felt more informed about ways these schools operated by listening to the tone and content of people's answers. The whole process of gathering and reading the documents, recording the results from the teacher survey, and the data generated by the site visit and interviews was overwhelming. Patton (1987) stated that the first task of a qualitative study is a vivid description, one that is credible and sensible. This study was

credible and sensible, but bringing order, structure, and a sound interpretation of all of the data was difficult. The data was rich, but it had its limitations.

Major Problems or Limitations

- Only two case schools were studied
- The study was limited to schools that won a Phase II grants through the OK-ACTS program.
- The data collection was limited to the 2002-2003 and the 2003-2004 school years.

Summary

Chapter Three outlined the methodology that motivated the researcher to conduct this multiple case study on school and community connections. Engagement and triangulation were provided by examining the two schools' grant documents, surveys, and on-site interviews. Chapter Four gives a comprehensive view of Case School A: Country Living Elementary peering at their actions plans, teacher survey, and on-site interviews. Chapter Five gives a comprehensive view of Case School B: City Life Elementary through peering at their action plans, surveys, and on-site interviews. Chapter Six highlights the findings and analysis of the two case study schools. Chapter Seven states conclusions, recommendations, and implications of this case study research of two schools building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development.

CHAPTER IV

Case School A: County Living Elementary

Introduction

Chapter Four will examine Case School A: Country Living Elementary. Glimpses of the Country Living Elementary School and the community surrounding it will be based on the action plan from Phase I of the OK-ACTS program and Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS grant application, specifically the action plan for Practice 8: School and Community Connections. Data from the on-line OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers adds to the holistic picture of this school. Personal interviews of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member by the researcher give individual perspectives of Country Living Elementary School's connections with the community. The triangulation of documents, surveys, and interviews shared in this chapter give a descriptive account of Country Living Elementary as it becomes a professional learning community (PLC) facilitating connections with the community. The privacy of the school, documents, surveys, and confidentiality of interview participants is respected by the researcher. Pseudo names were chosen for the school and participants to ensure confidentiality.

View of Country Living Elementary

At greatschools.com a parent noted:

> Country Living is a great school for children to attend. I think Country Living needs to make available more things like band, music, etc. for children K-5 grade. Seems like parents are very involved with their children as well as the teachers being involved with the children," (p.1).

According to the school's report card at www.SchoolReportCard.org Country Living, 95 % of the third graders were tested with a score in reading of 61% and a score in math of 58%. Third graders outscored the state average by one point in reading and two points in math. The fifth graders met the 70% Performance Benchmark for Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests in Math, Science, Writing, and History/Government. They did not meet the benchmark for reading, geography, or the arts.

The principal at Country Living Elementary School is Ms. Nita Bridgers. She has been the principal of the school for eight years. Like all of the state's principals, she is concerned about test scores, the API (Academic Performance Index), and making adequate yearly progress as set forth in the No Child Left Behind mandate from the U.S. Department of Education. With her fifth graders scoring below the 70% benchmark in three areas, she and her staff have made a constant effort to improve test scores, improve parent and community connections, and ensure that each student is achieving at his or her potential. Technology is one tool that Ms. Bridgers is eager to implement as a possible way to improve student achievement in the fifth grade. It is no wonder that a large part of the school's OETT-OK-ACTS grant was targeted for fifth grade.

View of County Living School District

The Country Living School district consists of Country Living Elementary School, Country Living Middle School, and Country Living High School. The district serves about 1088 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in a rural setting. The school is lead by five school board members, the superintendent, and three principals. Since the school district is the community, the view of this district is best achieved through a look at the community.

View of the Community

Country Living Public Schools is located ten miles from the nearest town, Backyard. It has 2, 800 people, no stores, just scattered homes, an elementary, middle, and high school. The school personnel travel to Backyard for needed supplies for the school. Country Living Public Schools is the hub of the community with an interesting, but limited history.

Around 1889 County Living became a school when early settlers built a bridge of freshly cut timbers to cross the creek and cleared a site for the school. Country Living High School began in 1919 and is located on the south side of the road of the present Country Living Elementary School. In 1951, a tornado hit the school. No one was killed, but there were some injuries. In 1959, the school population declined to the degree that the high school students were sent to surrounding small towns. Records from the school's district website show that Country Living was struck with another tragedy in 1968, a fire this time. Due to faulty wiring, a huge amount of the school was destroyed in the early morning hours

From 1977 to 1981 Country Living School enrollment leaped from 212 to 491. Since that time there has been steady growth at County Living Public Schools with classrooms being filled as quickly as they were built. In 1985, the Country Living High School and the fourth and fifth grade building were built. In 1989, an addition to the high school was completed; in 1990, Country Living High School graduated a senior class. The high school gymnasium, completed in 1994, is used for elementary programs, graduation, assemblies, drama events, school meetings, and physical education classes.

The building appropriately lends itself to athletic, academic, and social events for the entire community.

The County Living community gracefully accepts the challenge as more people move to the area. With state finance shortfalls and continuing unfunded mandates over the past two years, the district has had to increase class sizes, reduce the force of teachers, and do without needed services. Although they struggle with these challenges, the community intends to move forward and grow. The mission of this district is clearly defined.

> The mission of Country Living Schools is to create and maintain a positive and welcoming school climate, free of drugs, violence, intimidation and fear. To provide an environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn which promotes the cognitive and affective development of all children and those professionals who serve them.

Phase I OK-ACTS

Ms. Nita Bridgers, principal at Country Living Elementary School, proudly totes a laptop computer as part of her completion of Phase I of OK-ACTS. She uses it so much that she bought one of the computer cases with wheels and a pull-out handle so that it can follow her to and from school, home, wherever her principal duties take her in the community. She takes it to out-of –town professional meetings and shares it with others in the school as needed.

Ms. Bridgers is one of over 800 principals and superintendents who went through professional training to learn about IDEALS, which include leading their staff in becoming a professional learning community, having teachers from their schools take the

TAGLIT (Taking a Good Look at Instructional Technology) survey on line, and writing an action plan implementing one of the 10 practices of high achieving schools using technology as a tool. Ms. Bridgers relinquished her power as she set the vision in her mind to share decision making. She began to see her staff in new ways; she capitalized on the collective gifts and talents of her staff as she set goals to lead her staff in becoming a professional learning community. Through the grant process and OK-ACTS professional learning opportunities, she has had a new beginning and a change in her leadership philosophy. Ms. Bridgers is making an effort to let go of her old leadership style:

> I'm a Type A personality and I like to do it myself...I have had to learn to allow others to participate. I have done more of that since writing the OK-ACTS grant than ever before. It frees me. I always felt like I should be the one with the answers and I've discovered that I don't have all the answers, you know...so I am going more toward sharing leadership. I've always tried to be everybody's answer to everything and you just can't do it.

As Ms. Bridgers let go of the old to make room for the new, she and a few members of her staff began talking about technology in their school. The results of the TAGLIT on line survey taken by her staff during Phase I left her feeling disgusted but also motivated and excited about technology at Country Living Elementary School. The computer lab, a bunch of old high school hand-me-downs was the disgusting part. The TAGLIT results made it clear that her students and teachers required more hands-on, minds-on experiences using technology than the outdated equipment could provide.

Certainly the lower scores of the fifth graders and the need to raise reading scores entered into the technology dreams and schemes of the technology team that was forming at Country Living. "I'm not a techie person. I do mainly word processing...I've come a long way since we first started the grant," Ms. Bridgers admits with a grateful heart as she smiles at her students and computers.

Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS Grant Application

Country Living Elementary School is one of 21 schools in a south central state of the United States to win an OETT/OK-ACTS Phase II grant. From the general information page of the school's grant application, it should be noted that this rural school has 500 of the district's 1088 students. School level ethnicity includes 89 percent Caucasian, 9 percent Native American, less than one percent Hispanic, less than one percent African American, and less than one percent Asian/Eastern Pacific Islanders. Of the 500 students listed 80 in kindergarten, 85 in first grade, 85in second grade, 80in third grade, 80 in fourth grade, and 90 in fifth grade. Thirty-three percent of the students are on free and/or reduced lunches as of October 1, 2002. In 2001, the school's total academic performance index (API) was 1082, and in 2002 it was recorded at 994.

The title of Country Living Elementary School's grant proposal was Lappin' It Up! They proposed to bring their rural students to feast at the metaphorical "Technology Café." Addressing the school's shared vision to share world-class education with their students and community using interactive educational technology, they planned to use authentic learning, content-rich resources and increased teacher's knowledge, and efficient and effective use of technology. Their vision included providing home/community/school connections through adult education classes, activities, and

events to showcase technology-based learning. The Lappin' It Up grant proposal combined authentic teaching, learning, and assessment; professional development; and home/community connections to fulfill their shared vision of using technology to learn. The stakeholders in this shared vision chose to open the "Technology Café" to help students, teachers, and the community lap up learning using technology as a tool.

As Country Living strives to become a professional learning community, the grant monies are helping them. Goals as documented in their action plans are to implement Practice 1: Shared Values, Common Goals, and Shared Purpose, Practice 2: Authentic Teaching and Learning, and Practice 8: School and Community Connections of the ten practices of high achieving schools.

Practice 8: School and Community Connections, along with the other two practices are to be implemented during the 2003-2004 school year. It is Practice 8: School and Community Connections that this researcher is specifically interested in at Country Living, but the integration of all ten practices should be noted because the school is trying to become a high achieving school. Since their grant was funded, they have not only the supportive evidence for fulfilling Practice 5, 8, 1 and 2, but the finances to open the "Technology Café' for business.

Supportive Evidence

The shared vision of delivering authentic learning to students in an increasing special needs population in an isolated rural setting and more training for teachers to use technology efficiently and effectively is supported. The school's faculty lead by the much loved and respected principal, Nita Bridgers, the school board, and the administration have cooperatively developed technology site goals based on Oklahoma's

Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) for Instructional Technology and Information Literacy, National Educational Standards for Students (NESS) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) standards for student learning.
Through staff development and training of teachers in technology and professional learning community development, teachers are shifting from "all knowing" to learning together as facilitators."

Home and the community have long supported one another at Country Living, but technology is new to their elementary school. They have little help in this effort. Fundraising by the PTO and volunteers who belong to an amateur radio group are lending expertise to wire the school for closed circuit programming and video production. Parents, teachers, and community volunteers have constructed an outdoor classroom for hands-on, authentic learning opportunities. Parents and community members are also being recruited to serve on a Technology Committee to address home/community technology needs.

Obstacles

The grant application states four areas indicated by the TAGLIT survey that are obstacles to higher student achievement using technology as a tool at Country Living: Time, Training, Technology, and Funding. Twenty-three computers shared by 500 students allows about 30 minutes a week for all students in the computer lab. With limited funding and increased class sizes to almost 30 during the 2003-2004 school year, another strain was added to the 23 station computer lab. The 500 children of County Living were limited in the use of technology as a tool for learning.

Another obstacle for County Living is limited planning time. Teachers need time to practice, plan, and participate in using technology (McKenzie, 2002).

Teachers are not adequately trained in high achieving school practices or in efficient and effective ways to use their technology. Needs for professional improvement vary widely among the staff, ranging from some that need the basics to some that need training in website design and Internet strategies. Teachers need to use the school district's website and e-mail capabilities to involve parents and the community.

Besides time and training, Country Living needs technology and funding. The school is limited to worn out hand-me-down computers from Country Living High School. The state budget cuts have eliminated 14 out of 80 certified positions. Technology is not a high priority when all of the finances go to teacher salaries. Implementing the "Lappin' It Up" program would have been impossible without grant money.

Action Plans

Country Living's Phase II Grant action plans have two phases. Phase I will include technology committee and collaborative team planning, professional development, and acquisition of the technology needed for implementation of the grant during the 2003-2004 school year. Phase II is a long term goal which includes the hiring of a technology resource teacher and access to Lappin' It Up laptops for every elementary student in the school.

Using technology to learn instead of learning to use technology, Country Living has conducted a pilot program with selected fifth graders using a wireless mobile lab, upgraded the existing computer lab, provided authentic learning opportunities, developed

effective teaching strategies to increase student achievement, and provided technology training opportunities for teachers, parents, and the community.

To overcome their obstacles for school and community connections the school planned to develop classroom websites for teachers to communicate with parents and the community. The staff members wanted to be able to use their individual websites and e-mail to communicate with each other, the administration, and home and community. They also planned to create partnership with outside sources such as the Omniplex in Oklahoma City, area technology schools, and others. If possible videoconferencing would be used as a partnership tool. The staff wanted to establish community technology classes from parent/community surveys determining the need and program possibilities. They also planned to establish parent nights to showcase technology-based learning of students. They planned to develop "Tech Fairs" to showcase students' technology-based research projects and to involve PTO in school website design and communication efforts.

Connecting to the community is difficult since the area surrounding Country Living is rural residential. Because the closest town is ten miles from the school, the staff hopes to connect with businesses and service organizations in nearby towns or possibly larger cities in the state.

Practice 8: School and Community Connections is one of ten practices to be developed as Country Living Elementary School becomes a professional learning community. The school carefully followed the grant application to include facilitating connections with parents and the community, but the survey that the school took on-line reveals vital information about the teacher opinions of technology. The survey became a rich source of data as the school staff shared their opinions of Country Living's

technology as they worked together as a professional learning community using technology as a tool.

OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers

Twenty teachers at Country Living took the OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers in October of 2003. This on-line survey was taken by the teachers at all twenty-one schools in Oklahoma that received an OETT/OK-ACTS 2003 Grant. A copy of the survey instrument is in Appendix E. Parts of the survey will be presented in tables in this chapter. The purpose of the survey was to find the degree of support teachers have for using technology in teaching and learning, what the current technology strengths of the teachers were, what ways teachers were using technology in the classroom, and what obstacles they might need to overcome in order to use technology as a tool in their teaching. Table 5 shares the frequency of responses that Country Living made to the OETT-OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers.

Table 5

School A: Frequency of Responses to Survey on Computer Usage

Computer Usage	Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Use of Computers	0	0	0	3	17
Personal Use	1	0	3	4	12
Classroom Record Keeping	5	3	6	5	1
Classroom Instruction	2	3	3	6	6
School Communications	1	5	0	4	10

At Country Living seventeen of the teachers use a computer daily and three use it weekly. While no teachers are experts at using a computer, fifteen feel they are working at an intermediate level of expertise.

Table 6

School A: Frequency of Responses to Survey For Teachers on Computer Expertise

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Expert
3	15	2	0

Table 6 shares the computer expertise of Country Living teachers. Fifteen percent of the teachers are at beginning level; seventy-five percent advanced. At the site visit, two teachers appeared to be well-versed in technology and had developed expansive roles in implementing the grant. Several teachers at the site noted the support for using technology as a tool in teaching and learning:

> Administrators have made sure that computers are available in classes and some staff development has been provided.
>
> The principal is in total support of using technology in the classroom and for student learning. She allows us the freedom to explore our own avenues of instruction for our students.
>
> The principal is providing workshops for us. Other teachers are helping with internet information.
>
> The principal and several teachers with technological expertise are available to assist with any problems I have, and some teachers have provided workshop training...

The teachers are feeling supported by their peers, thus leadership roles are changing at County Living. Such comments from the survey as these, support that

teachers are beginning to share, help, and collaborate, typical in schools becoming professional learning communities:

Teachers with technological expertise are available to assist...

Teachers help with Internet information...

Teachers share software...

Teachers at Country Living are excited about the use of technology in their school; in fact 95 % agreed or strongly agreed that teachers and students using technology are increasing student interest; contagious says the principal. The staff believes that students are more interested in learning when using technology to investigate an issue or solve a problem and that technology can help students better understand what they are learning. Ninety-five percent of the teachers want to learn more about using technology for learning and teaching; they feel that they will be better teachers by using technology as part of their instructional practices.

The strengths and proficiency in use of computers for the twenty teachers surveyed varies greatly. Twelve teachers are using the computer personally and professionally; they use it for classroom grade keeping or attendance. Twelve teachers reported they are using the computer daily or weekly for instruction and fourteen teachers use their computers for school communications to teachers, students, and /or parents. Word processing, PowerPoint, Internet access, and e-mail access are the most used types of software. One of the real strengths teachers find using technology as a tool is the computer lab. Sixteen teachers responded positively about the computer lab and 1-2 computers in the classroom; comments include:

We are fortunate to have a computer lab with 30 computers and an on site computer/technology assistant. Each classroom has one or more computers with printers.

We have a computer in every room and a computer lab!

We are in the process of implementing networked software for all grades and a wireless computer lab for a pilot program with fifth graders.

Each child has access to a computer. We received a technology grant that will allow us to invest in more technology.

More than half the teachers at Country Living rated themselves moderate to expert in word processing, e-mail usage, and Internet usage. See Table 7 to view the responses for proficiency of Country Living teachers to use technology application or tools.

Table 7

School A Frequency of Responses on Application and Tool Proficiency

	Not at All	Basic	Moderate	Well	Expert
Word processing (Word)	1	6	7	6	0
Spreadsheet programs (Excel)	14	5	1	0	0
Presentation (PowerPoint)	9	8	1	2	0
Database programs	17	2	1	0	0
Email	0	9	6	4	1
Internet/Web Browsers	0	5	9	6	0
Calendar to Schedule	11	6	3	0	0
Publishing programs (Acrobat)	15	3	2	0	0
Graphics programs (Photo Shop, Paint Shop Pro)	9	5	5	5	0
Scanner	14	2	3	0	0
Hand-held device	17	3	0	0	0
Graphing calculator	18	2	0	0	0
Digital Camera	10	5	3	1	1
Smartboard	19	1	0	0	0
LCD projector	19	1	0	0	0
Removable Media (CD Rom)	10	7	1	2	0

The majority of teachers are basic or not at all proficient in spreadsheet programs such as Excel, presentation software such as PowerPoint, database programs such as FileMaker, calendar scheduling programs, publishing programs such as Acrobat, graphics programs such as Paint Shop Pro, and using scanners, hand held devices, graphing calculators, digital cameras, Smartboards, LCD projectors, and CD Roms. The potential for strengthening technology usage at Country Living in some of these proficiencies is reassuring as these comments suggest:

> I feel I have strengths in lots of technology, but I don't have the time to implement them because of my many responsibilities.
>
> I have a willingness to learn. I am fairly comfortable in trying new things, exploring for myself, and just generally experimenting with the technology.
>
> I am confident with computers and not afraid to try new things.

Table 8

Frequency of Responses on Ways Technology is Used in the Classroom

Classroom Uses	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Incorporate technology in lesson plans	3	5	8	4	0
Collaborate with other teachers to plan and review technology	6	9	4	1	0
Look for technology-related activities that improve students basic skills	2	1	12	5	0
Look for technology-related activities that increase critical thinking	5	4	6	5	0
Observe other teachers integrate technology for instruction	5	6	7	2	0

Create lesson plans using technology	9	7	3	1	0
Design instruction that encourages students to use technology	4	4	11	1	0
Incorporate problem-solving activities for students that require technology	7	7	6	0	0
Design activities for student that use technology for creativity	6	10	4	0	0
Design activities for student that use technology tools for collaboration with peers and outside experts	8	7	5	0	0
Design student activities that us technology tools to facilitate discussion and reflection on learning	9	8	3	0	0
Design student activities for analyzing data	11	8	1	0	0
Design student activities to encourage researching on the Internet	9	2	7	2	0
Encourage student presentation using technology	16	2	2	0	0
Teach students to evaluate using technology	15	4	0	0	1
Deliver instructional information using technology	9	8	3	0	0

In the classroom, (see Table 8) about sixty percent of the teachers are trying to incorporate technology into student learning experiences. Seventeen teachers or 85 % are on the lookout for technology-related activities that will improve their students' basic skills in reading, writing, and math, and a little more than half are using technology-related activities that will increase students' problem-solving skills and critical thinking. A little less than half of the teachers, 45 %, are beginning to work with other teachers by

observing what technology is working in their classrooms. About 65 % of the teachers are gathering information for their lessons or units using technology and 45% are designing activities that encourage students to do their research via the Internet. Teachers report that about 50 % of their students use the Internet or other software to research information and find material for assignments in class or out of class. Seventy percent of the students are using software to learn or practice new skills in or out of class. Comments about using technology in the classroom include:

> I would use technology for researching history and geography. There are many sites for colonial history and teaching U.S. Government. I would also incorporate geography using the atlas on-line and different sites for geography.
>
> I would like to find activities for the students to do more virtual field trips. It would be nice to be able to use a big screen where all students can see what is going on.
>
> I would like for each child to have a laptop computer. It would be much easier to incorporate computer based learning experiences into the classroom. For example, student could learn keyboarding and use their computer for writing assignments.
>
> More web-based learning. In art, I want to use technology to bring art around the world to my students. Before now, this was done through text and one classroom computer.
>
> I would like an LCD projector so that I can use more computer based lessons.

While teachers feel supported, have strengths, and feel positive about using technology in the classroom, the survey reports obstacles that keep them from using technology, too. The most common obstacle cited was time; it was listed in ten out of seventeen responses as an obstacle to overcome in order to use technology. Time was the obstacle mentioned on the grant application for each of the three practices of high achieving schools that Country Living is trying to implement, too. As teachers add technology to their school's list of tools, they need more knowledge and experience with computers; they cannot model for students what they themselves do not know. Two comments made were:

> I did not grow up with computers, so I am still a little intimidated by them.
>
> I have to overcome my fear of computers.
>
> ...I know just enough right now to be dangerous. I have ideas, but I'm not always sure how to implement them.

Money and need for professional development emerged as obstacles, too. Both of these were mentioned on the grant application for all three practices: Practice 1: Shared Values, Common Goals, and Shared Purpose, Practice 2: Authentic Teaching and Learning, and Practice 8: School and Community Connections that Country Living is trying to implement. Cynicism, as an obstacle, was noted in some comments:

> The other teachers (not all) are used to doing it the same old ways and won't allow time for collaboration. The community is too small to support incorporation of technology.

When asked what ways teachers would like to use technology in the classroom further comments may be construed as lack of knowledge:

Don't really know.

I'm not sure

n/a

And finally, when asked what obstacles do you need to overcome in order to use technology, a couple of responses revealed overwhelmed spirits:

Everything.

The need to do everything right.

From this survey the researcher notes two comments and two responses that directly affect Practice 8: School and Community Connections:

Parents and students have donated software.

The community is too small to support incorporation of technology.

When questioned about the degree of support received for incorporating technology into teaching and learning experiences by parents of their students, 35% of the teachers reported that they were getting no support; 35 % were getting hardly any support; 25% were getting some support; 5 % were getting a lot of support; but not one single teacher reported getting total support from parents. When questioned about the degree of support received for incorporating technology into teaching and learning experiences from organization/businesses in the community, 55% of the teachers said none; 35% said hardly any; 1% said some; and no teacher reported that businesses in the community gave total support to the use of technology in the school.

Being a school without a town can limit community resources. However, the unemployment rate in this small community is 5%; these families are working families. The average household income for Country Living parents is $49,983.00, and 23% of the

adults over twenty-five have college degrees. Around 63% of the adult population over 25 graduated from High School, so the community has great potential for educational success. Being a school with so many working parents can be a deterrent to effective parent connections, just because of their inability to visit the school during the school day, but the very fact that this community is passing bond issues to build schools is proof or evidence that they care and care abundantly. According to school records, 95% of the parents attend parent/teacher conferences about their children's academic achievement. They also supported the building of a wonderful playground for their children. The support for technology is probably there, but it will require an all out effort by the school to connect to parents and the community.

This survey will be given again in April, but results will not be tabulated in time for this research. The enthusiasm students and teachers displayed on site about their new technology when the researcher observed was much different than the initial survey suggests. The implementation of the grant has created change. Teacher perceptions will greatly differ during the post survey because these teachers and students opened the school at night to share new technology with parents and the community. The results are positive; the parent and community connections are evolving.

In summary, this survey gave details about support for technology, strengths of teachers using technology, ways teachers want to use technology in the classroom, and obstacles they need to overcome. This survey combined with the grant application gives an even clearer picture of school and community connections at Country Living.

Site Visit and Interviews

The Principal

The researcher's on site visit to Country Living Elementary was enlightening. An immediate observation of the principal is positive. She is a long time educator with warm regard for fellow administrators. She was professionally groomed and everyone who entered her presence received a smile, a handshake, or more often than not, a hug. Mutual respect by office staff, teachers, and students dominated. Quoted previously in this chapter, Ms. Bridgers has moved from being an authoritarian to being a lifelong learner. I'm not a "techie" she reiterates often, and she plans to learn right along with her teachers, students, parents, and the community. She admits it is the students that give her renewable energy:

> ...the thing I have seen is my kids are "techie" people. They are not afraid of computers. People my age are afraid of computers. These kids aren't. They just get in there and go! In fact, a lot of times they help me! They'll tell me how to do it.

In her office, she states that moving from traditional classrooms to a PLC is a wonderful, but exhausting experience. As she began to share, her contagious, enthusiastic personality revealed itself; the formal interview process began, but she was comfortable. It was clear that Ms. Bridgers is about personal relationships; people are more important than things. She is a positive role model and seems highly capable of leading change. It gives Mrs. Bridgers joy to consider herself as one of the lesser people in the school. She constantly gives credit to others in the building, is honest and humble, and has well-developed interpersonal skills. She sees herself as less than knowledgeable about

technology, but Fullan (2001) might describe her as knowledge building and coherence making. She is learning with others at all levels of the organization.

Ms. Bridgers is letting go of traditional ideas that teachers teach, students learn, principals manage the office, parents stay home, and the community members mind their own business. Her comments show that she is accepting the changing roles of families and sharing the leadership role:

> You know, I am 59 years old. So I go back to when I was in school...when I was in school, you did what the teacher said; no questions asked. We did our homework with our parents around the kitchen table. I don't find that anymore. I would like to get back to that, but I know we are going to have to modify...I tell parents to help their children memorize the facts in the car. Take or find opportunities to help your child.
>
> I'm also finding that we have so many multi-tiered family units now... It is really hard to keep straight who is who. There are step-parents, step-siblings, and step-grandparents...
>
> ...parents care greatly about their children. Things from middle school are not taught in upper elementary. In upper elementary, what we used to teach, we are now teaching in third grade. I think this makes parents feel uncomfortable.
>
> I have always felt that I need to be the answer person as we talked about before. But, I have always felt like this school actually belongs to the community and the parents. So basically, I've always tried to get parental input on major decisions that we make.

Ms. Bridgers is breaking down old walls and is appreciative of the work of others. She speaks fondly of two teachers who are bringing their collective gifts and efforts together, sharing values, and setting a new vision of technology that the whole staff is supporting:

> ...they are dynamos. Since we've got the new technology (from the OETT/OK-ACTS grant) and we've got the facilities (updated computer lab, CLTV), and equipment (Mobile laptop computer lab, and TV projection) we've been doing what we call "Community Bytes." It's been very well received. We've had over 20-25 people at every one. The teachers have taught digital cameras, PowerPoint...you know just various things like that. The community has really responded to it.

Ms. Bridgers has respect for teacher and student knowledge and by sharing leadership the whole school becomes more personal. She is excited because when everyone works together self interests are soon replaced by collective needs to improve student achievement. Researchers and change theorists (Glickman, 1993; Meier, 1995; Newmann & Associates, 1996; and Wood, 1992) believe that shared vision and common purpose cause schools to connect to the community and the world beyond the school. Bureaucracy is reduced and democracy and community building replace traditional structures that isolate schools and communities. Common good and personal ambitions become partners. Ms. Bridgers provides the necessary support for teachers to grow and change; the grant application assured that she has support from the superintendent as well as the school board. Parents and community members that support the school can continue with her positive approach towards technology and student achievement.

The Teacher

Mrs. Bridgers had graciously chosen, at the request of the researcher, the other adults who would be interviewed for this research. The teacher she chose is one of her dynamos, Ms. Brake. Ms. Brake is the school's art and gifted and talented teacher. She and the Title I math teacher have driven the new technology into Country Living with their vision to improve student achievement. Their action-oriented leadership is modeled in daily practice. Ms. Brake confirms, "We show our leadership by what we do."

Further, Ms. Brake says that parents should be involved in every step of the way. "We involve them every which way we can and every way we can think of to involve them." She believes that elementary teachers are really good at parent involvement. She thinks homework might be the most used method of involving parents at County Living, but she wants to promote much more because NCLB mandates more parent and community involvement.

Looking around Ms. Brake's classroom speaks multitudes about child-centered and authentic experience teaching and learning typical of professional learning communities. From a huge sunflower painted on the wall to student work to hands-on manipulative devices, it is plain to see that Ms. Brake offers a tremendous element of creativity to the Country Living teaching staff. Next to her classroom is CLTV station. She manages the early morning rise and shine show that is now produced in their television station and is viewed live every morning by the students and staff.

Ms. Brake values the OK-ACTS professional development component of the grant and wants to participate in collaborating best practices to increase parent

involvement. She believes the staff requires more training in the practices of high achieving schools because these are new ways of thinking that her colleagues are not used to. She also feels that Country Living cannot continue to do what they have done because they are becoming more and more isolated in their work. She perceives the OK-ACTS meetings for grade levels and the technology team meetings that have grade level representatives as the cornerstone of technological changes among staff. "We just blend outward to other teachers and students," she notes. Our vision:

> ... is to get students where they are self learners...I can't think of the word now...self-motivated...instead of trying to shift from that instructor standing in front of the room and being like their mentor, or facilitator might be the word.

When asked about community groups and their connections to the school Ms. Brake cited local church groups, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and the Gray County Sheriff's Department as supportive. She made the comment that the school is always trying to connect with other people, but "since it's out here, you know it is hard to get connections with other schools and other places." She continued,

> We are small and we are struggling and it is hard for the children to see the life that the children who live in towns or cities do. This rural location is heaven in many ways to the teachers, but when it comes to connecting to the community, they all ask who? When? Where? Who is going to pay for that kind of thing way out here?

The Parent

Sally Hash is a parent at Country Living Elementary School. Last year she was a new parent to Country Living Elementary School, but she volunteered so much that Ms. Bridgers, the principal hired her as the library assistant for the 2003-2004 school year. Mrs. Hash has a fourth grade girl attending Country Living Elementary School and a thirteen year old boy attending Country Living Middle School. She is a pleasant lady with a positive attitude and is a good role-model mother. She is kind, caring, and humble in spirit. Her voice is soft, but commanding. She states,

> Every child is very important. The school's philosophy of leadership is that no child should be left behind. They work hard to ensure that every child is taken care of and looked after. They put children number one. Parents can get involved at Country Living, too.
>
> There are lots of places where parents can be plugged in. Whether they have the time or not since it is a rural setting and both parents have to work a lot of times, but there are popcorn sales, there are book fairs, they can volunteer to come in and help the teachers make copies for the students...they can go into the kindergarten and read. They can help students at all grades take AR tests.

During sports activities parents talk about family and community connections. According to Mrs. Nash, with the technology grant the school is:

> Having community workshops now that they offer to the community to come in and learn things like digital camera use and different things...the community can participate with the school. The book fair is open for

parents to come in and we have a family night then, too. We have Open House at the beginning of the school year.

Mrs. Hash describes the community as close knit. A caring enriched learning environment begins with the principal, and Ms. Bridgers keeps everyone on the same page. Mrs. Hash continued, "It's a positive learning environment and there's not a lot of negative. Ms. Bridgers is positive and she wants to keep it that way at our school." Mrs. Hash agrees with Ms. Bridgers; she thinks that is good because once it begins to be negative it all just spirals down hill.

Math homework is every night for Mrs. Hash's fourth grader. "She checks over her work and then she reads to me or I read to her, she said." And spelling...

> You know the teachers have it planned out to where you know. I mean, the child can't say they didn't have any homework because every week it is the same routine. And they also have planners. They come home and you sign the planners, and on Wednesday they have folders for the week...It lists what they do. Every day they write down what they do and you read over it. So the parents are informed on what's going on in the classroom and you can keep up with their homework and activities they are doing.

The interview concluded with the question, what do you wish the researcher would have asked you?

> Ummmmm. I guess how great the principal is. You know, cause she's the backbone of the school and there is no job that she can't do or won't do. I mean, if she needs to go out and water the plants, she'll go out and water

the plants. Or take care of a sick child...she will take care of a sick child. That shows a lot about her leadership of the school. She is always here and there is nothing she won't do. I mean I have been in schools where you never see the principal. They are in their office and sometimes you don't see them. But here it's hands-on. And the kids know. They know her. It shows cause they know she cares and they feel good about that...I have been very impressed with her.

It is apparent that Mrs. Hash knows and appreciates Ms. Bridgers, the school principal. Mrs. Hash makes a powerful point about Ms. Bridger's leadership. She is sharing the leadership role or as Sergiovanni (1994) said, "They lead by following. They lead by serving. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership" (p. xix).

The Community Member

Janie Brooks lives in the Country Living community and has two children who attend the school. She has a first grader and a four-year-old in the Headstart program. She has an Associates Degree and plans to go to a nearby university in the fall to complete a teaching degree in special education and/or math. She loves Math. She has been voluntarily substituting at Country Living so that she can get on the job training as she strives to complete a college degree. Only in the past month has she been on the payroll; Ms Bridgers hired her as an assistant for her overcrowded fourth grade. When asked about leadership in the school Mrs. Brooks noted,

> Leadership...part of the leadership here is setting a good example not only for your coworkers but for all students. You show the students what is right and wrong and your actions are good.

She further talked about how the whole school is a family and touched on the fact that if one is out of line it hurts all of us. She described the culture of the school as being like families where they talk things out and take care of each other. She took that family feeling a step further:

> I'd never been to a football homecoming here. I was involved in that because my first grader was in an eight and under team for the cheerleading team. I have never seen a community come together and have so much pride in the football team. Even as far as the parade... They were so involved and so cheerful. And our football team wasn't very good this year. I think we won one or two games or something. But, they all just pulled together. Just the closeness and spirit of it, you could just feel it. They have a lot of pride in this community.

Mrs. Brooks reiterated the same feeling about homework as the parent, Mrs. Hash did:

> We have a set schedule on homework...Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. So on those set days parents know their child is going to have homework. So we have a homework days parents know their child is going to have homework. So we have a homework folder set up. So on those 3 days the teachers make sure those folders are there. And the Wednesday Folders are full of notes that tell us when the test is going to be and what they need

to be studying for. Also, as far as 4th graders, they have planners and they write down what is planned out for that day and the parents have to sign them every day. So that way parents know what is going on in their child's life at school.

Mrs. Brooks was soft spoken and kind as the researcher asked the formal questions. She was not shy about saying "I don't know" if she didn't understand or if she was not sure how to answer the question. Her honesty put the researcher at ease and her passion for the school and the community was evident in her smile and enthusiasm. She talked about what a great feeling she had about the school and how much she had learned by her involvement with the school. Before she started substituting, she was often disappointed or angry about things she didn't understand that were occurring. However, as she became involved, she developed an understanding of how and why the school worked in certain ways and she was much happier than before her involvement. Mrs. Brooks had bonded with the school because her children went to school there, but she bonded with the entire school program when her involvement caused her to walk hand in hand with the teachers. By bringing collective gifts and talents together; Mrs. Brooks shared the values and vision of the school. Her response to parents and other community members who want to get involved is

Parents can be involved in all ways. The fundraisers, coming in to check on your child's progress, homework folders, sign everything that needs to be signed, get involved in everything, volunteer for sports...be a booster. We need to put the word out there...the community needs to donate...vote...copy paper...and time...they would learn a lot about

Country Living and about all schools. I think it would help the school, any school. It would benefit them.

This bright-eyed young mother and community member of Country Living is a testimony of what can happen when the community connects with the school. Her personal mission to volunteer so that she may learn about teaching has turned into a full time job, a shared purpose, a warm relationship with the school and community, and possibilities for much more.

Summary

This chapter described Country Living Elementary School. A view of the school, the school district, and the community were presented. Documents used for Phase I OK-ACTS and Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS Grant Applications were reviewed. A survey taken on-line by the teachers at Country Living was discussed. A site visit and interviews of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member were presented. This chapter has given a holistic view of the data gathered at Case School A: Country Living. Chapter V will give a holistic view of the data gathered at Case School B: City Life.

CHAPTER V

Case School B: City Life Elementary

Introduction

Chapter V will examine Case School B: City Life Elementary. Glimpses of the City Life Elementary School and the community surrounding it will be based on Phase I of the OK-ACTS program and evidence, obstacles, and the action plan for Practice 8: School and Community Connections from the school's Phase II Grant Application. An on-line OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers adds to the holistic picture of this school. Interviews of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member by the researcher gave personal perspectives of City Life Elementary School's connections with the community. The triangulation of documents, surveys, and interviews shared in this chapter gives a descriptive account of City Life Elementary as it becomes a professional learning community facilitating connections with the community

View of City Life Elementary School

City Life Elementary School has the oldest school building in Most, a town in a south central state of the United States. It was established in 1947 and has been home to Most High School, Most Jr. High, and City Life Upper Elementary. The building has gone through four major renovations and has recently completed a gym/art/music addition. According to the school's website, City Life Elementary is one of the only schools to be totally contained within the city limits of Most.

City Life Elementary currently has a 41% Title I population and qualifies for two full-time Title I Reading Specialists. Other literacy efforts include multitudes of books; the school houses over 18,000 volumes in the media center. The media center has one

full-time media specialist and one half-time assistant who is available to students for checking out books, research, and technological instruction during regular school hours. The library is open after hours for special projects, such as the chess club and special research efforts by students. The new art lab has been implemented for all students as part of the fine arts integrated curriculum. Art, music, physical education, and Spanish are the fine arts offered at City Life (City Life's website).

The PTA has traditionally been very active and is an essential part of the total school program at City Life Elementary. The school typically boasts 100% PTA membership and supports all programs available to the students at the school, both during the school day and during extramural activities. Home-school partnerships are vital to the school. Beginning with early childhood, PTA, Title I, and other funds strengthen educational programs to enhance and help the school make adequate yearly progress (AYP). The combined efforts of students, teachers, parents, and the community make City Life an accredited school that brings honor to its school district.

View of Most School District

The Most Public School District is the fourth largest district in the state with a student population of around 18,487. The district encompasses approximately 159 square miles and includes some 600 acres of property with 2.3 million square feet of buildings (Most website).

. The district is founded upon strong student achievement, highly qualified educators, and parent and community connections to the school. According to the Most Chamber of Commerce web site, "Children are cared for, nurtured and treasured as well as informed, motivated and educated." The low teacher to student ratio of one to 18

expresses the commitment to quality schools. (The 18 to 1 ratio might not be true for the 2003-2004 school year due to budget cuts, but is posted on the Most Chamber of Commerce Website) The district has 1,300 certified teachers and administrators. The district includes two high schools (10 –12), five junior high schools (7 – 9), and 20 elementary schools (K – 6). There are specialized programs for students ranging from academically gifted to high-challenge students. Most has an alternative school for those whose academic needs cannot be met in the traditional classroom setting.

Students in Most School District may participate in a wide variety of activities, which stress academic achievement and community service. Competitive athletics and academic activities are offered in various grades including the academic bowl, band, golf, music, swimming, tennis, wrestling, basketball, cheerleading, football, track, baseball, cross country, gymnastics, soccer, softball, volleyball, and pom pom.

"Each year several high school students are named National Merit Finalists and Academic All Staters. ACT and SAT scores in Most are above state and national averages" (Most Chamber of Commerce website). Additionally, millions of dollars in scholarships are awarded each year to graduating seniors. Most school district is committed to a strong educational foundation for each student in the community and promotes community connections to the school.

View of City Life's Community

Located in the heart of the South Central United States, Most is south of the state's capitol city and along the Interstate 36 corridor. With the development of the interstate highways, Most grew from a small town of 1,700 in 1960 to a metropolitan community of over 41,000 citizens in 2004. Aside from easy access to the state's largest

city greater metropolitan area, Most has grown because of the outstanding public school system and quality, affordable housing. Most is close to an airport, an Air Force Base, a university, downtown of the state's largest city, the Federal Aviation Agency, and thousands of businesses, industries, public and private schools, as well as first rate recreational and cultural facilities. Most was founded in 1889. The early settlers came on train, horseback, wagon, and foot to make a claim.

> According to local historians, the town's original name was Hushbeck, as designated by the railroad company. However, a railroad employee reported to be either a conductor or a brakeman, lived in a boxcar at the camp and had difficulty receiving his mail. He painted his name – Most – on a board and nailed it on the boxcar. When a postmaster was appointed, he continued to call the settlement, (Most Chamber of Commerce website).

The city of Most is dedicated to its schools and the school district is the largest employer in the city. Realizing the importance of youth to the city's future, the Most Chamber of Commerce is a strong advocate of education. Parents, teachers, and members of the community are proud of both individual and collective school accomplishments.

According to City Life Principal, Pamela Opendorr, it is a great community. She has worked at Central Office, but being a principal is her first love. The children, teachers, and parents drew her away from the mundane paperwork at Central Office to City Life Elementary School.

Phase 1 OK-ACTS

Ms. Pamela Opendorr, principal at City Life Elementary School, also carries a laptop computer as part of her completion of Phase I of OK-ACTS. It is set up in her office, but she uses it for out-of –town professional meetings and shares it with others in the school as needed. Ms. Opendorr is one of over 800 principals and superintendents who went through professional training to learn about IDEALS. She learned how to lead the staff in becoming a professional learning community, had teachers from the schools take the TAGLIT survey on line, and wrote an action plan implementing one of the 10 practices of high achieving schools using technology as a tool.

Phase II OETT-OK-ACTS Grant Application

City Life Elementary School is one of 21 schools in a south central state of the United States to win an OETT/OK-ACTS Phase II grant. From the general information page of the school's grant application, it should be noted that this suburban school has 496 of the district's 18, 487 students. School level ethnicity includes 77 percent Caucasian, 13 percent Native American, 8 percent Hispanic, 3 percent African American and 2 percent Asian/Eastern Pacific Islanders. Of the 496 students listed 25 are in Pre-kindergarten, 71 in kindergarten, 74 in first grade, 61 in second grade, 64 in third grade, 75 in fourth grade, 77 in fifth grade, and 74 in sixth grade. Thirty-five percent of the students are on free and/or reduced lunches as of October 1, 2002. In 2001, the school's total academic performance index (API) was 1115, and in 2002 it was recorded at 1035.

The grant that City Life wrote is titled, "LAP IT UP!" (LIU). Part I of LIU is focused on professional development that is moving the school from teacher-centered learning to learner-centered learning. The teachers worked with the OK-ACTS team to

develop in-service on preparing lessons that support a spiraling, scientifically-based technology curriculum that will give students broad-based knowledge of how technology can serve them now and throughout their lives. Further training will provide the staff with skill to write lessons plans that will allow the students to progress through the technology curriculum. Part II of LIU will focus on increasing involvement and communication. The school will open its labs to parents and community members one night a month and invite them to participate in projects. It is hoped that these projects will increase involvement at City Life and promote the school's vision of modeling life-long learning. It is the hope of City Life that parents will participate in this opportunity to gain the needed technology skills to assist their children with school work and learn to navigate the Internet and the school website and communicate with the school via e-mail.

Using technology, 27 Dell Notebooks, 9 LAN ports, and 2 mobile carts as tools, school stakeholders hope to accomplish three of the ten practices of high achieving schools as they implement Parts I and II of this grant. The school has chosen Practice 1: Shared Vision; Practice 2; Teacher Collaboration and Learning, and Practice 8: School and Community Connections. This research is based on Practice 8: School and Community Connections, thus particular interest will be centered on emerging themes that support this practice.

Supporting Evidence

The TAGLIT surveys revealed the need for increased computer access and literacy at home. The mission statement for the school is as follows:

> It is the mission of City Life Elementary to create a learning environment where students become self-directed learners and productive citizens to the classroom as well as society.

This statement supports shared responsibility and a need for respect for one another. Another support of Practice 8 is that 100% of the faculty has been trained in Great Expectations. They have also been trained in Ruby Payne research on home/school connections. In addition, the entire faculty has established a Tech Team for implementation of technology and increased communication with parents. The entire school is making a committed effort to increase parent involvement in all areas, despite a few obstacles.

Obstacles

City Life wrote this grant for technology without a formal written technology plan. Many teachers lacked adequate technology skills themselves, so they were not modeling the use of technology for their students. If the teachers learn to use the technology better and in more innovative ways, they can model technology-enriched instruction. There is limited time and money. The children taught in this Title I school are highly transient and have little access to computer and/or the Internet in their homes. Parents lack the technological expertise to assist their children. Couple this lack of expertise with a need for increased communication, and the results can be overwhelming. However, these teachers and their principal turned their lemons into lemonade. Their actions moved this school forward.

Action Plan

The tech team for grant implementation is meeting monthly and is planning together with OK-ACTS mentors. The new mobile computer lab is being used for project-based learning in all grades. All of the students are going into the lab to work on class web pages, but these grades are going through the project-based curriculum in the following order:

2nd grade- Students are working on projects that involve databases

3rd grade- Students are trying to publish a product

4th grade- Student are using database and/or spreadsheets and creating graphs

5th grade- Student are creating PowerPoint presentations

6th grade- Students will create multi-media projects

The teachers used the mobile computer lab for teacher training when the OK-ACTS mentors presented six days of staff development. The mobile lab was different to the teachers because they were used to MAC format. The teachers also learned to use software applications and to improve their preparations for their grade level project-based lessons. Each teacher is learning how to make a website, and to maintain it.

On the school's website, the researcher looked at each teacher's link. It was found that twenty-one of the twenty-two classroom teachers have created a website. Of the specialty teachers, the media specialist, two Title I teachers, one of three resource teachers, and the art teacher, also maintain a website. The P.E., music, and speech teacher do not. The websites range from very simple to more advanced skills used in their creations. All of the websites have a welcome, assignments, projects, calendar, and resources section to their homepages. The websites are helping parents to find out the

week's homework assignments in each class and the notes home about upcoming events and parties.

The most creative and most visited website at City Life is the art teacher's website. Two hundred thirty-four of the children in the school have displayed art on Artsonia, Education Through Art, a site available on-line at [http://www.artsonia.com]. The site is dedicated to children's artwork. It provides an art museum, a gift shop, e-cards, information for teachers, and information for parents. Artsonia is an educational company founded to use the power of the Internet to unleash the creativity of young people all over the world. The company promotes students' pride, self-esteem, and multicultural understanding. It also helps to increase family involvement through helping the student's art education from the school. The site showcases 972 art pieces from 234 contributing artists from City Life. It can be viewed by family members and friends around the world. Thus far, the site has recorded 6,823 visitors. The most visited artist is a girl in second grade; she has had 287 visitors. Out of 352 comments by those who visited the website, she had the most comments, too. The site has a fan club. A City Life first grader has 25 fan club members. The possibilities for involving parents and the community in this project are ongoing. Parents and visitors can purchase the children's art which can be transferred onto a mouse pad, coffee cup, or plate. Fifteen percent of the revenue from these keepsakes goes back to the school to buy art supplies. Parents, relatives and friends can view the artwork online, send positive comments to the artist, join the artist's "Fan Club" and help the school. The parent and community connections at this art teacher's site speak highly of the grant's efforts to update classroom web pages and use authentic teaching practices using technology as a tool. This site is motivating other teachers to

explore the possibilities. The positive rippling effects of an attractive, child-centered home page with links to display art can increase school and community connections.

Other ways that City Life patrons are connecting to the school is the monthly "Lap-it-Up Tech Nights" where they are leaning to navigate the Internet and school website, communicate with school via e-mail, and submit information and/or articles to the online newsletter, "Bear Tracks."

The many ways that families and communities are connecting using technology as a tool At City Life are having positive effects. Further information about technology usage at the school will be shared through the survey that the City Life teachers took on-line.

OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers

In October of 2003, thirty-one teachers at City Life took the OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers. This on-line survey was taken by the teachers at all twenty-one schools that received an OETT/OK-ACTS 2003 Grant. A copy of the survey instrument is in Appendix E. Parts of the survey will be displayed in tables in this chapter. The purpose of the survey was to find the degree of support teachers have for using technology in teaching and learning, the current technology strengths of the teachers the ways they are using technology in the classroom, and the obstacles they might need to overcome to use technology as a tool in their teaching.

At City Life Elementary School, thirty teachers use the computer daily and one of the teachers surveyed uses it weekly. None of the teachers rated themselves as experts, but six professed beginner level, nineteen were intermediate, and six said they were advanced when asked about their general expertise for using a computer.

See Table 9 for the data.

Table 9

School B Frequency of Responses on Computer Expertise

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Expert
5	6	19	6

Table 10

School B Frequency of on Computer Usage

Computer Usage	Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Use of Computers	0	0	0	1	30
Personal Use	1	3	0	4	23
Classroom Record Keeping	8	2	2	7	12
Classroom Instruction	0	5	12	9	5
School Communications	0	0	1	8	22

Eighty-seven percent of the teachers use the computer for personal purposes nearly every day of every week. See Table 10 for the data. Sixty-one percent of the teachers use their computers to keep grades and attendance, but the others never or rarely use them for record keeping. Less than half, about 45 % use their computers for classroom instruction each week, whereas 38% use their computer to improve instruction monthly. See Table 11 to see how computer are being used at City Life.

Table 11

Frequency of Responses on Application and Tool Proficiency

	Not at All	Basic	Moderate	Well	Expert
Word processing (Word)	2	7	6	13	3
Spreadsheet programs (Excel)	17	13	6	5	0
Presentation (PowerPoint)	7	13	7	4	0

Database programs	**16**	**10**	**3**	**2**	**0**
Email	**0**	**8**	**6**	**12**	**5**
Internet/Web Browsers	**0**	**8**	**4**	**15**	**4**
Calendar to Schedule	**8**	**12**	**4**	**7**	**0**
Publishing programs (Acrobat)	**13**	**10**	**4**	**3**	**1**
Graphics programs (Photo Shop, Paint Shop Pro)	**12**	**11**	**5**	**2**	**1**
Scanner	**13**	**9**	**4**	**5**	**0**
Hand-held device	**24**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**0**
Graphing calculator	**27**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**0**
Digital Camera	**8**	**13**	**5**	**2**	**3**
Smartboard	**27**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**0**
LCD projector	**16**	**10**	**2**	**3**	**0**
Removable Media (CD Rom)	**10**	**13**	**6**	**2**	**0**

Approximately, 25 % of the teachers are using the computer for communicating with other teachers, students, and parents on a weekly basis while seventy percent are using the computer each day through e-mail access and Internet access. Ninety-three percent of the teachers are capable of using word processing, PowerPoint presentation software, and Excel spreadsheet software.

When asked in the survey to respond about their personal strengths using the current technology at City Life written responses included:

> I have knowledge in using presentation software and how to utilize the Internet for research. I am comfortable with using the computers and LCD projectors and I'm not afraid to try new things.
>
> I use the computer for averaging grades (Making the Grade), email, word processing, spreadsheet, and Internet research. I teach my students to utilize PowerPoint, Inspiration, Internet research, and word processing.

Others were less optimistic but honest about their personal strengths in computer usage:

> None.
>
> I am a beginner
>
> .
>
> I don't feel that I have any strengths. I am able to use the computer and do some trouble shooting.

At City Life the access to computers is high. Teachers have computers in the library, in the labs, and one or more in all classrooms. The teachers also have access to the mobile units (laptops) that they won in their grant. The most frequently used technology applications (See Table 12) are word processing, email, and Internet searches. The teachers are using this technology in different ways. Seventy-seven percent of the teachers are sometimes or frequently considering how to incorporate technology into student learning experiences, 51% are beginning to work collaboratively to plan and review lessons that involve the use of technology, and 74% are beginning to look for technology related activities to incorporate in teaching basic skills and meeting PASS Objectives. Sixty-eight percent of the teachers are beginning to look for technology related activities that will improve problem-solving skills and critical thinking.

Table 12

Frequency of Responses on Ways Technology is Used in the Classroom

Classroom Uses	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Incorporate technology in lesson plans	**2**	**5**	**21**	**3**	**0**
Collaborate with other teachers to plan and review technology	**4**	**11**	**13**	**3**	**0**
	Never	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Frequently**	**Always**
Observe other teachers integrate technology for instruction	**4**	**3**	**13**	**10**	**1**

Gather information for lesson using technology	**2**	**3**	**16**	**10**	**0**
Create lesson plans using technology	**5**	**10**	**9**	**4**	**3**
Design instruction that encourages students to use technology	**3**	**13**	**10**	**14**	**1**
Incorporate problem-solving activities for students that require technology	**9**	**8**	**14**	**0**	**0**
Design activities for student that use technology for creativity	**10**	**10**	**10**	**1**	**0**
Design activities for student that use technology tools for collaboration with peers and outside experts	**11**	**8**	**12**	**0**	**0**
Design student activities that us technology tools to facilitate discussion and reflection on learning	**10**	**11**	**10**	**0**	**0**
Design student activities for analyzing data	**17**	**7**	**7**	**0**	**0**
Design student activities to encourage researching on the Internet	**10**	**7**	**11**	**3**	**0**
Encourage student presentation using technology	**16**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**2**
Teach students to evaluate using technology	**19**	**5**	**5**	**1**	**1**
Deliver instructional information using technology	**5**	**9**	**15**	**2**	**0**

In support of Practice 8: School and Community Connections, when asked if the teachers at City Life use technology to communicate with parents, 35 % said that they sometimes do, 41% frequently do, and 6% always use technology to communicate with

parents. Most of this communication is done with parents through e-mail or notes on their classroom websites. Examples of website communications that support these parent connections are in Figure 1.

Figure 1 ***School B Example Websites***

This is going to be a busy year. There is so much to learn in first grade. We will all need to work together to make this a successful time.

In order to keep you well informed, Thursday Folders will be sent home each week. Please be sure to go over your child's work. As you look over the work, you will be able to help your student correct any missed problems and reinforce concepts.

My class will have homework Monday through Thursday. Homework will consist of one page of math and an oral reading assignment. Please help your child complete and return his homework each and every day. This will help your child build confidence in the areas being taught in class.

Grades will be taken on work completed in class. All work sent home is for review and will not be included in the final score.

Thanks for your help in this matter. It's going to be a Great Year!

If you have any questions, you may email by clicking on the link below.

Welcome 5th grade Bearcat Cubs and parents to our class web site! This site will help you stay informed about events happening in our class, assignments, and expectations. Students will be publishing work here, so visit often and enjoy!

First Grade

Welcome to our website! This will enable you to catch of glimpse of some of the activities we are doing in our classroom.

WE DID IT!!!!!!

All 22 of our students will be able to take part in our January 30th Pizza

Party!! This tells me that we have some really hard workers. This calls for a new challenge.

When asked how the teachers use technology to communicate with community members, the responses supported that community connections were being used at City Life. Forty-one percent of the teachers sometimes used technology to communicate with community members and nineteen percent of the teachers frequently or always use technology to communicate with the community. Classroom websites examples of community member's connections to City Life included the examples in Figure 2.

Figure 2 ***School B Websites With Community Connections***

Partners in Excellence

OFFICERS:

President.....Karah Sidd
1st Vice.....Jana Benkins
2nd Vice.....Randy Teis
Secretary.....Time Tamproot
Treasurer.....Moody Morris

This year has had a great start! We had a very successful open house and would like to thank everyone that attended.

Our Fall Fundraiser is under way. Please take some time to look it over and see all of the new changes that we have made. Your support is VERY important. This will be an especially hard year financially for our school, and we would like to provide as much support as possible.

Our Reflections program is now beginning. This year's theme is "Signs of Courage." Jeff Benkins is our chairperson and he's doing a great job! If you have any questions or would like to help out please leave him a message at the office and he will get right back with you. Entry deadlines for all categories is October 25th.

Our T-shirts have been very popular! We have them for sale every morning at the student store or you can send an order with your student and we will deliver it to their homeroom. We also have long sleeved t-shirts available. T-shirts are $10 and long sleeved shirts are $12. We will also be taking pre-orders for sweatshirts soon.

We are going to be sponsoring many reading nights this year. Our goal is to have one each month. Some will include meetings and some will not. We hope they will be a great experience for our students! We will have great storytellers each time with a different theme. Come check us out for a night of no hassle, no cost entertainment!

The Valentine's Day celebration was so much fun. The children were very excited to distribute their goodies and cards. We had a ton of sugar: chocolate, cookies, cupcakes, suckers and RED Kool-aid. Thank you for sending the treats. I know the kid's appreciated it.

This week the students have had a chance to work on the Lap Tops and the Notebooks. They did a fabulous job. I was blown away by the ability they displayed. Our school was fortunate enough to have received a grant which purchased several more computers that we are able to check-out and use. Our class project is to produce a book which contains one letter of the alphabet on each sheet of paper and clipart that goes with that particular letter. YES, that sounds hard for little people, but they will rise to the challenge.

We are planning the spring party. We have some great ideas for activities. We have sent home notes requesting treats, food items, drinks etc. Please get those to school as soon as possible. The theme is a "Beach Party." I hope the weather cooperates! If it is warm, I encourage the children to dress the part. They can wear shorts, sandals, sunglasses, T-shirts, hats, etc.(Remember to stay within the dress code). We are planning to watch *Finding Nemo* while eating ice cream sundaes. Then we will go outside to soak up some rays and have recreational time.

Another way, that City Life is connecting to parents and to the community is by posting homework assignments on the classroom websites. Thirty-one percent of the teachers do this sometimes, twenty-two percent of the teachers post assignments frequently, and twenty-five percent post assignments always. Good examples of posting on the website are included in Figure 3.

Figure 3 ***School B Posted Homework Assignments***

Dear Parents,
The year is progressing nicely, and I am seeing lots of growth in your children. I'd like to pass on some items of general information:

1. Homework will consist of a reading assignment most nights. Just indicate that you have listened to your child read by signing the bookmark.

2. Thursday Folders will be sent home with papers for you to keep. Some papers may need to be signed and returned the next day, as does the folder itself.

3. Spelling will begin the second 9 weeks. Our routine involves a pre-test on Monday (these tests will go home that day), various practice activities Tues.-Thurs., and a final test on Friday.

Your support concerning the procedures above will be greatly appreciated and will make "the difference: in the learning of your children.

February and March

READING

Remember we have reading homework every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Please have your child read orally.

MATH
Multiplication tables 0-5
Addition and subtraction practice

SOCIAL STUDIES
We are studying the three branches of the Federal Government. We will be memorizing the Preamble to the Constitution.

About ten percent of the teachers at City Life are allowing students to use word-processing both for in-classroom and out-of-classroom assignments. These students use the Internet for research. They use software for basic skill practice, and they use the computer to analyze data or keep records on spreadsheets sometimes. Twenty –nine of the thirty-one teachers feel that technology used by teachers and students is exciting. They believe that students learn better when they use technology to investigate and issue or solve a problem. While eighteen of the teachers think computer technology makes their jobs easier, eleven say that it makes their jobs more complicated. Twenty-four teachers responded that technology helps students better understand what they learn.

Thirty of the teachers want to learn more about technology for teaching and learning, and twenty-five of the teachers at City Life feel that they will be better teachers by using technology as part of their instructional practices. Comments included:

> I would like to learn to take virtual fieldtrips for science and social studies.
>
> I would like to expand and explore concepts and to practice previously taught concepts; an example would be visiting websites of various authors and illustrators and the site of Weekly Reader.
>
> I'd like to be able to do the mobile lab more often for research.
>
> I'd like to use PowerPoint to help students organize what they are learning.

All of the teachers on the staff at City Life feel as though they get continuous support from their principal as they try to increase their technological expertise. At the site visit it was apparent that Principal Pamela Opendorr has vision and is a strong leader; through her actions and everyday deeds, she is committed to helping teachers and students use technology effectively. She leads by example. She seems to have a clear knowledge about how technology can support best practices in instruction and she uses e-mail for communicating with teachers, extra staff, students, parents, and the community members who help her school. She constantly highlighted the efforts of teachers who are attempting to use technology as the researcher toured the school. Her staff's comments about her leadership on the survey include:

> Our principal provides training and personal help where needed.
>
> Our principal is very proactive in encouraging everyone in our school to use the equipment that we have been able to get with our grant. We have everything available to us that has been mentioned in this survey.

Our principal provides many resources. Other teachers share ideas and websites. Businesses in the community are proud of our grant and make donations.

Our principal encourages us to use our e-mail to communicate with parents and we are also required to keep a web page updated. She also sends us important information on our e-mail instead of printing it out and putting it in our boxes.

When the teachers responded to what obstacles they needed to overcome in order to use technology in their teaching, their responses were almost predictable after reading the responses from Case School B: Country Living. The teachers at City Life reported that time was the number one obstacle preventing them from using technology as a tool.

Time, I don't have the time to plan and find the information that I need or the time to organize it enough to teach.

Time to plan.

Time is the major obstacle right now.

More time so as not to take away from my instructional time, more knowledge and practice.

More time to plan!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Time to search and develop

TIME.

More time in the teaching day to use technology-there is not enough time, as it is to give students concrete learning experiences.

Other obstacles mentioned in the survey responses were professional training and practice, practice, practice. When the researcher stopped to think about how many teachers are using technology at City Life, it was amazing. While most teachers embrace change at City Life, a small minority resist it. It is a slow process, time consuming process, but City Life has a technology-rich environment. The more attention the school receives, the more progress, the teachers seem to make.

This survey will be given again in April, but results will not be tabulated in time for this research. The enthusiasm students and teachers displayed on site about their new technology when the researcher observed were much different from what the initial survey suggested. The implementation of the grant has created change. Teacher perceptions will greatly differ during the post survey because these teachers and students opened their doors at night to share their new technology with parents and the community. The results were positive; the parent and community connections were evolving.

In summary, this survey gives details about support for technology, strengths of teachers using technology, ways teachers want to use technology in the classroom, and obstacles they need to overcome. This survey combined with the grant application gives an even clearer picture of school and community connections at Country Living. At the site visit to the school four people were interviewed: the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member. These interviews enrich the understanding and add color to the bigger picture of school and community connections that are facilitated at Country Living, a school in the process of becoming a professional learning community.

Site Visit and Interviews

The Principal

Pamela Opendorr is the principal of City Life. She has been the principal for four years. She is an admitted work-a-holic and spends many hours during the day and after the children go home serving her constituents. Her children are grown and her husband owns two businesses that keep him busy. " We kind of meet in the middle," she assured the researcher. Her leadership philosophy is narrowed to one word...service. She stated:

> I don't ask the teachers to do anything I am not willing to do, and so before I think of anything I want the teacher to do or the direction we want to go, I think about... is this something that I would be willing to do and if we go at it from that way, can we have total collaboration about decisions that are made. Everything, every decision I make is based on is it good for kids? You know what would be best practice for students. And so we start from there and then we go with the best for the teachers and then move on out from there.

Ms. Opendorr does not see herself as one of those "information is power" type people. She does not keep secrets. If she knows it, the staff will know it. She uses e-mail to communicate with her staff so as not to interrupt them during instructional time. At the end of the day, she calls for buses, day-care, and parent pick-ups over the intercom. Ms. Opendorr does inside lunch duty every day so that she can get to know her students and ensure that teachers have a duty-free lunch. She helps with bus duty every day, too. All of the state mandates, shortfalls, and decreased staff have her quite busy. She is an

in-demand lady who receives much respect from her staff, students, parents, and community.

Ms. Opendorr is full of pride for the school that she leads as she gives a tour to the researcher. It is an older building, remodeled, refurbished, and reinvented as an elementary building that was formerly home to Most High School. The office appears to be about the center of the building and is down a long hall from the main entrance. Halls are very narrow in some places, especially in the older part where the office is. Directly across from the office the whole wall is a beautiful mural of a colorful, outdoor scene. It is a picture where the mascot might come to life and truly live. The huge library and space where the mobile computer lab (the one won in the grant) is kept, has an old feeling with modern conveniences and is right next to the office area. Other murals cover many of the hallways to brighten and give aesthetic quality to the older building. The classrooms are colorful and lively, the teacher's lounge is well-equipped. Teachers and staff were very friendly and parents roam the halls freely. A student store is located in one corner of the building near the Kindergarten rooms. The PTO operates the store. It is pleasant to find out that the parents have a room of their own in this unending school of rooms. Ms. Opendorr's comments were:

> We have a real good core group of PTA parents...not just moms...we have Mr. Moms and Mr. Dads, too. Some people don't want their parents at school, but I don't feel that way. They do way too much for us for me to exclude them from here. For me it is just another pair of eyes. There is a clear line that they don't cross as far as getting in the way of the teachers... and they do and that kind of thing, but we have that

conversation really often about what is appropriate. They do not go in our teacher's lounge because they just know that that is a place where teachers can relax and they do not have to worry...I have given the them (the parents) a room to work in. They have their own workroom.

In the parents' workroom Ms. Opendorr has parents stapling papers together for Thursday Folder notes and delivering them to the teachers. That is why she gives them a room; they deserve it because they are a big help, she adds.

Ms. Opendorr tells the researcher that the reason City Life won the OETT/OK-ACTS Grants is that they are so pitiful. She said she was familiar with Jamie McKenzie, the technologist, and had read his books and dreamed about what they could do with technology. She indicated that they are going to learn how to use technology, but the purpose at City Life is much bigger...they are going to use technology to make learning and teaching better.

To help engage parents in homework strategies is one of Ms. Opendorr's goals. She is on the lookout to help her students be successful. She noted that they have a transient population, but she feels that strategies using technology as a tool may help this Title I school. She and her staff are getting in touch with parents via e-mail. More people are getting access in the homes, and that is a big thing for the faculty trying to get that word out to parents. All of the teachers have their own web sites; Mrs. Opendorr has encouraged them to put their homework on it.

Parents are e-mailing the school more often, Ms. Opendorr explained. She told parents to send her a very short e-mail. She gets 10-100 emails a day. She tries to check the e-mail three times a day, but if they are too long, she tells parents to call.

The principal at City Life is aware that no matter how many computers are available or how much training teachers have, some do not talk the talk and some that talk the talk, do not walk the walk. Effective use of the new technology requires changes in teaching; but once teachers are successful, that in itself, is a catalyst for change. City Life teachers' new web sites are changing the teachers, students, parents, and community's ideas about technology benefits and the possibilities for school and community connections. Next, the researcher interviewed a teacher at City Life who is using the grant technologies as a teaching tool in her instructional program.

The Teacher

At City Life, technology is an integral part of a comprehensive plan for improving student learning. More than half the teachers are becoming comfortable with learning and using technology tools, but none are experts. They understand the obstacles, but many are ready, set, go. Donna Bixler is one such teacher. Mrs. Bixler is a team player on the City Life staff and she counts on her colleagues for help when technology overwhelms her. Mrs. Bixler stated,

> We're going to make a strong group of teacher leaders. This is not a competitive thing. We're all in this together. We pull together to make things work for the students and everyone involved.

Mrs. Bixler is a media specialist. Figure 4 shows the suggestions she posted on her website for students in February at the time of the researcher's interviews.

Figure 4 **School B Science Fair Website**

How to Cite Sources
More Citations
These links will provide guidelines on how to correctly cite sources for science fair and other projects.

Science Fair
Discovery Science Fair
Create A Graph
Ask A Scientist
These sites will assist students with science fair needs.

Fun Printables
Fun With Poetry
Fact Monster
Create A Virtual Jack-O-Lantern

When asked about technology from the OETT/ACT-ACTS grant, the researcher found that Mrs. Bixler is in charge of the mobile lap top carts that the school purchased with grant money. She explained the "LAP IT UP" night for fifth/sixth grade was centered around the Science Fair. The students and their parents located web sites for projects. She also showed parents how to email the teachers. She showed them how to create bar graphs on line with the web sites. This way, students took pride in their science projects and finding things about their topics. She indicated that the whole project was highly successful.

She went on to explain how this technology allows student to become active learners and to develop their problem-solving skills and creativity skills. Of course, science fair projects can be done without all of these technology tools, but by using the word processors, students were able to improve the quality of their finished products. If students have the tools, and it is the way the real world is headed, then why would the teachers, the students, and the parents of City Life not want to use technology enhancements for their science fair projects?

Mrs. Bixler said that she had donated the scanner that was in the library to the art teacher because she won a $500.00 grant to belong to an on-line art site called Artsonia.

The whole school was really excited about the children being able to publish their art on this web site. Mrs. Bixler stated,

> The parents can look at it, make comments...anybody can make a comment about it. E-mails have arrived from dads overseas, who can view their children's artwork. Some were from Afghanistan...I wish more art teachers knew about it because the kids...it motivates them to do their best work. The scanner has now been moved to her room...we're getting a new one for in here...I told her to just take it and I'll order another one...They are learning scanning and that process... and how it gets uploaded to the website.

Parents and the community are important to our school says Mrs. Bixler:

> You can't come into our building on any given day without running into one of our parents. They are involved. Our school would not run without them. Last year was my first year, and I had never run a book fair. They just said we do it like this and you just kind of come along and learn the ropes. They are just so active.
>
> The outside community members...well we have a teacher who is on the police force. And the fire department...And the public library, we take our kids over there and they stay in good contact with us, especially during science fairs. That is like a team effort between us, the public library, our teachers, our students, and our parents. The sixth grade teacher had great luck with her students. She had the most students place this year. It is very much a team effort. They visit with our students and they take them

on a tour. They show our students different things on the computer in the computer lab. I stay in touch with them. Like they are looking for this book...I don't have it here...do you have it over there? They recognize a lot of our students because we are in such close proximity that they have a more personal relationship with them so...that's exciting.

Having technology for technology's sake is not wise. Educators, parents, and students using this science fair project used the technology to enhance the learning objectives for the science fair projects. Thus, the technology that these students used motivated their efforts and provided a fresh and different perspective to reach student's learning styles. This project is an example of how teachers can know the capabilities of their students and harness every available human and technological resource to turn out winning projects. It is no wonder that Ms. Bixler's smile widened and her enthusiasm and appreciation of the whole project increased as she continued to share:

> We are trying as a faculty to make ourselves more available. Like I said, with the LAP IT UP nights and the science fair...I know I always bring up science fair, but it is such a saturated time for the technology. You know there are days I have kids catch me after school, and we'll stay and work on those...or their teacher would stay and work with them. We're in the process of when we have our LAP IT UP night, to talk with the parents concerning setting aside we have certain days for an hour and a half when the students or parents could stay after school when they have projects due like that, whether the programs is PowerPoint, Microsoft Word...which nights would be better, and what is a good time for it to end as far as

getting off work and picking students up. We are trying to talk with them face-to-face rather than sending out a letter. To get their input...to say hey, we want to be a bigger part of those kids success and we'll make the commitment to stay and open up the school now that we have all of this technology.

Ms. Bixler also commented on the changing vision of the school since the winning of the OETT/OK-ACTS grant. Written into the grant was an action plan for LAP IT UP nights. She claimed now that they have begun that process, it is just going to grow. They will build on that vision. This year they have showed students and parents how to log on to websites, but next year they want to give parents even more tools. So the excitement of success and knowing that they have filled their whole cafeteria with interested parents and students is a sign that they have to change the ways that they do school. It is a good start and one that every teacher and the principal can be proud of. It is a contagious collaborative effort that she continues to praise.

Southern Financial is one of the businesses that Mrs. Bixler noted that was helping City Life. She praised their efforts in motivating teachers by bringing in special edible treats for the teacher's lounge. The business is located across the street and they invited teachers to have lunch at their place, too. When businesses show their willingness to understand and support education, it is like a breath of fresh air to the school.

The final interview question asked Mrs. Bixler what she wished the researcher would have asked her. By then, the last bell of the day had sounded and the media center had filled with about 40 children setting up chess games. Her final response to the question was:

> One thing I wrote to the teachers this year is, you know it's moving to see their commitment and passion for their jobs. We have a lot of students with special needs. I think it just takes special people to come in and nurse those wounds and make them feel good about themselves...we have a treasure of teachers at this school....

The Parent

The research has shown that strong relationships and trust among participants are vital to a collaborative process. When Ms. Opendorr, the City Life principal, brought together groups of people, especially parents, she knew that she was dealing with diverse interests and backgrounds. However, her goal was to maximize parent participation. The parent Ms. Opendorr chose for the researcher was proactive about City Life and the new grant. It was apparent that she had been involved every step of the way.

The interview took place in the Parent Room, which is close to the teacher workroom so that teachers who needed help can count on parents to run papers, assemble Thursday Folder materials, and watch classes for short periods of time. The flexibility of the parents and the structure of the process make parent involvement accepted at City Life with gratitude. Parents embrace volunteering their time, fundraising, and ideas about what makes a good school.

Upon closing the Parent Room, Jana Benkins, mother of a first grader at City Life, opened the conversation by explaining the Pennies for Pasta effort at the school. She explained that the school was raising money for the leukemia society and did not keep any of the money. The PTA also does a food drive at Thanksgiving and is in touch with the Student Council, too. The parents are always involved in the red ribbon parade every

year. This year City Life won the spirit stick. The parents do so much here; they are involved in the community; Jana's husband was also in the building helping on his day off.

When asked about the vision of the school, Jana said that improvements are always being made. The PTA is trying to raise money to improve the playground and that would be good. Specifically Jana cited:

> Our school is the oldest school in the district, so it needs some improvements. The murals in the hallways are beautiful, but it would be nice to have a big foyer entryway into our school. It wouldn't be so boring and it would be more pleasant for the kids. It might make them want to be here.

Southern Financial is having a positive effect on the school according to Jana. They have adopted the school and what that means is, if there is a need, they help out. For example, for the red ribbons for the Red Ribbon Parade...they work with the Student Council and sold hot dogs with parents at the event, too. They also helped in some special way for the Teacher of the Year, the PTA Teacher of the Year, and for Principal of the Year. Jana went on to say that every single school in Most has been adopted by a business in the community. The principal and teachers feel lucky that Southern Financial has supported the teachers, the principal, and are making a difference at City Life.

Ms. Opendorr has the respect of Jana as well as other parents. The parents volunteer in classrooms and they just do whatever needs to be done. With all of the cuts due to shortfalls, Jana said that they had lost some people that the school really needed. She went on to explain that she thought that Ms. Opendorr was doing three jobs this year.

The school lost their Assistant Principal, and the counselor hours were cut back. When the school secretary got sick and was gone for three weeks, the parents came in and answered the phone while she was gone. When the parents are asked to fulfill a responsibility and they can do it, whatever it is, they will try to find a way to do it because City Life has such a good group of parents.

Jana lamented that it would be a while before her child got to be involved in the LAP IT UP nights because she has a first grader, but she knows all about the event from other parents and from her child's teacher. She explains,

> A friend of mine has a fifth grader and she is excited about the fact that she can go on line and find her child's homework. I know that we are all excited about that now that we have all of this new technology. We want to learn how to use the LCD projector because we have this bright idea to have a movie night in the gym and show it on the wall.
>
> My daughter's teacher said that all of this new technology is helping reading skills. I am excited that we have all of these computers in our classrooms, the labs, and the media center...If our kids don't learn this kind of stuff, they are going to be hurting five or ten years from now...Even families that hardly have any money want their children to be successful.

Continuing, Jana noted that a couple of teachers have been Nationally Board Certified, and she is impressed that the principal would promote that for the teachers at City Life. She thinks it raised the bar for families when the bar is raised for teachers. She feels as if those teachers who go back to school brought more positive to the school.

Jana said that by being at school, she has gotten to know the teachers; it is a family atmosphere where everybody is concerned about the kids.

Jana continued by adding that her daughter's teacher telephones her. The teacher calls her if there is a problem and she encourages Jana and other parents to go on-line for assignments. In turn, Jana encouraged other parents to, "Ask questions...Sometimes I know before I was more involved in PTA or volunteering the answers weren't as clear... the more parents that get involved at City Life the more things we can do that is for fun for the kids."

The Community Member

Ms. Opendorr wanted public involvement early on as the school wrote the OETT/OK-ACTS grant. The more she encouraged public ownership and understanding of the importance for what City Life was attempting to do, the more supportive the efforts in Most community became. Keeping stakeholders, interested parties, and others aware of the plans for integrating technology required internal and external communication. Luckily, a business across the street, Southern Financial has been one big plus for City Life.

Patty McVain works at Southern Financial and is really proud of the offices there. The entire building has been refurbished as the original building might have looked like in the "good ole days." The old building was the former Central Office for Most School District. The executives feel they raised the bar of the once outdated building and have room for other business to locate there. Besides Southern Financial, the building hosts Redbird Beauty Shop and Spa.

Patty is a member of the Most Chamber of Commerce serving on a branch called the Educational Services. She attends a monthly meeting with the district's superintendent where he gives an update on the schools. She shares that information with other people

Patty was excited that their business would provide some monitors at City Life Elementary School for the third and fifth grade testing in the spring. She said she provided goodies for the Teacher of the Year, The Principal of the Year, and other things that the PTA supports. She explained,

> One thing we did...was we cooked for all the teachers one day and had them over here to eat. So they got to take a break from their school day and come over here and eat. Then we just sat out in the halls. So we cooked lunch for them and they just had a relaxing time. They got a little massage since we asked the spa girls to get involved, too. We try to do things like that. We made some breakfast casseroles one morning for the teachers. So I have to say, we've probably been more involved with the teachers and the PTA rather than the students.

Another thing Patty does since she got involved in the educational activities for the Chamber of Commerce is when she meets a teacher, or administrator, or other educator she says thank-you right off the bat. She feels that teachers aren't thanked enough in a lot of different ways. She commented on what a great leader Ms. Opendorr is.

> She is an awesome leader herself, so I would say the leadership at City Life is high on the scale of things, on the ways she leads. You can see her excellence in everything she does, not just in City Life, but outside

activities, also. She sets a high standard. You can tell when you walk into that elementary school that she sets the standard. She has great teachers and children.

Pamela [Opendorr] is impressive. I was impressed that they got the $79,000.00 grant. Pamela took the lead...she puts it out there and everybody follows. It can't be better than that!

When asked about how parents were involved at City Life, Patty noted that parents are involved in very supportive ways. She said that parents are very supportive of the teachers and administrators. Parents are volunteering and when Patty read the grant application, she could see the levels of involvement would be changing because school stakeholders had insisted in the grant that it would change.

City Life feels comfortable when parents walk in. Patty noted that, "It's not stand-offish, it's welcoming. You know, it's just like they've invited us over many times...come on over, come over and see what is going on and take part." Patty has noticed that teachers at City Life take it upon themselves to make the children feel at ease at the school. The researcher noted that the painting on the walls and things that have pulled everyone altogether at this school are wonderful.

We've just been working for a short amount of time, probably about a year...but you feel we're all together; not separate. We're over here and they are over there. We feel welcome. I think they try to put that across to the parents...they are welcome to come in any time and take part.

The shared vision for City Life has developed into collaboration, a relationship that promotes change and improvement for schools. The community that Patty described

is helping City Life. Their cooperation, the school and community connection bring benefits to both students and community members. They pool resources; each of them receives benefits that they could not attain alone.

As Patty concluded she noted that strong leadership in the school is keeping everybody positive and appreciated. Showing appreciation for the teachers is something that all schools do not receive. Keeping teachers' spirits lifted was everyone's business, now. The teachers have not received salary increases, their salaries are low, and they can get discouraged. So maybe, the community is helping to set the standard, too by showing appreciation. It builds everyone up.

As Patty thanked the researcher for visiting her office, she handed her a little token of appreciation that she gives the educators at City Life. The researcher hung on to her words, "If we just come across the street once in a while and say 'hey, we're so glad that you are our neighbor and we're glad you're here.' It doesn't take much, to change schools and business when we give each other pats on the back."

Summary

This chapter examined City Life Elementary School. A view of the school, of the school district, and of the community was presented. Documents used for Phase I OK-ACTS and Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS Grant Applications were reviewed. A survey taken on-line by the teachers at City Life was discussed. A site visit and interviews of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member were presented. This chapter has given a holistic view of the data gathered at Case School B: City Life. Chapter VI will combine the data from Case School A: Country Living and Case School B: City Life to

share the findings and analysis that began with the researcher's preliminary constructs that guided the examination of these two cases.

CHAPTER VI

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter includes the findings from the analysis of two case schools: School A, Country Living Elementary and School B, City Life Elementary, are seen through the lens of school and community connections. Specifically, this study reveals the connections among school and community through constructs of professional learning communities, technology, student achievement, leadership practices, parent involvement, and community groups. Emerging themes are provided. The researcher has gathered data in the form of documents, a survey, and on site visits and interviews at both schools. This research began with preliminary constructs that guided the examination of the two case schools.

Preliminary Constructs

The researcher was one of the 800 principals and/or superintendents that completed Phase I of OK-ACTS. This year long process was a journey to develop professional learning communities that use technology to impact student achievement. With the loom of *No Child Left Behind* every administrator in every state is beginning to look at his or her school's teaching and learning.

> The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLBA) has made substantial changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These changes range from new assessment and accountability provisions in Title I that affect states, school districts, and schools to increased flexibility in use of funds for several programs, including the ability to consolidate funds from

certain programs at both state and local levels. Implementing these changes poses significant challenges for school officials at all levels. [On line at http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/policy90.html]

No Child Left Behind is designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works. Phase I OK-ACTS assists leaders in developing professional learning communities that integrate technology to improve student achievement.

While receiving a free laptop computer for the school was a strong incentive to get these two principals from Case School A and Case School B into training, the need for school administrators to acquire skills related to administrative and instructional uses of technology is critical. These two principals along with others in their Cluster Group were introduced to the OK-ACTS "big picture" of education and the possibilities that compliment NCLB, connect to API scores, and leadership strategies that enhance the IDEALS Framework (See Appendix A).

The "big picture" or preliminary constructs for this research came from examination of the professional knowledge base introduced to research-based practices on professional learning communities, technology, student achievement, leadership practices, and the need for schools to connect to parents and the community. This rich interplay of new information ended with the acceptance of the laptop for some, but for Nita Bridgers at Country Living Elementary School and Pamela Opendorr at City Life Elementary School, it was a prelude to possibilities. They put the big ideas into practice.

Professional Learning Communities Construct

By their very definition, professional learning communities (PLCs) evoke a change in school administrators. Principals who want their schools to become PLCs participate democratically with teachers sharing power, authority, and decision making while more traditional principals might not provide opportunities for the staff to be involved in decision making. When asked if the practices were beginning, developed, or well-established, both of these principals apologized to the researcher repeatedly about their humble circumstances and their beginning stages of becoming a PLC as if the grass were greener at other schools. Both principals at the two case schools reported they were beginning on early stages of developing PLCs on their action plan forms

PLCs share a vision for school improvement and constantly focus on student learning. The staff works to ensure that all children are learning. Nita Bridgers, principal at Case School A: Country Living and Pamela Opendorr, principal at Case School B: City Life are working to improve test scores, and that means focusing on the needs of every child in their schools. Their schools must make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as mandated by NCLB.

Ms. Bridgers worries if her small community will have the necessary tools to increase student achievement because of the state shortfalls in her district. The district lost $400,000.00 for the 2003-2004 school-year. This equated to a loss of one teacher at each grade level. Classes of twenty became classes of 30. While Mrs. Bridgers knows she must meet the state test mandates and make adequate yearly progress, many of the classes at her school have been increased to 30 children, an obstacle for the 2003-2004 school-year. (House Bill 1017 and twenty students in a class is history she laments.) The

loss of staff members hurts the children; the most severe devastations were in third and fifth grade, but she smiles and is confident in the effectiveness of her teachers. It is easy to see that she circulates among the troops and compliments her staff on a regular basis. She and the researcher visited overcrowded classrooms during the tour; they were crowded, but not chaotic.

Ms. Bridgers and her teachers feel the accountability measures of NCLB every spring when they receive their Third Grade Stanford Achievement, Ninth Edition Test Scores and the Fifth Grade Core Curriculum Test Scores (CRTs). If her school makes measurable improvement, fine, but if they experience a one-year dip in academic achievement, Country Living will be given a fair chance to show that the decline is out of the ordinary. If Country Living does not make AYP two consecutive years, they, like every school in America, will be identified as needing improvement and subject to immediate interventions-beginning with technical assistance and serious corrective actions if the school continues to lack adequate yearly progress.

To add to Ms. Bridgers and her staff's already full plate, NCLB has punch. Parents of children in schools in need of improvement have the choice to direct district funds toward transportation costs to a better school or toward supplemental services such as tutoring or after-school programs for their child. Ms. Bridgers does not want to lose more money or children; her staff, students, and parents are stressed enough, she commented and smiled. "We'll get through this," she persuaded with determination, as she bit her lip.

From the school's Academic Performance Index (API) and Table 13 which was taken from the Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS grant application, this school has a declining API.

Table 13

Case School A: Country Living API Scores

	2001 District	2001 School	2002 District	2002 School
Attendance	**1024**	**1060**	**1036**	**1048**
OSTP	**1099**	**1084**	**995**	**988**
Quality	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**
Total	**1042**	**1082**	**1022**	**994**

The entire school is working on improving student learning. They are targeting improvements in fifth grade because the scores on fifth grade CRTs did not reach the benchmark in reading, geography, and the arts. This is part of the reason that the API scores are declining, too. See Table 14 for CRT scores.

Table 14

70% Benchmark for Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests For Country Living Elementary for 2001-2002

	Math	Science	Reading	Writing	History, Const. & Government	Geography	The Arts.
5th Grade	**Yes**	**yes**	**no**	**yes**	**yes**	**no**	**no**

[On line at www.Report Card.org]

The developing professional learning community at Country Living is using the laptops they received in their grant to promote new ways of learning the core subjects at fifth grade level. Their pilot program using a wireless mobile lab for authentic learning using technology includes the Flat Stanley Project and the Jason Project. They know that research findings report that children learn 95% of what they teach. By targeting fifth grade students to run the equipment and plan the television station provided by their grant, they hope to increase test scores, too. They have established a video production room and all shows are student produced, written, and directed. Although the school's API is down a little, there is always next year. "Our district does not want to get caught on the downhill slope of progress," said Ms. Brake, a fifth grade teacher.

About fifty miles away Pamela Opendorr, principal of City Life, is experiencing some of the same grief, as she leads school improvement with an undeviating focus on student learning. The API scores, taken from the Phase II OK-ACTS grant application at City Life are reflected in Table 15.

Table 15

Case School B: City Life API Scores

	2001 District	2001 School	2002 District	2002 School
Attendance	**1040**	**1168**	**1132**	**1120**
OSTP	**1110**	**1091**	**1142**	**1026**
Quality	**1229**	**NA**	**1198**	**NA**
Total	**1115**	**1099**	**1138**	**1035**

Ms. Opendorr's professional learning community is trying to make decisions based on the API data as they aim for higher student achievement. Their API scores are above the state goal of 1000 at this time. However, everything is not perfect at City Life Elementary School. The fifth grade CRT's for 2001-2002 had three deficiencies, writing, geography, and the arts. See Table 16.

Table 16

70% Benchmark for Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests For City Life Elementary for 2001-2001

	Math	Science	Reading	Writing	History, Const. & Government	Geography	The Arts.
5th Grade	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no

[On line at www.ReportCard.org]

In a conversation with Ms. Opendorr; she noted that test scores during 2002-2003 were some of the highest scores in Most District, but she has lost about 60 of her planned fourth and fifth graders; they are not at City Life to attend schools for the 2003-2004 school year. The high degree of transient students at City Life is an ongoing problem, but it suddenly increased for the 2003-2004 school year. No data was available to support that number, but Ms. Opendorr knew the new Office of Accountability Report Card would reflect the changes when they received the state reports from Most.

The data supports that both case schools are busily focusing on student learning and rightfully so. The grant application and desires to take action to create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address them are supported at City Life by the new mobile computer lab that is used for project-based learning in grades PreK to sixth

grade. During the site visit, the researcher discovered the entire school population was using the lab to increase student achievement through project-based curriculum, just as the grant application had described. Even the parent interviewed at City Life was aware of the attempt to change the ways children learn, and had knowledge of, and anticipated the prospects of the projects. She noted,

> My child is in first grade...We haven't got to do the "LAP IT UP" night. We are having one next Thursday and they started from sixth grade down; it will be a couple of months before our turn.

From this data an emerging theme of the preliminary construct of professional learning communities is the accountability for AYP by the principal, teachers, and parents at both schools. Accountability for AYP causes the staff to observe each other's classrooms and as an entire staff to meet, discuss, share information, and learn from each other. Further the technology from the grant is creating new roles for the teachers. Together these teachers are passing this information to parents via LAP IT UP nights at City Life and Lappin'It Up tech nights at Country Living. Together they are changing their roles and actions to find solutions to maintain or increase student achievement. Each staff is moving from isolated pockets of teachers to working together collaboratively as teachers. The new web sites at City Life help teachers train and grow in technology usage, share technology talents; and collaborate in using best practices to make AYP. This involves sharing the good and bad with parents and the community. The Office of Accountability Report Cards provided as a measure of each school's success are available to every parent and community member who have access to the

Internet. Both schools seek to become high achieving schools; the sharing involved in the process is the next emerging theme.

A second emerging theme of the professional learning community construct is broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in changing roles and actions. This is reiterated in both schools continuous goal of AYP as well as Great Expectations and the writing of a school technology plan. Both of these schools indicated that they are involved in Great Expectations (GE). City Life is working for 100% of the faculty to be trained in GE according to their Phase II OK-ACTS grant application. During the Country Living school visit, the researcher attended the Rise and Shine, a component of GE via the new TV station, CLTV. The GE training is a professional development program that helps teachers and principals create a school atmosphere where students are inspired to pursue academic excellence. Great Expectations methodology promotes the belief that all students can learn. The training sessions concentrate on building a strong school climate and helping teachers discern best practices in teaching and learning. The components of GE include building self esteem, setting high expectations for students, and increasing student achievement in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Parent and community involvement are a big part of GE; they encourage everyone, support staff, parents and community members interested in school improvement who can afford the $1000.00 fee for one week to be included in GE training. Again the theme is broad involvement.

Writing a school technology plan involves all of the stakeholders who have an interest in the new technology because it will impact their work. Both schools, County

Living and City Life cited a definite need for a technology committee at their school as written in their Phase II OK-ACTS grant applications. City Life states:

> Our Technology Plan needs refinement.
>
> We have established a tech team for implementation of technology and increased communication with parents.
>
> Establish a tech team for grant implementation that meets monthly, and plans together with OK-ACTS mentors.

At Country Living the emphasis for technology planning is on release time for teachers to collaborate, plan, and reflect. They are excited about their possibilities. They will need parents and the community every step of the way. When the dismissal bell rings, at Country Living, Ms. Bridgers greeted parents and reminded two parents of the meeting.

A third emerging theme of the professional learning community construct is time. Over and over again, both schools report that one of the obstacles to becoming a PLC is time. Country Living stated:

> Time is needed for planning and reflection on the three practices of the ten practices of high achieving schools that we want to implement. With the reduction in force (RIF) of one teacher per grade level, teachers don't have the time to accomplish what they could with twenty children, when they now have thirty children in their classes.

City Life teachers said that, "Once school starts, time to sit down and collaborate is at a premium." This theme emerged in several constructs, so more will be devoted to it not only in the technology construct section but in other construct sections as well.

Technology Construct

This research is based on regular classroom teachers, music teachers, art teachers, and others who use technology to support the learning of all students within and across curriculum areas in two case schools. Technology does not counteract every obstacle in education, and sometimes technology is not the best tool to use to solve learning problems at these schools. However, there have been many research studies provide support that effective technology integration and learning with technology can improve student achievement.

The bottom line is that teachers do not use technology because it usually requires changing the way that they teach and connect to parents and the community. It is difficult to get teachers to change. Both school principals of these two case schools believe that visionary leadership is part of the plan to enrich learning at their schools with technology. Once teachers begin to integrate technology into their teaching and learning, shifts occur in classrooms; traditional teacher-focused instruction becomes student-centered as shown in Table 17. Appendix F also gives a view of conventional and/or traditional and authentic and/or PLC teaching and learning.

Table 17

Traditional Instruction Compared to Technology Enriched Instruction

	Traditional Instruction	**Technology Enriched Instruction**
Activity	**Teacher Centered**	**Student-centered and interactive**
Teacher Role	**Fact teller and expert**	**Collaborator and learner**
Student Role	**Listener and learner**	**Collaborator and sometime expert**
Learning Emphasis	**Facts and replication**	**Relationships and inquiry**

Concept of Knowledge	Accumulation	Transformation
Demonstration of Success	**Quantity**	**Quality**
Assessment	**Norm-referenced and multiple guess**	**Criterion-referenced and performance portfolios**
Technology use	**Seatwork**	**Communication, collaboration, information access, and expression**

(Planning Into Practice, SEDL, 2000, p.57)

The principals and their colleagues at Country Living and City Life set a vision for technology at their schools; the technology has come to life. The first emerging theme of the technology construct is the change from traditional instruction to technology rich instruction. While this is a very slow process at both case schools, changes in instructional habits noted at visits to both schools included teachers learning the basics of operating a laptop, the fundamentals with Word and Excel, and they plan to learn PowerPoint. As they integrated these basic skills into their traditional classroom practices, they felt enthusiastic and empowered. One teacher stated, "I use the computer for averaging grades, e-mail, word processing, spreadsheet, Internet research, and I teach my students how to utilize PowerPoint..."

Mrs. Opendorr, principal at City Life, thanks to the grant specifics, is proud that every teacher at her school has a web site linked to the school's website. While the websites show varying degrees of computer savvy, the teachers are using the sites to let parents know homework assignments and provide updates of class activities and instructions. During the site visit, several teachers asked the researcher to examine the websites. Some of these sites are cited in Chapter V as examples of teacher's purpose and accomplishments in building their websites, but an online examination provides a full

appreciation of the color, font changes, and clipart that these teachers have used. As teachers hone their technology skills, the researcher notes changes in attitudes towards teaching. They are excited; their efforts have a rippling effect to students and other teachers. This excitement travels home to the parents, and the parents tell their positive views to the people they work with. Then, as in the case of the first grade parent who was patiently waiting her turn to see what is new, the community connects to the changes and their responses can be contagious.

Technology is contagious because it invites new ways of doing the same old thing. The mundane, the trite traditional ways of doing business at school can become challenging, fun, and authentic. Ms. Bridgers, principal at Country Living, can point to so many changes in her staff as they update their traditional views. The TV station has become the talk of the school and the community. As children and teachers appear on TV, the children delight in the process. While the fifth graders design and produce the show, other children and teachers watch the show and provide feedback to fifth graders and their teachers for future programming. Technology for technology's sake is nothing, but when it motivates and provides a fresh perspective to children's learning styles, it is powerful.

The second emerging theme of the technology construct is improved communication. E-mail and Internet are quickly becoming important forces that are getting information to the right people at both schools according to teacher surveys. Teachers e-mail Ms. Opendorr and she returns e-mails. She noted informally that parents are e-mailing her more than ever. Her concern is the length of their e-mails. Added to

their LAP IT UP nights agenda is e-mail courtesy points. "Some of my e-mails are three feet long, that's when I call parents and say, let's talk," she said.

Teacher surveys at both schools indicate that e-mail and Internet are the most frequently used forms of technology in their buildings. Both schools have great websites that inform parents and the community about their schools. Both schools are creating information on their wide area networks that is useful and relevant to many users. These users are inside the halls of City Life and Country Living and outside of their communities. The improved communication connects these schools and the community.

Time as an emerging theme that reoccurs with every construct, but these two case principals have their own ideas about time. Ms. Bridgers stated informally that she is available just about 24/7 to her school and community. She pointed to the differences in being a rural school and a large school in the city. She can not just blend into the woodwork; everyone in the community knows her and knows where she lives. She gives lots of time to her job, but it is more by choice, she does not feel abused by the community or the staff. She seems accustomed to it and genuinely feels that the most important part of the issue is how teachers decide to use their time. She points to technology as helpful when she is seeking additional time. She completes projects on the computer which can be done at any time. E-mail communication allows flexibility where the phone ties her up completely. Once she starts thinking about time, she has more of it. "We have time if we think it is important," she claims.

Mrs. Opendorr e-mails her teachers. She never interrupts instructional time by using the intercom except for emergencies and end of the day dismissal. She does not allow office staff to do so either; they e-mail everything possible. Newsletters via e-mail;

problems solved via e-mail. "We all have the same amount of time each day so we have to prioritize," she says.

Increasing time for teachers means letting go of old practices confirm both principals. They both encourage their teachers to be more authentic in their teaching and wish for less traditional pencil and paper work, but, it is a slow process. When teachers and principals are focusing on a shared purpose and work effectively and efficiently, they create new energy. Researchers call this synergy because instead of draining, fellowship can regenerate those involved (Lambert, 2003). Synergy helps participants feel calmer, clearer, and make better choices about teaching and learning. Synergy comes from teachers truly taking the time to work together, to learn about each other and appreciate each other's gifts and talents. These encounters can become gifts to each other and gifts to the community. Time together should be high priority because it strengthens the sense of community in the school. See Table 17 to view the change process for moving from traditional teaching to technology enriched teaching. Engaging in the change process is high priority for both schools and principals insist that time on the change is well spent.

Both principals are changing schedules and letting go of old leadership styles that are tied to traditional teaching. These changes are reflected in Chapter Four and Five under interviews with each principal. These two principals are modeling the use of technology to promote changes in teaching and learning. This is time well spent.

Student Achievement Construct

According to research, student achievement is hard to define (Lambert, 2003). Whenever the staff at Case School A and Case School B examined their fifth grade test scores for 2004, they hope that technology will have impacted scores. From reading their

grant application action plans, their goals are to improve student achievement. They hope that this technology will help them connect to the parents and the community in new ways that promote increased student achievement, but reality is that technology is not an independent variable of success. The way that students perform on tests is also guided by the students' abilities to use higher-order thinking skills. The impact of the technology that these two schools were able to purchase on student achievement is contingent on its use in the classroom and the goals these teachers have for technology implementation. It is a complex process. Mean, Blando, Olson, Middleton, Morocco, Remz & Zorfass (1993) say, "When technology is used effectively, technology application can support higher-order thinking by engaging students in authentic, complex tasks with in collaborative learning contexts. Technology then supports the broad definition of achievement and allows teachers to make choices. Choice about technology needs is the first emerging theme of the student achievement construct. The teachers at City Life chose to use laptops at every grade level to increase technology understandings and creating websites to learn to use technology for a purpose. Technology choices are also present at Country Living to use laptops in fifth grade core subjects and to run the TV station. These choices were informed by the needs of their schools. This will ensure that teachers, parents, students, and community members understand the role that the technology plays. If test scores improve, wonderful; it will justify the investment, but it may not be the only variable to the success at either school.

High or steadily improving student achievement in a PLC may be more than test scores. Portfolios, exhibits such as the science fair projects at City Life, the pictures of everyone who participated on CLTV, and the student-made television backdrops and

acting at Country Life are testimonies of higher achievement. Both of these schools have their share of at risk students; 35% of City Life students are on free and reduced lunches and 33% of Country Living students enjoy a free or reduced lunch. City Life is a Title I school with different genders, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and an increasing transient rate, but the goal is equitable outcomes for all students. That is hard to do according to Ms. Opendorr, because different skills and knowledge come with every child who leaves or enters this school. When preparing a yearbook a couple of years ago, she asked some of her students where they would go if they could go anywhere in the world? She was so disappointed when they answered over and over, "the mall." The fifth grade geography scores at City Life did not make the benchmark, but that is not the whole story. A low test score in geography does not begin to tell the story of going to City Life's cafeteria where students have researched and designed a beautifully decorated French Café. When one enters the halls of City Life, test scores can not describe what the researcher viewed and what the stakeholders feel. There is pride and promise steeping from every niche of the school. The artwork displayed by the children is beautiful; they are lucky to have an art teacher with all of the funding cuts. The wall mural, outside the office door, has the appeal of "come on in and let's learn." The teachers are busy, busy in every room; the kindergarten is using the laptops. Two computer labs are full of children, the library is huge, possibly the biggest the researcher has ever visited; all of this added richness to the researcher's journal and visions of a happy school making positive changes. The master schedule/calendar takes up one huge bulletin board outside the principal's office and is proof that everyone is on the same page every day. The children are free, giving a democratic feel, a feeling of collective ownership. Parents

roam freely after they check into the office, helping here, heading to the Parent Room and back to help some more. Some parents are reading in one class and helping to get everyone's backpacks ready to go in another. Also connecting to the school is Southern Financial who provides treats in the teacher's lounge. Sixth graders are on the playground having ice cream before the last bell, a treat for jobs well done. The climate is inviting, exciting... the researcher was warmed by the rich array of learning. How can all of this be reduced to a numeral?

The second emerging theme of the student achievement construct is test core information inadequacies. City Life and Country Living stakeholders want their schools to be held accountable, but not when "accountability is little more than a litany of test scores" (Reeves, 2004).

Country Living is not a Title I school, but the number of free and reduced lunches is increasing; federal funds and guidelines are imminent. As teachers encourage more authentic learning they will bond, solve problems, set goals, and make choices about their future. A student problem was handled right in front of the researcher during the teacher interview because a problem needed to be solved to help a child succeed. Learning does not stop at Country Living.

Country Living has several different buildings that hold the Pre- kindergarten through fifth grade. The brand new building where the office, new computer lab, and teacher's lounge/workroom are located also holds the primary classes. A parent walked by the researcher and said, "We love our new building." At a later interview a parent commented on how clean the school was. Proud of their school, parents are lightly scattered, free to roam into classes as long as they check into the front office. Safety is

important to this school as it has been previously burned and hit by a tornado. They are more cautious because safety is the number one priority of parents for Country Living as for all of today's schools. The second and third grade building is older, and does not have as much appeal to the researcher's eye, but the children and teachers are happy and learning. Children's work is displayed in every classroom. It was cold traveling from one building to the next, but the locals never complained.

Fourth and fifth grade are in another building. It is an older building, too. The 5th graders were working in pairs on a science unit. They were using the mobile lab to do research on the Internet. Students had been given a choice on their final projects, but the fifth grade teacher noted that most of them wanted to do a PowerPoint presentation along with concrete evidence. The change from traditional to technology-enriched instruction is clearly evident.

In yet another place at Country Living, the researcher was led to the gifted/talented teacher's classroom (a teacher interviewed by the researcher) and another teacher who is advanced in technological skills. These two teachers are described as dynamos by Ms. Bridgers; the description proves true. These teachers run CLTV and they have motivated the fifth grade students and beyond. They have included parents and the community. It is amazing to see the children using all of the equipment: document cameras, digital video camcorders, scanners, digital cameras, editing equipment and software, and more. Ms. Brake commented that they were highlighted at the Winter Institute and principals and teachers from all over the state came to see their set up. It is no wonder; the whole technology-enriched learning process is phenomenal. Parents, teachers, and the community are connecting full force on this project. This learning too

would be reduced to a number, but at Country Living, learning is much more than a test score.

While student achievement at both schools will be recorded as a test score to meet NCLB, these schools are highly influenced by the academic standards movement and are changing to give every student the high quality education they deserve. It is causing both schools to focus on instruction as never before. It is causing schools to connect with their communities to create shared responsibility for student and school success. Ms. Bridger and Ms. Opendorr have admitted through their grant applications and in their interviews that performing all that is expected of a principal these days is more than they can do. Yet, they both admitted if they do not press on with their visions and their decisions, the school will remain the same. The leadership practice construct describes the leadership capacity of the adults who lead the school.

Leadership Practices Construct

It was through Phase I of the OK-ACTS program in a segment titled, "Principal Paul," that many educators were introduced to leadership present in professional learning communities:

> As leader, Principal Paul you are interested in establishing a professional learning community. But, you want to be certain that your leadership behaviors are compatible with those of principals who have established professional learning communities. Your task is to find the five most common leadership strategies that principals use to establish a professional learning community and prepare a presentation to your staff about what strategies you will be practicing and why they are important to

the establishment of a learning community and to improve student achievement.

Principals were guided to an on-line search to find five areas that guide PLC's. Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr had principal changing experiences in their cluster groups and wanted their schools to be PLC's. They wanted to initiate changes using technology as a tool, so they were intent on writing a Phase II grant.

These principals were each proactive about their own professional development and regularly put themselves into settings where they would have opportunities for learning. Their attendance at OK-ACTS Phase I was self-initiated. Principals like Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr are characterized as always scanning the horizon for new information that can improve learning and student success at their schools. They then apply that new information at their schools, trying to model good teaching and learning. In so doing, each principal leaves her imprint on her staff. Essentially, each woman turned her own ongoing learning into capacity building among the staff of her respective school and each staff used its increased skills to improve learning for students.

In the interviews and interactions, there were no traditional supervisor and subordinate roles at Country Living or City Life. Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr purposely treat their teachers as co-professionals; everyone is kind and caring; they are openly real as observed by the researcher. They are both working very hard to develop good relationships with their staffs. The researcher recorded that each teacher had great people skills as they moved about the building on the site tours.

Ms. Opendorr has duties just like the teachers and she is prompt. The researcher observed her doing after school duty and she spends from 12:00-1:30 every day in the cafeteria. Although Mrs. Opedorr didn't lose staff, she lost her Assistant Principal, and her counselor serves more than one school this year. Ms. Opendorr helps wherever she can. There's no "pulling rank" at City Life.

Ms. Bridgers has the respect of her staff, too. She knows each teacher's abilities and stopped to interact as needed during the site tour. She was elbow to elbow with those teachers and her secretary. She held a baby for five minutes while a visiting mother paid lunch money to the secretary. It was plain to see that connections to family and community are everywhere as she shares leadership. Ms. Bridgers treats everyone in her school like family. If she does not know the answers, she knows who might and is quick to give them credit. Trust and respect for Ms. Bridgers abounds at Country Living because she is positive and focuses on success.

The first emerging theme of the leadership practices construct is modeling. Both of these principals model what they expect from their staff. Both principals are making mistakes and openly admit their weaknesses. They also know their strengths and try to create optimal working conditions for teachers. One of Ms. Opendorr's teachers said something that was indicative at both schools:

> ...I have always been impressed with the working relationship among staff. Our principal is outstanding in her approach and understanding. The climate is warm, relaxed, and committed to the needs of students and teachers. In an often frustrating and hectic occupation, I feel blessed to

work with staff and a principal who stay focused and supportive both of each other and the children.

At Country Living a teacher commented about Ms. Bridgers:

She's been here eight years. She needs to stay twenty more. She's really great!

Instructional leadership, a significant factor in facilitating, improving, and promoting student achievement, is the second emerging theme of the leadership practices construct. Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr support their teachers' instructional methods by being proactive. They spend time in classrooms. They help allocate resources and materials. What could be more proof of the two principal's leadership merit than all of the technology provided by the grants that each of these schools won? The principals collaborate with students, teachers, parents, and the community to put their vision for increased student achievement using technology as a tool into action. They make decisions on feedback: the TAGLIT during Phase I of OK-ACTS and the survey for teachers let them know what really needs to be done to approach technology as a tool to help increase student achievement in their schools. Data-driven decision making means principals have to learn right along with their constituents.

The leadership actions of both principals are impacting the instructional programs at their schools. They are making a difference because they are doing for their teachers what good teachers do for students...they do what works. Parents like what works, too. Parental involvement at a school increases when parents understand what works and why.

Both of these principals admit that they need help with parent involvement on their grant applications, in interviews with the researcher, and in the surveys. These

activities are described more like volunteering at school, showing interest in children, fundraising, and writing a newsletter. This kind of parent involvement is rampant at both schools. Due to the cutbacks, neither school has teacher assistants; all of the additional adults in the hallways or classrooms as the researcher toured the schools were volunteering parents, the kind of parent involvement needed to sustain schools that want to become high achieving.

Parent Involvement Construct

The researcher formulated a preliminary construct for parent involvement in these two schools as they make community connections. As schools become PLC's the role of parents becomes one of parent leader. Principals, teachers, parents, and students are all leaders in a PLC. In both of these schools they have developed a shared vision of student achievement using technology as a tool. The rubric for a high achieving school Practice 8: School and Community Connections states:

> In order to be a professional learning community, a school must connect itself with families and communities in various ways. On one level it should involve families and communities in the work of the school, which is educating for democratic citizenship. On a second level the school should involve itself in the work of the family and community [On line at htpp://www.k20center.org].

The emerging theme of the parent involvement construct at the two schools is homework. The parents and teachers are connecting through the websites at City Life and have begun e-mailing. The LAP IT UP nights are providing guidelines that would help parents and their children use the new technologies on various projects. At Country

Living, Thursday Folders are keeping parents informed about homework, but they also have a goal to update websites. The contagious CLTV is informing teachers and children. The children are excited and carry news home. It makes parents want to attend Tech Nights. With more technology the TV station can broadcast directly to homes in the community.

Parent leadership is much more than parent involvement according to Lambert (2003). She advocates parents co-leading with teacher, principals, students and other parents. They participate in education practices with others in the school community. They are advocates of education to other parents, community, and policymakers. They do not just worry about their own personal children; they have a collective desire to help all children. While these types of leadership are scattered and informal at both schools, some changes in parent leadership roles were noted. Changing roles is an emerging theme. For example, parents are taking a leadership role at City Life by managing and maintaining their own room at the school; they are not just consumers. They are promoting the LAP IT UP nights and helping their children with their projects. They are learning and leading together. Table 18 shows the changing roles that Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr can expect as they increase parent involvement by making parents partners.

Table 18

Parents as Partners

Traditional Roles	Reciprocal Roles
Customers to be satisfied	**Partners to be engaged**
Servant to the School	**Collaborators with the faculty and staff**
Obstacles to change	**Facilitators of change**
Student of parenting	**Co-teachers**

Audience for staff decisions and actions	Decision makers with staff
Fundraisers	**Resource Developers**
Clerks and Carpenters	**Team members**

(Lambert, 2003, p. 67)

While parents at both case schools are at a point where they are still more traditional than not, they seem ready to move forward. If Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr continue to help parents understand and participate in the changes occurring at their schools, parents will evolve. All of this suggests that City Life and Country Living have as much to learn from parents as parents have to learn from schools. At Country Living one parent said clearly that getting involved changed her entire thought process about school. From experience she is now advocating for her school and all children. Clearly, parents and the school connect when they work together, separately nothing ever changes. As parents become involved in leadership and promoting the school, they tell their friends.

Community Groups Construct

Teachers, school employees, people who live and work in the area and anyone who is interested in the school can be considered as a part of its community. Parents, teachers, and administrators engage each other and the community members in an effort to change and improve schools. As schools connect to their communities, they collaborate and reciprocate to solve the needs. By pooling resources, the schools and the community groups benefit from something that they could not do alone.

At Country Living community groups helped to build the children a new playground. Ham radio operators helped to wire the new closed circuit TV station and to

help teach new technologies to the teachers and staff. See Figure 5 to view Community Byte Night information. Community Byte Nights are monthly.

Figure 5

School A Community Byte Night Community Byte Nights-Free Community Education Workshops

- Picture This!-Digital Camera Photography-Nearly capacity enrollment-Parents, brought their own digital cameras.
- Upcoming Training this month-PowerPoint Basics, Library Media Resources

At City Life the agent at an insurance company next door became involved with the Education Committee as a member of the Chamber of Commerce. When she found out from the superintendent that City Life had lost personnel for the 2003-2004 schools year she connected. To start with she could see that the school needed nurturing if nothing else. She provided food and talked the beauty shop/spa into giving free mini-massages to tired teachers when they finished lunch, her treat to over 40 staff members.

City Life and Country Living have made a district pact with the university of and OETT. They are collaborating to provide staff development for the schools and practical experience for the university mentors. The bond between these organizations has brought the new technologies from grant monies to the schools. The schools are further involved with SEDL, NCREL, and other cooperative organizations that help them stay focused on student and adult learning. This cooperative called Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS is helping Country Living and City Life to become engaged communities. Without this collaboration, both schools admit in their grant application that new technology would not be a priority for the district. The emerging theme of the community group construct is

collaboration. The research at both schools shows signs of increased involvement and sharing in the work of the schools.

Ms. Bridgers plainly admitted that without the help of the community, there would have been no playground at Country Living. The playground benefited the community as much as it did the school, so it was completed. She boasted of lots of help and lots of food donated by businesses to feed the volunteers. The playground is an attractive school and community place. It provides a warm, non threatening environment that welcomes the children of the community in and out of school.

When community groups join together or collaborate with the school, they can bring extra funding to help support school efforts on a higher level. PTA, such as the one at City Life, can raise the awareness of needs at their schools; then businesses, such as Southern Financial chip in. The children of the parents who own the beauty shop/spa go to City Life. They informed the entire building of potential needs and Ms. Opendorr can not say enough about their continuing financial helps and the nurturing, too. This has encouraged Ms. Opendorr to connect with the Chamber of Commerce and other groups.

Strong relationships such as these examples at City Life and Country Living build trust and are vital to collaboration. Community connections have been few and far between at these two case schools; they both want to engage more community groups as indicated in interviews and on their grant applications. Because of former traditional attitudes, it was the principal's job to take care of the school and the community members and groups job to run the city. As both of these schools work on their technology plans, they will have the perfect opportunity to build on the relationships that they have already developed with community groups. The technology plan will be their vehicle of

communication. As the LAP IT UP nights are happening, seeds are being planted in parents and the community. As the Community Byte Nights at Country Living continue, the support grows in their community.

Technology can benefit the entire communities at both of these schools because the communities of each school are underserved populations. Country Living is rural...City Life is a Title I school...they both need the community, and they need to be very open about how they can collaborate with their students, parents, and community members to increase student achievement and improve their schools.

The preliminary constructs helped the researcher to view school connections to the community in relationship to the many areas that the school is trying to fulfill as part of the grant commitment to OETT/OK-ACTS. See grant criteria in Appendix D. The OK-ACTS Phase I program ensures that each of these six preliminary constructs is understood by each principal and/or superintendent in the professional training. These are not all of the components essential for success, but they are areas that facilitate Practice 8: School and Community Connections.

The six preliminary constructs formed to guide this research have narrowed the focus. Professional learning communities, technology, student achievement, parent involvement, and community groups were matched with the interview questions to seek as much information as possible about school and community connections by these two schools as they become PLC's. Table 19 provides the relationship between the study's research questions to the questions and interview questions.

Table 19

Research Questions in Relation to Interview Question

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How can an elementary school in the process of becoming a professional learning community facilitate connections with the community?	**9, 10, 18, 20**
1. What technology is being used in the facilitation of school and community connections?	**8, 13, 14, 20**
2. What actors appear to effect student achievement in the facilitation of school and community connections?	**7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17,20**
3. What leadership practices are being used by the school to facilitate community connections?	**1, 5, 11, 12, 20**
4. What role are parents playing in the facilitation of community connections?	**2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 20**
5. What role are community groups playing in the facilitation of school and community connections?	**3, 4, 6, 16, 19, 20**

The Interview Protocol and research questions are in Appendix G. This included several steps and permission from each individual involved. Each of the participants (Principal, Teacher, Parent, and Community Member) interviewed was asked the same open-ended questions. As the questions were asked, conversation evolved. All interviews were taped. The tapes were transcribed and reviewed several times. These interviews and site visit, the Phase I and Phase II documents, and the teacher survey provided an overwhelming amount of data to sift through and decipher. The process of data analysis for the six preliminary constructs has been eclectic; the researcher thought the process might be easier using the preliminary constructs that evolved from the researcher's Phase I OK-ACTS training. The researcher also struggled because every bit of data mingled together and overlapped.

It was when the researcher paralleled the process of becoming a PLC using the

Rubric of High Achieving Schools to the preliminary constructs of this research that decisions about data became clearer. If a school tries to implement all 10 Practices of High Achieving Schools at the same time the ten practices would overlap. If only one practice of the 10 Practices of High Achieving Schools is implemented in a school, the school would not be very high achieving because it is the overlapping and ongoing implementation of all practices that create final success. Thus, if Practice 8: School and Community Connections is going to be implemented in these two schools and work, the interplay of the preliminary constructs will overlap in all areas. The process of dividing data and putting it into neat little stacks would never be perfect, but it was easier with preliminary constructs, and clarification was somewhat easier. As Creswell (2002) stated:

> Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, and methods of data collection...This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible (p.230).

Working from a holistic perspective the story of these two schools is clear to the interpretations of the researcher, but for others this could be difficult. Often times, qualitative researchers are criticized for being so positive about their results and drifting from conventional scientific standards (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In order to prevent that from occurring in this research, the researcher has tried to make the information analyzed as public as possible. In Appendix G the Interview Protocol is available so that all interview questions can be viewed.

The interviews opened the daily lives of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member at each of these case schools to everyone who reads this research. Although confidentiality is promised in the research, a matrix from the hard data showing the preliminary constructs and the emerging themes will be helpful for a better understanding of what was proposed as response to the research questions. The triangulation of documents, surveys, and on site visits and interviews is corroborated in Table 20 Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation. This matrix clarified the research, and gave it definition and accuracy as the researcher examined these two case schools.

Table 20

Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation

Preliminary Constructs	**I**	**S**	**O**	**D**
1. Professional Learning Communities	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Accountability for AYP	x		x	x
Emerging Theme-Broad Involvement, Collaboration, and Collective Responsibility Reflected in Roles and Actions	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Time (all constructs)	x	x		x
2. Technology	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Improved Communication	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Change from Traditional Instruction to Technology Enriched Instruction	x		x	x
3. Student Achievement	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Choice About Technology Needs	x		x	x
Emerging Theme-Test Score Information Inadequacies	x		x	x
4. Leadership Practices	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Modeling	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Instructional Leader	x	x	x	x
5. Parent Involvement	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme-Homework	x		x	
6. Community Groups	x	x	x	x
Emerging Theme- Collaboration	x	x	x	x

I = Interviws **S=Surveys**
O=Observations **D=Documents**

Emerging Themes

This research began with the preliminary constructs of professional learning communities, student achievement, technology, leadership practices, parent involvement, and community groups. An analysis of the data produced emerging themes that refined the preliminary constructs and helped explain what was really happening at these two case schools. The emerging themes identified by this research include accountability for AYP, time, improved communication, change from traditional to technology-enriched instruction, choice about technology needs, test score information inadequacies, modeling, instructional leader, homework, and collaboration. Each of these themes helped describe how two elementary schools in the process of becoming professional learning communities facilitate connections with the community. Professional literature that supports the themes is provided.

The Theme of Accountability for AYP

The federal government reports that schools fail to demonstrate academic progress and that the current system hides failing schools [http;//www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/ayp/yerly.html]. The NCLB solution 1) establishes clear goals and timeframes; 2) gives parents information on academic achievement; and 3) provides choices if schools continue to be identified as in need of improvement. The bipartisan support and popularity of NCLB shows that Americans are united for results, and schools must use taxpayer funds on programs that work (Serim & Hammond, 2002). Case School A: Country Living and Case School B: City Life now

have standards to meet for every child in their buildings; they are making dramatic changes to make sure every child is successful (Reeves, 2004).

Dorn (1998) guided accountability systems with three requirements that are common to meeting the need for accountability. They include:

- Accountability systems should use student performance as a starting point for deeper discussion of educational problems.
- Accountability systems should link student performance with classroom practice.
- Accountability systems should focus on improving education for all children, not encourage schools to isolate and devote fewer resources to children who already have the odds stacked against them. [www.sedl.org/policy/insights/nll/10html]

Accomplishing this is ongoing at School A and School B as their state demands that students meet or exceed PASS content standards. These schools will be continually monitored as they move from short-term to longer term planning to make AYP. Inquiry, discourse, and equity (O' Hair, 2000) have become every day acts for the faculties at both case schools because they will not be able to hide their failures (Reeves, 2004).

Test data will be reported by economic background, race and ethnicity, English proficiency, and disability. Measuring progress by subgroups will share student achievement for disadvantaged students as well as other students, ensuring that no child is left behind at Country Living and City Life. Ms. Bridger and Ms Opendorr and their schools are held accountable.

Public opinion remains staunchly behind higher, more challenging standards.

> More than 80 percent of parents polled by Public Agenda (Johnson & Duffett, 1999) said they believed higher standards would strengthen students' academic performance. What's more, support for higher standards was strongest among low-income families-historically those most poorly served by the education system. Even students themselves said that they would work harder if they were more challenged to do so [http://www.sedl.org/policy/insights/n11/a.html].

Accountability can be a wonderful thing or an embarrassing incident for schools; it plays heavy on the minds of educators as they go about their unending tasks, decisions, and responsibilities. Fear of failure is a powerful motivator. When people are afraid they do things that they might not normally do. They might make the end rather than the means the point of focus. While Ms. Opendorr and Ms. Bridges are accountable they clearly emphasized the real issues when it came to achieving in the classroom; they have overcome their personal fears of failure and are honest about the many obstacles that hinder school success. Both of these principals radiated joy and were curious in positive and constructive ways that promoted collaboration. As an added benefit the teachers and parents were tolerant of others. They clearly wanted to be a part of something great. With or without NCLB, Nita Bridgers and Pamela Opendorr are connecting students, parents, colleagues, and community members in every way they can.

The Theme of Broad Involvement, Collaboration, and Collective Responsibility Reflected in Roles and Actions

Leadership is described in the IDEALS model of High Achieving Schools (Appendix A, Appendix B, and page 50 in Chapter II) as shared understanding that leads to a common focus and improves the school experience for all the members of the school

community. Long before the writing of these grants, both schools had Great Expectations Training. Teacher roles had become more child-centered because it is the children who lead the opening day's events called Rise and Shine, and GE training focuses on child centered, not teacher-centered learning. The writing and implementation of the Phase II grants are impossible without collaboration and training from OK-ACTS. The implementation of the grant is a collective endeavor. The actions of the teachers and their roles are changed as both schools move from traditional teaching to using $50,000.00 worth of technology as a tool to improve student achievement.

Now that they have the technology, both schools have a team writing new technology plans for their schools. They are collaborating with parents, community members, and community groups every step of the way. Local businesses such as the Chamber of Commerce, police, firemen, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, church groups at Country Living, and local ham operators are involved. Both schools received television press, newspaper articles, local press, and interest from the people who helped install their new technologies, their Internet providers and more. The roles and actions evolving have changed people's minds about using technology at school and have created renewal and collective responsibility for teaching and learning (Fullan, 2001; Hoerr, 1996; Lambert 2003, Sergiovanni,1994,).

The theme of broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions is supported by research (Darling-Hammond,1996; Fullan, 1991; Glickman, 1993; Lambert, 2003). In her book, *Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement,* Lambert states:

As individuals work together, their personal identities begin to change: principals expect colleagues to participate more fully, teachers find more efficient ways to do their work, and parents and students shift from seeing themselves as subjects to seeing themselves as partners.

The need to meet AYP as set forth by NCLB, increased broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions, and time are facilitating community connections at both schools. NCLB has forced change on these two schools; it is the grant monies spent on technology that is giving them renewal of purpose and courage to call on parents for additional help and to reach out to the community in new ways that were before impossible or incomprehensible. The partnerships (Table 18) that Lambert (2003) referred to are beginning at both schools as all stakeholders communicate and progress.

The Theme of Improved Communication

The OK-ACTS teacher surveys point clearly to the fact that Internet usage, and e-mail were the most common uses of technology in the two schools. Technology links school directly to the homes of the parents and community members who have access to computers. If parents lack access at home, the two case schools open at night. If parents visit these schools during the day, principals and teachers gladly demonstrate how to get on-line. Parents no longer receive a busy signal at the school; they sent a short e-mail and receive a response promptly by the principal, secretary, or to whomever it was directed. This is efficient and effective.

Improved and effective home-school communication and interactions, including direct parent-teacher contacts and relationships as well as more general communication

between school and home regarding school events are supported by research (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2000: Miedel & Reynolds, 1999: Quigley, 2000). Technology, such as e-mail, bulletin boards, or Internet access can be used to improve communication between parents, schools, and other members of the community (Drake, 2000, Sanders & Harvey, 2000).

Both case schools have updated websites. City Life has links to every teacher except one on the school website. Classroom websites are growing and changing all the time. With upcoming plans to learn how to use digital cameras, one teacher said, "Now I am excited about getting my kids on my website. Talk about great parent connections." Country Living is on schedule to have training from the OK-ACTS mentors in developing websites. Ms. Bridgers, as well as her staff are looking forward to improving communication through improved websites.

The Theme of Change From Traditional Instruction to Technology Rich Instruction

In the revived computer labs, in the CLTV studio, in the classrooms, on the interactive whiteboards, and in handsome empty carts of laptops, the signs of technology are vivid and exciting at City Life and Country Living. Not one empty lab, not one unused computer was seen either of the two schools when the researcher was on the site tour. The researcher looked at the lab schedule postings to see the daily schedule of use. Not only were they used all day long, but teachers and students wanted more access to the computer labs than available.

One of Country Living's grant goals is to deliver world-class education to students using interactive education technology to access authentic learning, content – rich resources, including equal access and equity for all students, teachers, and the

community (Newmann & Associates, 1996). They chose Practice 2: Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment as one of the three practices to fulfill the grant requirements. As evidence of this action plan, the grant writers said that the media specialist, classroom teachers, art teachers, and gifted/talented teachers were already doing authentic learning projects (Newman & Associates, 1996; Glickman, 1993). The technology enriched the process.

At City Life the children asked to stay after school to use computers. The media specialist, who is the teacher the researcher interviewed, said that she lets children stay and individually helps them on technology skills that they want to learn. Teachers came in for help after school, too. This supported the change from traditional to technology-enriched teaching and learning. (Not one child came in and asked if they could do an extra worksheet or read an extra chapter in a text book). After she gave permission for about seven or eight students to stay after school, some of the students went to the office to call their parents to tell them they would be staying after school. Three of the students sat down at the first available lap top and e-mailed their parents at home or at work to tell them to pick them up on their way home or to ask them to pick them up at a certain time. See Table 17 to view changes from traditional to more technology enriched instruction.

It is the technology tools that each of these schools received in their grant that has improved communication by all of the stakeholders at the school.

> Technology allows students to become active learners and to develop their problem solving, critical-thinking, and creativity skills. Technology offers students and teachers rapid and broad access to information and resources. Tools

such as the Internet provide the means for students and teachers to engage in inquiry-based learning and to interact with others (Sun, 2000, p. 57).

These new forms of technology and the changes teachers are making in traditional instruction to using more technology are facilitating school and community connections (Drake, 2000).

The Theme of Choice About Technology Needs

Every piece of data except the surveys voiced choice of technology needs. The grant gave students, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders the right to choose the technology equipment that met their needs. The pact was clear; if a school won the grant they agreed to a long list of assurances, one of which was to provide how the technologies would be integrated into the curriculum to help enhance authentic teaching and learning, training, and student achievement.

It is clear that choice and collaboration on technology made a difference in how the grants were implemented.

> Community engagement requires careful consideration because schools are composed of individuals with differing interests and backgrounds. Bringing a representative group together is an important first step in successful decision making and planning for technology (Sun, 2000, p. 143).

Teachers, parents, and all collaborators are more apt to follow through when they are a part of the plan from the very beginning (Drake, 2002; Sanders, 2001). Each stakeholder at the two case schools has had important roles in the decisions that were made about their schools and reflect the needs of that specific site. Shared input was

critical for the stakeholders at each school to feel they served a real role and no one can sabotage success.

The Theme of Test Score Inadequacies

No school wants to be judged by their test scores alone. The interviews, the site visits, and the documents shared the obstacles, and they have been previously addressed. Each of these two case schools was much more than a number, and they wanted to be acknowledged for their joys and success, not their obstacles. This theme may have fit with the theme of accountability, but it seemed best to separate it since the concern is that job security might be tied to low test scores.

Achieving high standard is the essence of accountability. To measure how well schools and students were meeting high standards, the state in this research uses CRTs. Fifth graders are assessed in math, reading, science, U.S. history, geography, arts, and writing. Teachers fear that these assessments can become the number one indicator of district, school, teacher, and student achievement.

> Combining incentives for performances with interventions and consequences for failure is typical in state accountability systems. A number of factors, however, make these practices especially thorny issues. For one, accountability systems have also become chief mechanisms for evaluating teachers, principals, and other administrators. This practice had drawn fire from teachers' unions, which argue that student test scores reflect more factors than those under a teacher's direct control; therefore, they have no place in personnel evaluations. [http://www.sedl.org/policy/insights/n11/5.html]

> The prevailing presumption is that test scores, typically reported as the averages of classes, schools, or systems, are the only way to hold teachers accountable. Teachers know, of course, that their jobs are far more complex than what can be measured by a student's performance on a single test, and they understandably resent the simplistic notion that their broad curriculum, creative energy, and attention to the needs of individual students can be summed up with a single number (Reeves, 2004, p. 5).

The theme of choice of technology needed to meet the needs of their students and test score inadequacies was a factor that appeared to affect student achievement in the facilitation of school and community connections at both schools. It was the relationship that these teachers at both schools were providing to parents and their community that was making changes in new and positive directions. The grant gave the two case schools the technology that the stakeholders felt will solve some of their student achievement problems in their fifth grade CRTs and other areas. The stakeholders were working together and attempting to establish value and support into their school However, test scores were often the sole marketing tool of success and failure. These two schools were increasing student achievement; together they were creating success connecting their schools with the community (Furman, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1994; Reeves, 2004).

The Theme of Modeling

Followers desired to know what they could expect from their leaders, if they could reach their personal goals and potential, and if they could trust their leader. Followers recognize leadership preparation, honesty, integrity, self-confidence and they want to believe in their leader's vision.

> Such leadership learning extends to the organization as a whole, as well. Through all their actions, leaders model what they value in terms of educational vision, professional engagement, and effective practice. Leadership is reflected in what leaders "pay attention to, measure, and control regularly, their reactions to crises, their criteria for allocating resources, rewards and status, their system for hiring, promoting and firing staff, and their deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching" (Schein, 1999, p. 98).

At Country Living and City Life, the principals worked elbow to elbow with their teachers, parents, and community members. Everything these principals did sent a signal to the school community regarding what they valued. From the look of the building and student work being displayed...the researcher got a sense of the values of these two schools within minutes of walking through the school. Consistently in the survey response comments, Anita Bridgers and Pamela Opendorr were applauded by their faculties for empowering the teachers. In the interviews, parents and community members reported that both principals talked the talk and walked the walk. They were there to serve (Bennis, 1985; Hoerr, 1996; DuFour, 2003).

The Theme of Instructional Leader

Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Opendorr were well aware of the responsibilities involved in increasing student achievement. Ms. Bridgers admitted that she once thought she was supposed to do it all and be everything to everyone, but now she is trying to become an instructional leader. She became more well-informed about curriculum and instruction, and helped children solve problems and construct knowledge. Deliberate inquiry and discourse were happening more often since the school received the grant than before.

She wanted to help low achievers and help teachers teach low achievers in authentic ways. Ms. Bridgers wanted to keep good teachers and she knew who the best teachers in her building were. She had them at the forefront of all the new technology at Country Living and she gave them full credit for their expertise. Ms.Bridgers said over and over, "I'm not a techie," but she wanted to learn and she does not care if the kids and teachers have to teach her. They all learned together.

NAESP has Six Standards that Characterize Instructional Leadership. These actions taken together serve as a definition of instructional leadership, and the two principals exhibit the following standards:

- Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.
- Set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.
- Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.
- Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.
- Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.
- Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success (NAESP, 2001, p. 2).

Ms. Opendorr was knowledgeable about computers and modeled rich technology usage that she expected her teachers to follow. Professional development was available

for her teachers, but if a teacher needed help in the classroom, she was there to help. She believed that technology was a critical tool in improving teaching and learning.

Using technology to improve the learning at City Life and Country Life has its challenges. Both principals were glad they made the decisions to write the grants and they contend that all the hype and press about being one of the 21 winning grants schools has made them pay closer attention to the true needs of their teachers and students.

Modeling and instructional leadership were the leadership practices that were being used to facilitate school and community connections at these two case schools. These two leadership practices helped all stakeholders to accept new roles in leadership (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fullan, 1991; Glickman,1993; Lambert, 2003). The leadership of these two principals was being shared by teachers, parents, students, and key players from the community. By working together they formed a leadership force that is powerful in both School A: Country Living and School B: City Life. This banding together has formed a team of professionals at each school that invites parents and community members into the work of leadership (Banks, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Weissbourd, 1994). The combination of talents was changing the way all stakeholders at these schools think and the principals were following the standards set for leading learning communities (NAESP, 2001).

The Theme of Homework

The theme of homework evolved through websites, parent interviews, e-mails, CLTV, and collaboration. Parents observed the changes their children were experiencing at Country Living and City Life. Homework was changing, too. The websites help connect parents to the commitments (See in Chapter 5) for weekly homework and

assignments at City Life. A parent at Country Living pointed to an unwavering commitment to keep parents informed by the principal and her teachers; the Thursday Folder of today might very well be e-mailed home tomorrow. Plans were in order at both schools to create student portfolios using the proper software, display digital camera photos on the websites, and communicate, communicate, communicate as they connect parents to the school to increase student achievement (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1997). Some of these technology training needs were being addressed by the OK-ACTS mentors and others as part of the vision.

Enforcing completion of homework was the greatest role parents were playing in the facilitation of school and community connections at both case schools. Clark (1993) found that the ways children spent their time at home, not the family's income or education level, predicted their success in school. Most parents reported that they talked with their children about homework, read to their children, and made sure they did their assignments. The importance of this research was that home work is changing from traditional ways of doing homework to becoming technology-enriched. Assignments were found on websites as well as through e-mails at both schools. The fact that parents were coming to school for special help sessions to learn how to use technology was also indicative of changes in homework and the involvement of families in their children's new uses of technologies can lead to higher achievement. These areas were changing quickly at both schools; it will be interesting to observe how homework evolves in the next few months.

The Theme of Collaboration

The emergence of collaboration is a new role for community groups in the facilitation of school and community connections in both case schools. The research in Chapter Two pointed to the traditional role of teachers teaching, the principal managing the office, parents staying home, and the community minding its own business. This was changing at both schools as community members take a participatory role in both schools (Epstein,1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2000; O'Hair, 2000). Chadwick's (2004) comment, "More involved parents and community members mean more adults working together to educate children..." is a phrase that describes the collaboration at both schools.

The Theme of Time

Time was mentioned more times in this whole research project than any other theme. Time is a problem for all educators. Too many students and not enough time to take care of all of them was a common comment. One teacher described the time issue as "A full year's job in nine months and not enough time to teach everything that needs to be taught. Too much I don't know and not enough time to learn it...too many meetings and not enough time to grade papers and prepare for tomorrow" (Lambert, 2003, p.75-79).

Teachers and principals at both schools felt pulled in many directions and sometimes helpless to change it all. Time controls their lives, and sometimes the researcher could see from the surveys and observable body language that time held many victims. The research says that these victims will change as they find comfort in the new technologies (Fullan, 2001; Sun, 2000).

The IDEALS

The emerging themes at Case School A and Case School B fit into the IDEALS Framework (O'Hair, etal., 2000). Inquiry, discourse, equity, leadership, and service were evident throughout. All emerging themes showed improved individual and school practice, growing conversations about teaching and learning, fairness, emerging authenticity, shared leadership, and differences in the way schools were treating families and the community.

Discourse at both schools has brought about the need to prioritize and experiment with new possibilities for meetings and training for improved learning and teaching. "Slow down!" was a cry from everyone. Both schools must realize that technology integration and professional learning community development is a slow process (Fullan, 2001). It requires support and encouragement for educators to feel secure. Both of these schools were technology poor before they received their grants, so they have received a lot of new technology very quickly. With proper encouragement by parents and the community, everyone will let go of old traditional practices and expect to see technology-enriched environments at school. When these schools put teaching and learning first, follow effective research (Newman & Associates, 1996; Lous & Kruse, 1995), look at what students are learning and see how technology can make it more effective, they will move more quickly. There are only 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week; what these teachers and their leaders at these two case schools are choosing to do as they connect students, teachers, parents, and the community during the school day was greatly enhanced by receiving the Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS grant. As they continue to grow and change so will their priorities and time management (Fullan, 2001; Lambert, 2003).

Summary

This chapter has analyzed the data from two schools, School A: Country Living and School B: City Life. The researcher examined the process of becoming professional learning communities that use technology to facilitate connections with the community. The examination of both schools was guided by preliminary constructs of professional learning communities, technology, student achievement, leadership practices, parent involvement, and community groups. As these preliminary constructs were drawn from the data, several themes emerged. These themes included accountability for AYP, time, improved communication, change from traditional to technology-enriched instruction, choice about technology needs, test score information inadequacies, modeling, instructional leadership, homework, and collaboration. Careful consideration of these themes might assist elementary schools attempting to become professional learning communities that use technology to facilitate connections with the community.

CHAPTER VII

Reflections, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter I introduced the research topic: School and Community Connections. The need for the study was defined. It also, stated the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The research question was stated. Limitations of the study and a definitions of terms used in the study were listed. The researcher's perspective and an overview of the dissertation concluded the chapter.

Chapter II reviewed the related literature of community connections. Chapter III detailed the methods involved in this case study. Chapter IV gave a view of Case Study A: Country Living and Chapter V gave a view of Case Study B: City Life.

Chapter VI revealed findings and an analysis of all data collected at both case schools. The preliminary constructs of Professional Learning Communities, Technology, Student Achievement, Leadership Practices, Parent Involvement, and Community Groups when school and community connections using technology as a tool were presented. The two case schools revealed emerging themes including accountability for AYP, time, improved communication, change from traditional to technology-enriched instruction, choice about technology needs, test score information inadequacies, modeling, instructional leadership, homework, and collaboration as they develop as professional learning communities. These themes permeate the research findings.

This final chapter, Chapter VII, shared reflections, conclusions and recommendations from this multiple case study research. How this research might be used to help other schools building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development brought closure to this study. Possible ideas to initiate further study related to this research and implications for administrator preparation programs were shared as the research project came to an end.

Reflections on Conducting the Research

During this past year the researcher has learned much about the research process. Skills as a researcher have been honed and data has been collected, organized, and interpreted. It took the researcher a while to get everything in order; in her normal life as a principal of a busy elementary school, details can be left to the secretary, the counselor, and other teachers whom she trusts and with whom she shares roles and responsibilities. In other words, this was a solitary effort and there was much to be done, to plan, and to be approved by my mentors.

The first decision was to choose schools for the focus of the research. After reviewing 21 grant-awarded schools' action plans, it was determined that there were only four elementary schools that had chosen to implement Practice 8: School and Community Connections.

After reviewing action plans from the four schools, the researcher selected two schools based on similarities of their grant goals. Both schools chosen requested laptop computers for the implementation of their three action plans. Besides that, the

researcher listened to information shared about these two schools at the OK-ACTS meetings. School A: Country Living and School B: City Life displayed traditional tendencies but were intent on becoming professional learning communities. Both schools had excellent action plans to use laptop computers to increase student and adult learning in the schools, set high expectations, and engaged the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.

After the schools were identified, the researcher sent an e-mail to each principal to inform them of the research and the intentions. Both principals accepted the invitation to participate in the research. The schools, faculties, and principals were accepting and helpful. This made the collection of data much easier because the researcher went with the flow of the schools and their leaders.

The researcher gained much from the year of study, but the most important and exciting part of the study was the site visits to the schools. After the interviews, the researcher immediately wrote reflections to capture important details and general impressions.

The researcher's interaction with the case schools helped plant technology and PLC development in the school the researcher leads. Watching children and teachers use the new technology was memorable. Talking to parents and community members who wanted to help was enlightening. Each person interviewed cited the importance of learning from one another, regardless of age, experience, or role in life. Upon completion of this research, the researcher concludes with a sense of satisfaction and understanding the need for all schools to connect to parents and community members,

to share and sustain the vision for improved learning and teaching at the heart of the school's mission, and to use technology as a tool to improve student achievement.

Conclusions

The researcher has reviewed the grant applications, teacher surveys, site visits, and interviews for both schools thoroughly. Case School A: Country Living and Case School B: City Life are fortunate. Their unique grant applications shared a vast amount of information about each school. The evidence, obstacles and action plans convinced the grant reviewers to select them as two of the twenty-one schools to receive monies for technology equipment and professional development. The teacher surveys revealed information about technology access, usage, and needs in each of the two schools. Comments and opinions of the teachers were included in the surveys. Site visits to each school and interviews of the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member completed the triangulation of data. Using preliminary constructs of practices on professional learning communities, technology, student achievement, leadership practices, and the need for schools to connect to parents and community members, several themes emerged from the data. The emerging themes identified by the research included accountability for AYP, time, improved communication, change from traditional to technology-enriched instruction, choice about technology needs, test score information inadequacies, modeling, instructional leadership, homework, and collaboration. The researcher concludes:

1. <u>The Theme of Accountability for AYP.</u> The case schools and all schools in the United States have concerns about AYP. From information retrieved from

http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/ayp/yearly.html, the NCLB ties funding to student achievement. The site states, "Improvement at a snail's pace and chronic underachievement are inadequate and unacceptable" (p.1). Student achievement must be reported and be presented in subgroups. Case School A and Case School B must ensure that every child learns. The two case schools will follow the NCLB mandates. Eventually they will test every child in grades three through eight and give parents a copy of the report card for their school—highlighting success and shining a light on failure (Dorn, 1998; Reeves, 2004)

- The law requires that all schools be held accountable for making sure that every student learns.
- Test scores will be broken down by economic background, race and ethnicity, English proficiency, and disability. That way parents and teachers will know the academic achievement of each group of students and can work to ensure that no child will be left behind.
- Testing tells parents, communities, educators and school boards which schools are doing well. If a school takes a challenging population and achieves great results, testing will show that. If a school is allowing certain groups to fall behind year after year, testing will expose that, too (p. 1).

Authentic teaching and learning at both case schools, as they strive to follow the IDEALS Model for High Achieving Schools, is helping change the way children learn and teachers teach. Both schools are using technology as a tool to increase

student achievement. Research indicates that the test scores at both schools will increase, and both schools can make progress through authentic teaching and learning.

> Researchers have found that when teachers teach authentically, their students consistently outperform those that are taught in more conventional ways (Newman & Associates, 1996). That is, when teaching focuses on the development of understanding and meaning and on connecting lessons to a student's interest and experiences rather than on memorization, students do better both on assessments of advanced skills as well as on standardized tests. These findings suggest that students who think carefully about subjects, study them in-depth, and connect them to their personal experiences also are more likely to remember the facts and definitions called for on standardized tests (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000).

2. The Theme of Broad Involvement, Collaboration, and Collective Responsibility Reflected in Roles and Actions. This theme, named by Lambert (2003) and other researchers who have promoted collaboration with all stakeholders of the school, is in beginning levels at both case schools (Apple & Beane, 1995; Barth, 1990; Bennis, 1985; Boyd & Hord, 1994; Brandt, 1992; Canter; 1991; Comer; 1996; DuFour 2003; Epstein, 1992; Fullan, 1993; Hord, 1997, O'Hair, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1994).

3. The Theme of Improved Communication. Communication had been limited to take home folders, parent/teacher conferences, phone calls, and student-written homework assignments at the two case schools. Using their new technology as a tool communication efforts have improved and changed. Each of the case schools has a website. Teachers are forming their own class websites and linking to other sites. Homework is posted on the websites. Students, teachers, and parents are taking advantage of e-mail to communicate. There was no more phone tag or calling and recalling parents or patrons. E-mails are short, quick, and efficient when schools connect to parents and the community on-line.

The classroom websites at City Life are at beginner levels, but the enthusiasm for making them better is contagious. The websites open the classroom doors at City Life by extending their greetings and assignments to anyone with Internet access. The professional development for making improvements was provided by the OK-ACTS mentors.

The school website was under construction at Country Living. Country Living has donated more time to CLTV and it is having a phenomenal effect on communication throughout the entire community. Both case schools have increased communication between all stakeholders (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2000; Drake, 2000; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Quigley, 2000; Sanders & Harvey, 2000).

4. The Theme of Change From Traditional Instruction to Technology Rich Instruction. Country Living will never be the same. The stakeholders' collective vision for CLTV and targeting fifth grade core subject areas to improve student

achievement is working. The smiles on fifth grade faces, the projects completed with quality performance, and the improved grades and increased attendance provide evidence of change at Country Living. To see the fifth graders enjoy and look forward to class as they carefully open their laptops, share new knowledge they have researched on the Internet with a friend, and turn all of that into a project to share with the whole group develops authentic learning.

Watching students, teachers, and parents blossom with enthusiasm and creativity as they forget about traditional teaching and standardized curriculum to write and produce an early morning TV show brings forth greatness. Even the electrician who was checking the wiring paused to enjoy the production as identity building, interaction, and inquiry came to life using technology as a tool.

When the whole school concentrates on constructive learning and teaching, a climate for creativity, inquiry, and discourse abounds (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000). The IDEALS framework is clearly in place at Country Life and many practices overlap as the climate of the school becomes a field of technology enriched learning.

5. The Theme of Choice About Technology Needs. In education, as in anything else, teachers get what they aim for. The impact of this grant and the connections that the school is making to parents and the community is dramatic. That was part of the plan for both schools to get parents and the community more involved and interested in student achievement. "He who cherishes a beautiful vision, a lofty

ideal in his heart, will one day realize it." This timely quote by James Allen was found on the wall in one of the classrooms at Country Living.

If all the preconceived notions about education were erased, could City Life move more quickly to implement their grant action plans? Yes, but the reality is that using technology as a tool to improve student achievement is a slow process. The joy is that City Life has seen changes in student behavior and attitudes toward school and learning since the new grant technology has arrived. Fifth and sixth grade teachers have observed several unmotivated, alienated students become eager, cooperative learners for this year's science fair as they selected topics and received recognition and praise for their efforts. The aesthetic quality of the projects was enhanced by word processing, Excel chart making, and insertion of pictures and professional quality printing for the backboards. It is gratifying to see what happens when students are given the freedom to learn without traditional constraints; the days of pencil and paper projects enhanced by Magic Markers is being replaced. The City Life science fair contributions have been reinvented through technology.

At both schools, teachers are learning to project multi-media presentations using LCD projectors. Change is not all happening at once, but thanks to the grant monies at City Life and Country Living, advances are made more quickly than before the technology and professional development grants.. The availability of technology in these underserved schools is subtly transforming how teachers and students work and learn. Even the coke machines in City Life teacher's lounge has modem access to distributors to report when they are low on drinks. These new

technologies are effective tools for learning for students, teachers, parents, and the community beyond the school. All stakeholders had a choice in the new technology to enhance learning at both schools, and they have made the new technology top priority (Drake 2000, McKenzie, 2003).

6. The Theme of Test Score Inadequacies. Student achievement remains the goal at both case schools. Technology is just one tool for getting there, but it is impacting learning. E-mailing and Internet usage are opening these classrooms to the world. The teachers and students at County Living and City Life have the capabilities of submitting works of art and writings and researching any topic as they access practically anyone in the world with Internet access.

The principal, teachers, and parents are viewing student achievement data from norm-referenced tests, criterion referenced tests and performance-based assessments as well as trying to reach all populations of their constantly changing enrollments. They want their school's story to be more than a number. They want policy makers to be informed about perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors at their schools and in their classrooms. Reeves (2004) reiterates how teachers, students, parents, and the community feel about the inadequacy of test scores:

> The progress of individual students does not rely exclusively on averages of large groups of students who may or may not share similar learning needs, teaching strategies, attendance patterns, and other variables that influence test performance...only when community leaders, board members, administrators, parents, and teachers

understand the content of accountability can they understand the meaning of the numbers that now adorn the education box scores of local newspapers (p. 6).

7. The Theme of Modeling. Strong leadership at both case schools is ensuring continuous student and adult learning, high expectations and standards for academic performance, safe and secure learning environments, collaboration and an engaged community. These two principals are engaging parents and connecting to the community to build greater ownership for the work at Country Living and City Life. They are educating over 500 students and sharing leadership and decision-making. They encourage parents at home, in a room of their own at school, and all over the building to get involved in their child's learning and in all learning at the school. They have reached across the street to the business leaders of the community and to service and social workers, and beyond the walls of a world that has traditionally been left up to the school (Bennis, 1985; DuFour, 2003; Hoerr, 1996; Schein, 1999).

8. The Theme of Instructional Leadership. *The Six Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* promoted by NAESP are modeled by Nita Bridgers and Pamela Opendorr, both of whom have been honored as Distict Principal of the Year by the state organization. Leadership, vision, student learning, adult learning, data and decision making, and community engagement permeate their management and instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fullan, 1991; Glickman, 1993; Lambert, 2003, Chadwick, 2004).

9. The Theme of Homework. City Life and County Living are making effective school-to-home and home-to-school connections. Practice 8: School and Community Connections is a part of the learning culture and it overlaps with each of the ten practices of the IDEALS Rubric of High Achieving schools (O'Hair, 2000). Homework evolved at the two case schools as the area allowing the greatest role parents play in their children's education. Websites, parent interviews, e-mails, CLTV, and collaboration aimed at increased student achievement through homework permeate the schools (Clark, 1993).

10. The Theme of Collaboration. Community groups are just beginning to accept the role of collaboration at the two case schools. Both case schools have found that public support is essential to ensure that the grants and support of technology efforts are successful. The School Board president of each case school signed the grant assuring support. Community groups, the Chamber of Commerce, electricians, working parents, and more have joined a proactive role in helping the two case schools. It has been established at both case schools that the more public ownership and understanding are encouraged, the more supportive the public becomes. Research has found that strong relationships and trust among participant are vital to the collaborative process (Chadwick, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2000; O'Hair, 2000).

11. The Theme of Time. Time is a problem for both schools, but this researcher found time to be an excuse that many of the teachers used to keep from changing their comfortable habits. When trite traditional practices are replaced by

technology-enriched practices, priorities change. As students achieve more through authentic teaching and learning, test scores will improve (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000) at both schools. As teachers "help facilitate and accelerate technology literacy and integration by connecting the curriculum to the world beyond school" (O'Hair, 2000) their time is well spent (Newmann & Associates,1996; Glickman, 1993).

The researcher concludes that these schools will continue to develop and refine their professional learning community goals. As they grow in their technology expertise they will continue to include parents and the community in each step. The researcher also encourages and recommends further research at these two schools as they continue to connect their schools to the community, the state, the nation, and the world using technology as a tool.

Recommendations and Implications for Research

This research on school and community connections has taken about a year to complete. Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS grant applications were due in May of 2003; grant recipients were honored in August. The implementation of the grant was coupled with a statement of assurances requiring grant schools to comply during the funding year. That year long pact will be completed during the summer of 2004. Professional development included with the grant continues for a 3 year cycle.

The possibilities for continued research in community connections at either of these two schools will be ongoing. The schools will receive continuous professional development for two more years. The staff will continue to grow

through job-embedded professional development and networking with other OK-ACTS schools.

This research captured only two of the schools out of four elementary schools that are implementing Practice 8 School and Community Connections in the state. It is recommended that these other two schools become part of a research effort.

Further research is needed on Practice 8 in various settings. This research was limited to two elementary schools; the school and community connections take on new and interesting possibilities in Middle Schools and High Schools. A comparison of two or more schools in each of these areas would add to body of knowledge on school and community connections that benefit student achievement for older students.

The research interviews were limited to the principal, a teacher, a parent, and a community member at each of the two case schools. Interviews with more parents and community members would give insight to sustaining these connections after the grant funding year. Extended interviews would give broader perceptions and a bigger picture of shared responsibilities.

Both of the case schools are intent on improving parent and community connections as indicated by changing and updated websites. Website evolution at both schools could be a topic of research.

Pre and Post OK-ACTS Teacher Surveys will provide changing roles of teachers and students as they have progressed during the past grant funding year.

The SEDL survey on professional learning communities taken by the four schools that chose Practice 8: School and Community Connections would create interesting research in this field.

Practice 8 is only one of ten practices for high achieving schools (K20 Center, 2004). All ten practices overlap and are extensions of each other when schools strive for systemic change involving professional learning community development that integrates technology.

As the demands of NCLB and the need to improve student achievement increase, the need for principals to be skilled in the work of leadership is essential. This research implicates the need to talk with others about leadership, encourage others to take leadership roles and responsibilities, and provide leadership training using the IDEALS model. As individual and collective leadership grows within the school walls and beyond the school doors, it is important for the principal to build relationships and develop trust and rapport by treating others with respect. Professional learning communities need structures in place that foster leadership of all stakeholders and ways to showcase the talents and contributions of all learners. The principal should provide time and resources for everyone to teach and learn in authentic ways. Support and encouragement can be modeled through e-mail, hand written notes, and even two thumbs up. If the principal admits mistakes, shares honestly, shows humility, listens, treats others in a professional manner, and maximizes trust, fear and anxiety will disappear. These are important implications for university principal certification programs, professional development presenters,

and others building school and community connections through leadership, technology, and professional learning community development.

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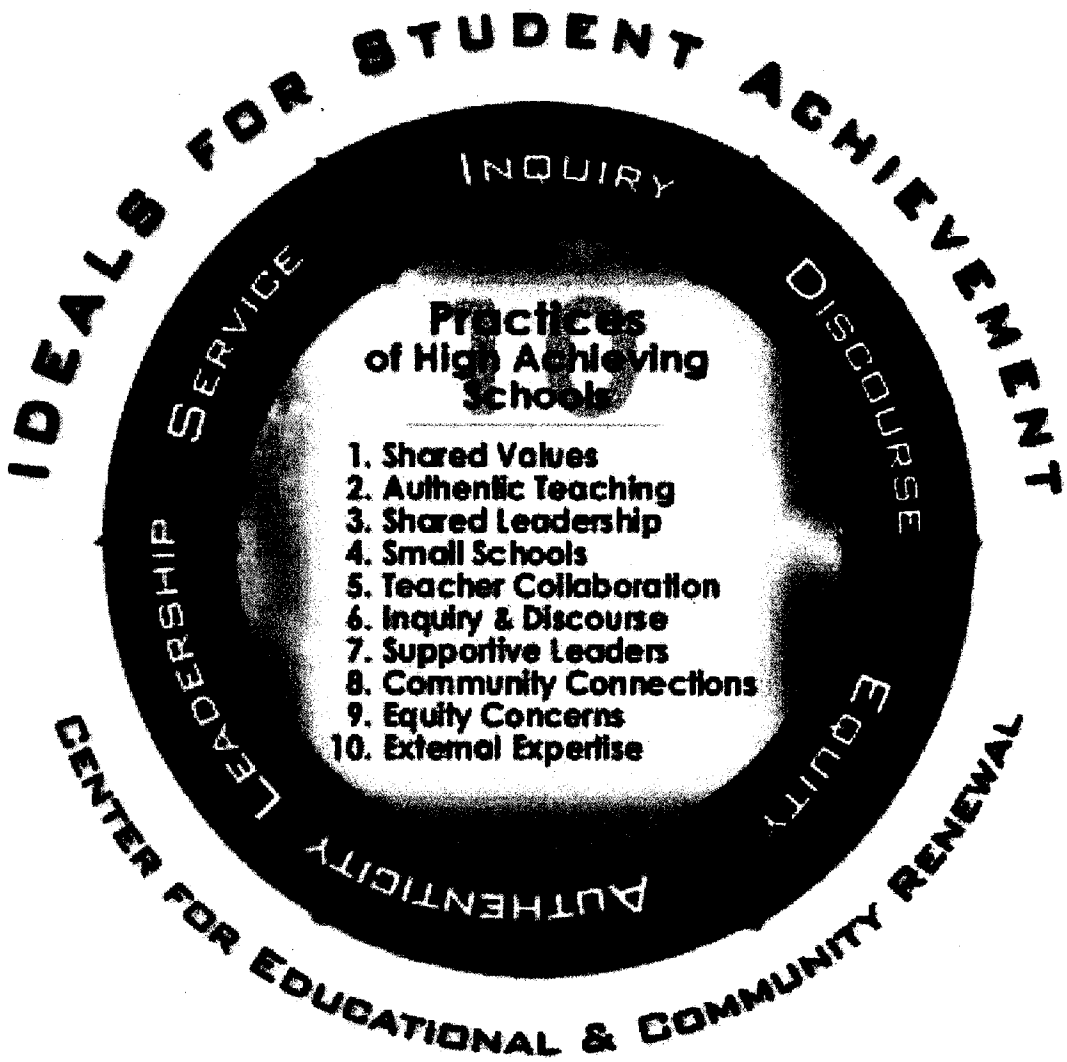
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APPENDICES

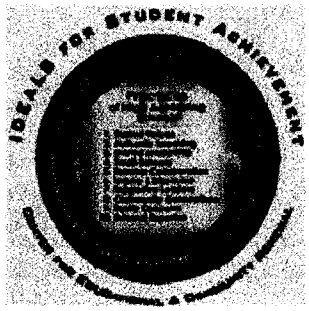
Appendix A

The IDEALS Framework



Appendix B

Rubric of High Achieving Schools



RUBRIC OF HIGH ACHIEVING SCHOOLS:

Practice, Evidence, Obstacles and Action Plans

Developing professional learning communities that create the feeling and benefits of smallness, even in large high schools.

Practice 1: Shared Values, Common Goals and Shared Purpose
A shared set of goals, commitments, and practices enacted throughout the school. Common goals in a school serve as a basis for decision-making (i.e., "How does that decision fit with what we believe in?") and give individuals an enhanced sense of purpose. They make individuals part of a bigger cause – of a cause beyond one's self.

Practice 2: Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment
Authentic pedagogy is practiced in the school. Students learn best when they

1. Think
2. Develop in-depth understanding
3. Apply academic learning to important, realistic problems and connect learning to the real-world

Practice 3: Shared Leadership & Decision-Making
Shared decision-making structures are designed to involve teachers, administrators, parents and students in making critical decisions that impact teaching and learning. Decision-making structures emphasize the importance of hearing all voices in the school community and emphasizing decision-making based on inquiry and data.

Practice 4: Caring/Personalized, Small School
Unlike conventional schools where teachers feel responsible for their students only while

the students are in their classrooms, in professional learning communities, teachers believe they are responsible for all students in the school all the time. Even in large schools, reorganization leads to personalized, caring environments through the development of practices such as teams, large blocks of time, small loads, and advisors/advocates. In these schools where collective responsibility for students and smaller learning communities exist, students feel cared about and important.

Practice 5: Teachers Collaborate and Learn Together

Teachers form study groups to examine research-based on successful teaching and learning. They set collective standards based on shared goals, work to connect the curriculum both internally and externally, examine student work together, and supervise and guide one another.

Practice 6: Inquiry and Discourse

Inquiry and discourse about school practices allows teachers to consider relevant perspectives, data, and knowledge. It involves asking questions such as:

- On what basis are we doing what we are doing? What evidence or support do we have to justify our practice? How do we know whether what we are doing is effective?
- What information, data, knowledge, and perspectives can we gather to assist us in studying our practice?
- How does what we are doing fit with our values and beliefs as a school?
- How does what we are doing serve the needs of the diverse individuals and groups who make up our community? Whose interests do our practices serve? Whose interests do they not serve?

The primary purpose of inquiry and discourse is the improvement of teaching, learning, and school practice in the classrooms and schools that engage in it.

Practice 7: Supportive Superintendent/Principal Leadership

Superintendent/Principal involvement in a school's efforts to become more democratic can range from being actively resistant to actively supportive of democratic efforts.

Superintendent/Principal resistance involves placing obstacles in the way of teachers attempting to become more democratic (e.g., withholding financial or material support) or simply refusing to engage in certain practices (e.g., sharing decisions).

Passive forms of Superintendent/Principal support consist of neither blocking the efforts of teachers engaged in school renewal work, nor proactively supporting or becoming personally involved in such efforts.

Active Superintendent/Principal support includes regularly publicly and privately communicating support for democratic efforts, personally participating in such efforts, and providing time for discussing the school's movement toward professional learning communities.

Practice 8: Connection to Home and Community

In order to be a professional learning community, a school must connect itself with families and communities in various ways. On one level it should involve families and communities in the work of the school, which is educating students for democratic citizenship. On a second level the school should involve itself in the work of the family and community.

Practice 9: Concern for Equity

Schools are concerned with issues of equity and justice not only within the school, but also in the local and global communities. Some equity issues that a school might examine include:

- Why is there a disparity between races in achievement in our school?
- How can we provide less affluent students with equitable access to technology?
- Do our instructional practices legitimate the background and culture of some students at the expense of others?
- How do we group students and how does this impact each different group of students?
- How do our discipline policies and practices affect students from nondominate cultural groups?
- Do our interactions and language subtly and subconsciously promote socially constructed gender roles and expectations to students?
- Do our shared decision making procedures ensure that the voices of all teachers, parents, and students get heard?

Practice 10: Access to External Expertise

In democratic schools teachers and others are regularly exposed to ideas and knowledge from sources external to the school. These schools are constantly participating in individual or collective staff development efforts. Ideas and knowledge brought in from external sources are not simply "adopted" and put into practice, but rather are discussed, debated, and subjected to inquiry and discourse.

[On line at k20center.org]

Appendix C

Researcher's IRB

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

April 14, 2004

Dr. Mary John O'Hair
Center for Educational & Community Renewal
SCI 308
CAMPUS MAIL

SUBJECT: "OETT and OK-ACTS: Partnering for Professional Learning Communities (PLC)"

Dear Dr. O'Hair:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved the requested revision(s) to the subject protocol.

Please note that this approval is for the protocol and informed consent form initially approved by the Board on June 27, 2003, and the revisions included in your request dated 12/08/03 to add the following persons to this project:

Mark A. Nanny	Jo Ann Pierce
Randy S. Averso	Ron Myers
Jean Cate	Dan Allen
Dennis Gentry	Jesica Turner
Leslie A. Williams	Craig Stevens
Linda Atkinson	Robert H. Kinsey

If you wish to make other changes, you will need to submit a request for revision to this office for review.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 325-8110.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair
Institutional Review Board - Norman Campus (FWA #00003191)

FY2002-443

cc: Dr. Mark Nanny, Engineering / Randy S. Averso, Education / Jean Cate, Education / Dennis Gentry, EACS / Leslie A. Williams, EACS / Linda Atkinson, Education / Jo Ann Pierce, EACS / Ron Myers, Education / Dan Allen, EACS / Jesica Turner, EACS / Craig Stevens, EACS / Robert H. Kinsey, EACS

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3085 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-2373

Individual Informed Consent Form for Research
University of Oklahoma, Norman

This survey is part of research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is intended to provide information so survey and interview respondents can acknowledge informed consent for participation in a research project.

Title: OETT and OK-ACTS: Partnering for Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
Principal Investigator: Mary John O'Hair, Ed.D., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Co-Principal investigators: Mark Nanny, Ph.D., Civil Engineering and Environmental Sciences
Randy Averso, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Jean Cate, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal

This research is designed to understand perceptions and change processes that are involved within a school community following their one to three-year engagement in 10 practices designed to increase student learning and foster democratic citizenship. Participants agree to complete the Rubric for High Achieving Schools. The Rubric consists of the 10 practices linked directly to improved student achievement and involves the participant to give examples of each practice, describe obstacles to each practice, and develop an action plan to overcome obstacles. Practices focus on the following: core learning principles; authentic teaching and learning; shared leadership and decision-making; teacher collaboration and learning; inquiry and discourse; supportive administrative leadership; caring and collective responsibility for students; connection to home and community; concern for equity; and access to external expertise. Time required to complete the Rubric will vary by school. Most schools connect the Rubric to school and district goals and devote professional development days (approximately 4-8 days per year) to identifying, analyzing, and implementing the Rubric's 10 practices. In addition to completion of the Rubric, selected participants from OK-ACTS Phase II schools and districts agree to a follow-up interview (approximately 1-2 hour) based on practices described in the Rubric. Participants will be asked to describe the process involved in developing the practice, the obstacles encountered, and how they plan to or have overcome obstacles.

Please read the statements below:
1. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty.
2. I understand I am entitled to no benefits for participation.
3. I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty.
4. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only. Responses will not be shared with persons who are not directly involved with this study.
5. All information I give will be kept confidential.
6. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

The investigators, Drs. Mary John O'Hair, Mark Nanny, Randy Averso, and Jean Cate or other key personnel are available to answer any questions regarding this research study and may be reached by phone at (405) 325-1267, by internet at www.k20center.org, or by contacting the Center for Educational and Community Renewal, 640 Parrington Oval, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019.
For inquires about rights as a research participant, contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405/325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.
If selected to be interviewed, I consent to being audio taped. (Please check: yes ___ no ___)

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____ Researcher Signature _____

APPROVED
APR 1 4 2004
OU-NC IRB

APPROVAL
JUN 2 6 2004
EXPIRES

INVESTIGATOR'S ASSURANCE

- I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.
- I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have the responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project and the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects.
- I agree to comply with all OU-NC IRB policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research.
- I will ensure that this study is performed by qualified personnel adhering to the OU-NC IRB approved protocol.
- I will not modify the approved protocol or consent materials without first submitting for review and approval by the OU-NC IRB an amendment to the approved protocol.
- I agree to obtain legally effective informed consent from the research participants as applicable to this research and as prescribed in the approved protocol.
- I will promptly report significant adverse events to the OU-NC IRB, in writing.
- I will adhere to all requirements for continuing review.
- I will advise the OU-NC IRB of any change of address or contact information as long as this protocol remains active.

Mary John Elkins Principal Investigator	10/31/2003 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Mark A. Nanny Co-Principal Investigator	10-31-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Sandy L. Stevens Co-Principal Investigator	10-31-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Jean Otte Co-Principal Investigator	10-31-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Dennis Hensley Collaborator	10-31-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Judell Watkins Collaborator	10-31-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
[illegible] Collaborator	[illegible] Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
JoAnn Pierce Collaborator	11/3/03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Ron Myers Collaborator	11/3/03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Dan Allen Collaborator	11/3/03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Jessica St. Turner Collaborator	11-3-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Craig Stevens Collaborator	11-3-03 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
 Collaborator	 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
 Collaborator	 Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

FACULTY SPONSOR'S ASSURANCE

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accordance with the research protocol. Additionally,

- I hereby confirm that I have thoroughly reviewed this IRB application, including the protocol narrative, and deem it ready for submission.
- I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
- I agree to be available, personally, to assist the investigator in solving problems, should they arise during the course of the study.
- I assure that the investigator will promptly report significant adverse events and will adhere to all requirements for continuing review.
- If I will be unavailable, e.g. sabbatical leave, vacation, or resignation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the OU-NC IRB, in writing, of such changes.
- The research is appropriate in design.

Mary John O'Hair — Faculty Sponsor

12-5-03 — Date

Note: To act as faculty sponsor you must be a member of the OU-NC, OU-Tulsa (non-medical), or Cameron University faculty. The faculty sponsor is considered the responsible party for legal and ethical performance of the project.

Appendix D

Phase II OETT/OK-ACTS Grant Application

OKLAHOMA EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY TRUST
OK-ACTS Phase II PARTNERSHIP GRANT
FY03 Competitive/Limited Application – Round 1
Center for Educational and Community Renewal

General Information

Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust (OETT) is the funding source to increase technology equipment, training, and integration for the improvement of student achievement. The OETT/OK-ACTS Phase II grant is a funding program for OK-ACTS Phase I schools and districts to implement and sustain collaborative professional learning and high achieving school practices. The grant funds will support learning opportunities through the integration of technology in authentic ways to ensure students have meaningful and successful learning experiences.

Maximum Grant Amount: $50,000.00 Approximately Number of Grant Awards: 20
State Quadrants: 6 (based on ADM) Application Prerequisite: Completed OK-ACTS Phase I

A typewritten or word processed original, five copies, and a floppy disk of the completed application must be postmarked no later than **Friday, May 30, 2003** or delivered to the Center for Educational and Community Renewal no later than **4:30 p.m. on Friday, May 30, 2003.** Multiple application attempts will result in disqualification. Mail or hand deliver to: The Center for Educational and Community Renewal, University of Oklahoma, 640 Parrington Oval, Room 308, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3064. Technical assistance is available at (405) 325-1267.

Information

Type of Application: ☐ District Application ☐ School Application

County Name and Number:

District Name and Number:

School Name and Number:

Mailing Address:

City: State: Zip:

District Telephone: - -

School Telephone: - -

Contact Person (s), Title, E-mail, Address and Telephone Numbers:

Amount Requested $

_____ _____

Signature of District Superintendent Signature of Principal

_____ Grant Number

Signature of School Board President Office use only District

School

Demographic Information

1. a Type of District/School: ☐ Rural ☐ Urban ☐ Suburban

1. b Campus type (check one): ☐ Primary ☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ Jr. High ☐ High School ☐ Alternative ☐ Charter ☐ Independent ☐ Dependent ☐ Career Technology

1. c Number of teachers in the district?

1. d Number of teachers in the school?

2. a Total district enrollment on October 1, 2002:

2. b Total school enrollment on October 1, 2002:

3. a Percentage of students for free and/or reduced lunch as of October 1, 2002

District % School %

3. b Number of students for free and/or reduced lunch as of October 1, 2002

District # School #

4. a District Ethnicity Information based on October 1, 2002

What is the ethnic percentage for the following groups in your district?

African American	Caucasian	Native American	Asian/Eastern Pacific Islander	Hispanic

4. b School Level Ethnicity Information based on October 1, 2002

What is the ethnic percentage for the following groups in your school?

African American	Caucasian	Native American	Asian/Eastern Pacific Islander	Hispanic

5. a Number of teachers who will participate in this grant proposal?

5. b Number of students by grade level who will be served by the proposal.

Grade Level	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
# of Students								

Grade Level	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
# of Students							

1. Enter the API scores

	2001 District	**2001 School**	**2002 District**	**2002 School**
Attendance				
OSTP				
Quality				
Total				

OETT/OK-ACTS PARTNERSHIP GRANT

Executive Summary

An executive summary is a brief overview of the grant application designed to give readers a quick preview of its contents. Its purpose is to consolidate the principal points of your plan in a concise format. Limit your response to the space provided on this page.

Project Summary:

Technology and Its Use:

Systemic Support:

OETT / OK-ACTS Phase II Grant Budget Proposal

Budget Year:

Date:

A. Technology Equipment

Quantity	Catalog/Order #	Item Description	Cost/U	Total

OETT/OK-ACTS Phase II Grant
Responsibility and Timeline Chart

Grant Goal:				
Timeline	Responsible Person(s)	Activities	Assessment Strategies	Location of Technology
Grant funds will be used to pay only for equipment or activities occurring during the grant funding year. No fund carryover is allowed to the next fiscal year. **Duplicate as needed.**				

OK-ACTS PHASE I

Completion Requirements

- ☐ **Attended 2-day leadership seminar**
- ☐ **Attended 2 cluster meetings**
- ☐ **Completed the TAGLIT assessment (principals only)**
- ☐ **Submitted one action plan**

ACTION PLAN FORM **Practice: Shared Values**		
SUPPORTING EVIDENCE (Provide examples of how the practice is enacted in your school. Please be specific. Include how technology impacts this practice.)	**OBSTACLES** (List factors which keep you from engaging more completely in the practice.)	**ACTION PLAN** (Explain how you plan to overcome obstacles. What role will technology play?)
In my school this practice is: (*Select one*) ☐ Not present ☐ Beginning ☐ Developed ☐ Well-established		

Appendix E

OETT/OK-ACTS Survey for Teachers

Please provide the following background information:

Last 4 Digits of Your Social Security Number:

Name of Your School:

Your District:

1. How frequently do you use a computer:

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

2. Your general expertise for using a computer is:

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced
- Expert

3. I use a computer mostly for:

		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
a.	Personal purposes (e.g., own correspondence, email)					
b.	Classroom record keeping (e.g., attendance, grades)					
c.	Classroom instruction (e.g., presentations, student activities)					
d.	School communications (e.g., with other teachers, students, and/or parents)					

4. Please rate your <u>current proficiency</u> to use the following technology applications or tools:

		Not at All	Basic	Moderate	Well	Expert
a.	Word processing (e.g., Word, Word Perfect, Apple Works)	○	○	○	○	○
b.	Spreadsheet program (e.g., Excel, Apple Works)	○	○	○	○	○
c.	Presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Hyper Studio)	○	○	○	○	○
d.	Database program (e.g., Access, FileMaker)	○	○	○	○	○
e.	Email (e.g., Outlook, Eudora)	○	○	○	○	○
f.	Internet/Web Browsers (e.g., Explorer, Netscape)	○	○	○	○	○
g.	Calendar or scheduling program	○	○	○	○	○
h.	Publishing program (e.g., Acrobat, Publisher, Pagemaker)	○	○	○	○	○
		Not at All	Basic	Moderate	Well	Expert
i.	Graphics program (e.g., PhotoShop, Paint Shop Pro)	○	○	○	○	○
j.	Scanner	○	○	○	○	○
k.	Hand-held device (e.g., PDA, GPS)	○	○	○	○	○
l.	Graphing calculator	○	○	○	○	○
m.	Digital Camera	○	○	○	○	○
n.	Smartboard	○	○	○	○	○
o.	LCD projector	○	○	○	○	○
p.	Removable Media (e.g., Zip Disk, CD Rom)	○	○	○	○	○

5. To what extent do you do the following now that you have participated in the professional development offered by OETT/OK-ACTS?

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a.	Incorporate technology into my students' learning activities when planning lessons.	○	○	○	○	○
b.	Work collaboratively with other teachers in planning and reviewing lessons that involve the use of technology.	○	○	○	○	○
c.	Use technology-related activities to improve my students' basic skills (e.g., reading, writing, math computation).	○	○	○	○	○
d.	Use technology-related activities to promote problem- solving skills and critical thinking in my students.	○	○	○	○	○
e.	Observe other teachers' use of technology in their classroom instruction.	○	○	○	○	○
f.	Use technology to gather information for my lessons (e.g., search the Web)	○	○	○	○	○
g.	Create lesson plans using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
h.	Design instructional activities that encourage students to use technology.	○	○	○	○	○
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
i.	Design learning activities that require students to use technology resources.	○	○	○	○	○
j.	Design activities for my students that encourages creative expressions of learning using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
k.	Design activities that require students to use technology to collaborate with peers and/or outside experts on assignments.	○	○	○	○	○
l.	Design student activities that use technology for discussing ideas and reflecting on learning experiences.	○	○	○	○	○
m.	Design student activities that use technology for collecting, manipulating, and analyzing data	○	○	○	○	○

	(i.e., spreadsheets, databases).					
n.	Design student activities to encourage information gathering via the internet.	○	○	○	○	○
o.	Provide student opportunities to create and share presentations using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
p.	Teach my students to evaluate the accuracy and bias of information gathered using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
q.	Incorporate technology into my instruction.	○	○	○	○	○
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
r.	Use technology to communicate with colleagues and staff for administrative purposes.	○	○	○	○	○
s.	Use technology to communicate with students.	○	○	○	○	○
t.	Use technology to communicate with parents.	○	○	○	○	○
u.	Use technology to communicate with community members.	○	○	○	○	○
v.	Use technology to collaborate with colleagues and staff on student learning issues.	○	○	○	○	○
w.	Collect and analyze student data using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
x.	Assess student learning using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
y.	Use technology to organize grade information for students.	○	○	○	○	○
z.	Use technology to organize grade information for parents and/or school administrators.	○	○	○	○	○
aa.	Keep student attendance, progress, and demographic information using technology.	○	○	○	○	○
bb.	Use technology to post homework and other class information for student or parent access.	○	○	○	○	○
cc.	Use problem-based learning with my students.	○	○	○	○	○
dd.	Search the Web for student learning activities.	○	○	○	○	○
ee.	Engage my students in authentic learning activities.	○	○	○	○	○

6. How often do <u>your students</u> use the following for in-classroom assignments or out-of-ciass assignments?

	Other Technology Uses:	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a.	Computer applications to prepare assignments/papers (e.g., word processing)	○	○	○	○	○
b.	Computer applications to analyze data or keep records (e.g., spreadsheets)	○	○	○	○	○
c.	Computer or Web-based applications to produce class presentations	○	○	○	○	○
d.	The internet or other software to research information or find materials for assignments	○	○	○	○	○
e.	Software to learn or practice new skills	○	○	○	○	○
f.	Software to study for tests	○	○	○	○	○
g.	Enrichment tools to aid in learning (e.g., graphing calculators, LCD projectors)	○	○	○	○	○
h.	Computer communications to collaborate on assignments (e.g., email, Web-based communication)	○	○	○	○	○
i.	Computer communications to correspond with experts, authors, or others (e.g., email, Web-based communication)	○	○	○	○	○
j.	The Web to participate in virtual fieldtrips	○	○	○	○	○
k.	Other:	○	○	○	○	○

7. **What degree of support do you receive for incorporating technology into your teaching and learning experiences from the following:**

Other Technology Uses:		None	Hardly Any	Some	A Lot	Total Support
a.	Your principal	○	○	○	○	○
b.	Other teachers at your school	○	○	○	○	○
c.	Organizations/businesses in your community	○	○	○	○	○
d.	Parents of your students	○	○	○	○	○
e.	Your students	○	○	○	○	○
f.	Professional development providers	○	○	○	○	○
g.	Others:	○	○	○	○	○

8. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Other Technology Uses:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a.	I think learning how technology can be used by teachers and students is exciting.	○	○	○	○
b.	Students are more interested in learning when using technology to investigate an issue or solve a problem.	○	○	○	○
c.	I feel that technology makes my work more complicated to complete.	○	○	○	○
d.	Using technology can/does help students better understand what they are learning.	○	○	○	○
e.	It takes a special talent to creatively facilitate and manage technology-based learning activities.	○	○	○	○
f.	Figuring out how to incorporate technology into instructional practices does not appeal to me.	○	○	○	○
g.	I want to learn more about using technology for teaching and learning.	○	○	○	○
h.	I feel confident in my ability to use technology for teaching and learning.	○	○	○	○
i.	Creating technology-based learning activities is too time consuming compared to what is learned.	○	○	○	○
j.	I think I am/will be a better teacher by using technology as part of my instructional practices.	○	○	○	○

9. The items below ask you to respond about your level of understanding of various types of technology in two ways: (1) Your perceptions NOW that you have received various professional development through OETT/OK-Acts; and (2) your perceptions PRIOR TO receiving the professional development. Please mark a response in BOTH sections.

To what extent do you understand the following NOW that you have participated in the professional development offered by OETT/OK-ACTS?

	Other Technology Uses:	Very Little	Some	Fairly Well	To a Great Extent
a.	computers	C	C	C	C
b.	computer software applications	C	C	C	C
c.	other technology applications (i.e., PDA, LCD projector, digital camera, etc.)	C	C	C	C
d.	search the Web	C	C	C	C
e.	overall technological skill	C	C	C	C

To what extent did you understand the following PRIOR TO participating in the professional development offered by OETT/OK-ACTS?

	Other Technology Uses:	Very Little	Some	Fairly Well	To a Great Extent
a.	computers	C	C	C	C
b.	computer software applications	C	C	C	C
c.	other technology applications (i.e., PDA, LCD projector, digital camera, etc.)	C	C	C	C
d.	search the Web	C	C	C	C
e.	overall technological skill	C	C	C	C

Appendix F:
Comparing Conventional and Authentic Pedagogy

Conventional Pedagogy *	**Authentic Pedagogy** **
Reproduction Knowledge	**Construction Knowledge**
• memorizing information	• organizing, synthesizing, interpreting, explaining, and evaluating information
	• considering alternatives
Transmission of Knowledge	**Disciplined Inquiry**
• repeating information	• collecting information via methods of inquiry
• superficial understanding • brief communication (1-2 word responses)	• in-depth understanding via exploring issues, relationships, complexities
	• elaborated communication
Value for School	**Value Beyond School**
• problem connected to books, tests, etc.	• problem connected to world beyond classroom
	• audience beyond classroom
• audience is teacher	
Implicit View of Students	**Implicit View of Students**
• students as generic mass	• student as an individual
• assumes sameness	• assumes difference
• difference is a deficit	• difference is natural
• difference is undesirable and to be rectified	• difference desirable & results in enhanced learning
	• gives voice to student difference
• attempts to silence student difference	

*Conventional and/or traditional

** Authentic Pedagogy and/or PLC's

[on line at www.k20center.org]

Appendix G
Interview Protocol

- **Have permission forms signed by all that are interviewed.**
- **Take digital camera to take pictures of technology and other resources that can visually help to answer the research questions**
- **Get a copy of the school's grade reporting process**
- **Get copies of any information the school wishes to share to document school and community connections**

Interview Questions for Site Visits

Each of the participants (Principal, Teacher, Parent, Community Member) interviewed will be asked the same open-ended questions. It is the researcher's intent to guide the interviews, but allow for rich conversation to evolve. I will listen carefully, but record the interviews so that I can find emerging themes to build on the research question and sub questions.

1. What is the philosophy of leadership at this school?

2. How should parents be involved in the school and in their children's education?

3. How and when do you talk about family and community connections? How do you support teachers in family and community connections?

4. How does your school's mission statement demonstrate a commitment to family and community?

5. What family and community involvement policies currently exist?

6. Are parents and community members included at curriculum meetings, professional development workshops, and staff retreats? Explain

7. Are family partnership policies resulting in higher achievement and stronger school community? How is this assessed? How is technology being added to the curriculum to support and improve student leaning with the grant monies? How are parents and the community helping with this?

8. How is the integration of technology impacting your school as it is implemented?

9. How does your school develop a personalized, caring-enriched learning environment as you implement Practice 8: School and Community Connections?

10. How does your school encourage participation in a collaborative network and share best practices as you increase parent and community involvement?

11. Do you have a parent library in the school or a parent center? Explain.

12. What is done to accommodate parent work/child care schedules at the school to increase parent and community connections?

13. What kinds of homework strategies engage parents in their child's learning?

14. How are parents informed of their child's learning performance?

15. Doe the school have a strategy for teaching parents how to help their children with schoolwork? Explain.

16. Does the community think of the school as an extension of the family? Explain.

17. How does you school, regardless of income, educational level, or cultural background involve parents in their children's learning, from preschool through the 5^{th} grade (6^{th} at one of the case schoos)?

18. Can parent and the community see the school's vision in the activities, instruction, and climate within the building?

19. What connections is this school making with community organizations or groups?

20. What do you wish that I would have asked you about this school and its community?