

# WHOLE SCHOOLING RESEARCH PROJECT

## VI. 2 Empowering Citizens In A Democracy

The Whole Schooling framework focuses on two facets of democracy simultaneously. One root of the democracy principle lies firmly in the belief that the ultimate purpose of American public education is perpetuation and improvement of our constitutional democratic form of government through the preparation of future citizens. Tied to this is the Whole Schooling goal of creating an educational environment in which demographic and socioeconomic constraints do not create barriers either to learning in the short run or to membership in broader American society in the long run. This goal is rooted in a concern for “social justice.”

Beyond an interest in valuing and capitalizing upon whatever diversity exists in a given school, Whole Schooling goes further in explicitly identifying disability as one of the key elements of diversity to be considered. Beyond working to include individuals with disabilities as full citizens of the school community, Whole Schooling also addresses the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)’s requirement that students have individualized educational plans designed

collaboratively by teams that include educators, parents, other members of the community depending on specific circumstances of individual students, and the students themselves. Creation of such plans requires that a team of individuals, including representatives of a broad range of the school community, to work together to reach consensus. Finally, genuine inclusion of students with identified learning differences requires, on the one hand, that the existence of learning differences among all students be acknowledged and addressed, and, on the other, that students be empowered to support one another in their effort to learn together, as well as to make sure that their own educational needs are met.

We believe that efforts to create a fully inclusive school can only be truly successful if the process of school change creates a community where all of the Whole Schooling principles are followed. Within the Whole Schooling Research Project, the Whole Schooling framework was used by school leaders in various ways to promote school renewal, both with respect to defining the vision of an inclusive school and to providing a procedural roadmap.

### KEY FINDINGS

Schools whose inclusive efforts are motivated primarily by social justice concerns tend to be more successful and resilient than those which view inclusion as a special education program.

Commitment to a democratic school environment creates healthy tensions in the effort to establish strong leadership while at the same time instilling personal empowerment in all members of the school community.

A wide variety of leadership and teaching styles can support schools and classrooms operating within the Whole Schooling framework.

Creation of a professional community climate where colleagues routinely confer about educational practices and beliefs is a major challenge.

## What Do We Mean By “Democracy”?

American society continues to struggle with tensions between a belief in individual rights and freedoms and the need to establish a system that supports the collective good. Nowhere are these tensions more obvious than in public schools. On the one hand, schools are seen as the primary medium for transmission of cultural and political values, hence the emphasis on character education, rules of conduct, and so forth. The current political emphasis on standardization of curriculum and testing to determine the level of attainment of those standards further emphasizes an underlying belief that schools have a mission to forward a collectively determined agenda. On the other hand, the notion of academic freedom has been stretched to the point where many educators (and others) believe that teachers should be free to do as they please within the confines of their classrooms, with virtually no outside “interference” and no responsibility to students or a larger school community beyond showing up (and probably maintaining some order and quiet in their classrooms).



Added to this tension is confusion about the democratic ideal for charting a collective course. Is it a simple matter of majority rule – dissenters must simply fall in line – or is the real goal reaching a consensus? If the goal is consensus, how can it be achieved? As a group, teachers have no special training in thinking about these matters. They often have little notion of strategies for conducting their own professional lives within a “democratic” context, and few experiences typically provided regarding how to prepare their students for life in a democratic society.

When we state a goal of preparing students to participate in a democracy, therefore, we are concerned far with far more than teaching them the mechanics of voting and otherwise determining “the will of the people.” Basic respect for those who are “different” is critical, as is an understanding of the need for, and benefits of, agreed upon “values” or “rules of the game” such as those embodied in constitutions at all levels. At the same time, students must learn the value of making their own voices heard and gain skills for doing so. They must learn to evaluate what they hear from other voices in light of their own experience, the experience of history, and synthesis of the wealth of information and opinion to which they have access.

All of this is often summarized in the concepts of “critical thinking,” “personal responsibility,” and “respect,” but those particular phrases are also used by many who do not share the basic mission of Whole Schooling. Indeed, “critical thinking” is often used to describe the process of parroting back a particular interpretation of information that is put forward by someone in authority (such as the author of a textbook or a teacher). “Personal responsibility” and “respect” often boil down to obeying authority figures. When interpreted narrowly, these elements of “character” can be used as the basis of virtually any educational philosophy implemented for any purpose. It is important, therefore, to keep the broader mission of Whole Schooling in mind when evaluating particular school initiatives or the observations of school

activities. Observations of professional interactions and classroom processes within the Whole Schooling Research Project have made it clear that this is not a trivial issue.

Likewise, the kind of school community within which classrooms are embedded is democratic not only when all members have a voice, but also when certain guiding principles are adhered to by all. Too often, teachers and administrators who seek to be democratic believe either that majority rule is the only issue or that individual freedom is so important that the only restraints that can be put on community members are those that would be considered criminal in our legal system.

Many teachers and administrators believe that meeting the needs of all students within a classroom is a matter of teacher choice. If a teacher prefers to teach only to a segment of the students, perhaps those deemed “on grade level,” that is a legitimate professional choice. Whole Schooling does not share this view. Instead, the underlying mission of educating all children, together, means that every member of the community has both rights and responsibilities that are not a matter of personal preference.

The democratic classroom is a classroom in which students have a voice in setting both long and short-term goals, in determining how those goals are to be achieved, and in evaluating the results of their efforts. They share responsibility both for their own learning and for that of their classmates. They share the responsibility with their teachers, the larger school community, their parents, and the broader community within which the school functions. Whole Schooling Research Project observation and interview data provide a wide range of approaches taken by teachers and students to share responsibility for generating goals and finding ways to achieve them, while still meeting goals imposed partly from the larger community.

A particular issue in classrooms, as in larger society, is discipline and shaping behavior so as to support, or at least not undermine, the central goals of the group. If one is committed to educating all students together and to developing a belief that difference is an asset, not a liability, then classroom management and discipline can become an important challenge. The positive behavioral supports initiative introduced in Michigan at the same time that the Whole Schooling Research Project began is entirely compatible with Whole Schooling. Indeed, the purest versions of that approach can be derived directly from the Five Principles and their supporting literature. However, teachers and school communities still struggle to implement this philosophy, which is radically different from that most of them experienced when they were in school, and is too often also new and counter-intuitive.

### **Democracy At The Building Level**

Creating a school that implements the Whole Schooling philosophy is thus a challenging proposition, requiring strong leadership and commitment of time and energy from all members of the school community. As the project progressed, it became clear that a basic issue unresolved in all project schools was the definition of the school community itself. While virtually everyone talked about a “community” that included students, faculty and staff, and parents, there was little observable evidence that such communities existed and that school leadership sought to engage all of these potential constituents on an on-going basis, particularly the broader communities within which the schools are embedded (See Table VI.2-1).

<b>Table VI.2-1: SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP</b>			
<b>School professional community</b>	Administrative staff		All schools
	Office staff		None
	Regular classroom teaching staff		All
	“Specials” teachers		Avery, Hamilton
	Special education teachers (with and without own classrooms)		All?
	Paraprofessionals		Partial at Evergreen, none elsewhere
<b>School professional community</b>	Administrative staff		
	Ancillary staff	Associated with programs like “gifted”, ESL, Title I	Partial?
		Therapists with on-going assignments within the building (full or part time)	None
	Building support services	Custodial staff, lunch room, etc.	None
	Professionals tangentially attached to school	Consultants from ISD or programs run at higher-than-district level	None
	Consultants brought in from all sources	Short-term tasks (usually)	None
	District-level support staff		None
	District-level administrative staff		Partial at Hamilton?
<b>Adult non-employees</b>	Parent volunteers	Involved on a regular basis	A very few parents at most schools, not included
	Community members	Involved on a regular basis	Meadowview, not included in planning
	Links to higher education	Student teachers	Partial?
		Involvement in pre-service education	None?
		Research projects	None?
		Critical friends	Hamilton, Buckley (partial)
<b>Links to other schools in district</b>	Faculty/staff linkages		Links to other schools in district
	Middle or high school students in elementary schools		Not observed
	High school students in middle schools		Not observed
	General education buildings and self-contained special education buildings		Not observed
	Public to private schools (in geographic district)		Not observed
<b>Links to schools outside the district</b>	Charter schools and schools in other districts	Staff networking	Hamilton, Meadowview, Evergreen, Armstrong
		Student contact	Planned only
		Internet projects	Meadowview, classroom basis only
<b>Students</b>	All enrolled students in the building		Partial to minimal at all schools

This situation contradicts the clear finding of the US Department of Education’s 1996 study of the role of leadership in sustaining school reform<sup>1</sup>:

Effective reform leaders cultivate a broad definition of community and consider the contribution that every member can make to helping children meet challenging standards. They hear the voices of many stakeholders--families, businesses, and other groups and institutions. Their ability to develop plans that reflect the legitimate influence of others draws in many authentic partners, whose personal convictions as well as community spirit energize participation. They look for evidence of widespread participation in important aspects of change. Establishing partnerships and listening to a chorus of voices are leadership skills that permeate all aspects of reform.

### **Who belongs to the school community?**

Building-level structures and activities can include a range of participants, from the full school community to very specific subsets of that community such as grade level teams or school improvement committees. The full set of Whole Schooling principles implies that the school community includes school staff, students, parents, and other members of the community who choose to involve themselves or who are required to do so by nature of their jobs. During the course of the Whole Schooling Research Project, however, we observed no formal activities or structures that acknowledged such a broad community and recorded no conversations aimed to involve the entire community.

At best, the “school community” is construed by school staff to mean the set of individuals who are physically present in the school during all or almost all of the time that classes are in session. Even some individuals who fit this description are often excluded from community membership: office staff, custodial staff, lunchroom staff, people housed in the building but not “assigned” specifically to the building (e.g., the ESL district staff housed in offices at Hamilton), and often paraprofessional staff. Although these individuals may consider themselves part of the school community, the rest of the community often seemed oblivious of their existence except when they needed a specific service from them. This situation parallels the class-level situation observed in some schools where students with disabilities appeared to consider themselves members of their classroom communities, but where their classmates did not acknowledge such membership. (See the discussions of Cheryl and Nathan in the section on “Severe disabilities”.)



Teachers in collaborative discussion regarding implementing inclusive education.

<sup>1</sup> Nadeau, Adel and Leighton, Mary S. *The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform: Voices From the Field*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary, July, 1996, Chapter 2.

Although students were sometimes deeply involved in planning and decision making at the classroom level, we attended no meetings at levels beyond the classroom where students were present and received no information about other meetings or activities where they were present or invited. (Student councils appear to be pro forma organizations whose sphere of operation extends only to the outermost fringes of communal life. For example, the council may be concerned with creating activities that seek to promote “school spirit” but that do not integrate with on-going school activities and do not necessarily follow any particular concept of what a “school with spirit” might even look like. Similarly, the council may be concerned with food sales, school fairs, and other activities that are not integrated with any larger vision of the school community.) Aside from formal meetings, there was also little or no evidence that students were considered genuine community members rather than as recipients of services.

Student codes of conduct and other formal rule definitions focus on “responsibilities” that involve various forms of doing what one is told, but are devoid of the kind of reciprocal responsibilities (and rights) that form the basis of genuine communities. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in Jennifer’s fourth grade class at Hamilton, a class closer to many of the WS principles than most others in the study, student papers on what they would do if they ran the school focused almost entirely on what the students would not do: homework, various assignments deemed unpleasant, and so forth. Some students would simply close the school or devote it entirely to athletics. The closest any students came to constructive suggestions consistent with a “community” vision was increasing the amount of time available for free reading.

If students were routinely involved in discussing the shared values of the school, creating strategies for living those values, and evaluating the success of those strategies, one would expect essays that dealt more substantively with the management and culture of the school. At the very least, one would expect that arguments in favor of, say, increasing the time spent on athletics would make arguments that the increase would further school goals. None of the students wrote essays of this nature.

The role of parents was variable across the schools, but at no school were there signs that parents are routinely involved in the decisions and planning activities that shape the academic day. With a very few exceptions, parents are not physically present during the school day; Instead, the prevailing roles for parents were fourfold: “helpers”, doing the bidding of paid staff; recipients of services projects determined by school staff (e.g., parenting classes); fundraising; and providing back-up tutoring and other academic assistance at home. This was true across the entire range of schools in the study, regardless of socioeconomic status of parents or school, and regardless of the racial or ethnic make-up of the school.

### **The core professional community.**

At all of the schools, the core professional community consisted of the administrators and general education classroom teachers. The roles of the “specials” teachers (art, music, physical education, media, and so forth) varied with the school, the content area, and the individual personalities of the people involved. At one extreme of involvement, the art teacher at Avery functioned informally as the “lead teacher,” taking a strong leadership role in bringing about school change by collaborating with both the principal and individual classroom teachers, as well as attending meetings and participating in joint projects. At the other extreme, specials teachers

at some schools did not routinely attend faculty meetings and did not collaborate with either administrators or classroom teachers.

With specific respect to students with disabilities, lack of true membership in the professional



Parents and teachers talk together about teaching practices that foster inclusion.

community by specials teachers is problematic. In most schools, specials teachers see all students with disabilities, whether they are included in general education classrooms for academics or not. At Hamilton, the specials teachers mentioned that for students who are “mainstreamed”, they often see the students twice as frequently as other students: when they come to the specials class with their general education class and when they come again with their self-contained special education classroom. (They also noted that, in general, the special education students behaved more appropriately and got more out of the specials class when they attended with a

general education class.) In addition, while classroom teachers typically have responsibility for an individual student for only one year and

virtually never for more than two or three years, specials teachers often see the student regularly throughout his entire tenure at the school. Many IEP goals can be addressed in interesting and powerful ways in specials classes. Yet specials teachers are rarely involved in planning for students with disabilities and do not receive the supports afforded to regular classroom teachers. Exclusion of specials teachers from the professional community therefore has severe repercussions for both the “include all” principle and the “support learning” principle.

The situation for special education teachers is similar to that of specials teachers in that it varied widely across and within schools. Conversations with the school principals made it clear that in all Whole Schooling Research Project schools, the administrator included the special education teachers as part of the professional community – this situation is not universally across the state. Indeed, in many other schools, special education teachers are not even sure whether their “boss” is the school principal or the district special education director. In a school attended by the son of one of the project researchers, a poster was put up at the entrance to the wing housing four self-contained special education classrooms at the request of parents. The poster contained photographs of all staff associated with the programs, together with their names and work assignments. Other teachers in the school commented that the poster was useful because they had “always wondered who those people were and what they did.”

Paraprofessionals generally do not have membership in the school professional community, or even in the general school community. A partial exception existed at Evergreen, where staff had voted to use available funds to hire paraprofessional support staff for general education classrooms rather than using those funds for technology and other purposes. There, one hallway contained photographs of school staff, and the paraprofessionals were included in the photo gallery. They did not attend any of the faculty meetings observed by project staff, nor was a possible presence at other meetings mentioned by anyone.

At none of the schools were the other employees in Table VI.2-1 included in the school community: not at meetings, not in conversations with administration and classroom teaching staff, and not in any observations of classrooms or other school activities. Many of these employees did have strong interest and job responsibilities connected to the Whole Schooling project, but they were operating at the margins of the school community. For example, a conversation with the person at Hamilton who was assigned to handle technology matters revealed that he was both interested and knowledgeable about the issues of providing good sound quality throughout the school to benefit students with hearing or attention issues as well as to enhance the comfort of the facility for all people who used it. He talked for some time about his struggle to improve sound quality in the gymnasium, which was used for assemblies and school meetings as well as athletic events, and his concern that the needs of students whose IEPs required sound field amplification were not met outside the general education classrooms. He seemed to be operating relatively alone, however – he was never mentioned by any administrator or teacher, and he seemed to gain his own professional support from technology specialists working elsewhere. Similarly, the literature on inclusive education is full of examples of strong roles played by custodians, school secretaries, and other adult non-members of the professional community. In his book and presentations about the life of students with learning disabilities, Jonathan Mooney makes a strong case that for many such students, the school custodian is the most powerful positive influence in their school lives.<sup>2</sup>

By virtue of involvement in the research project, all the schools in the study did have a link to higher education, namely the Whole Schooling Research Project staff. Beyond that, Evergreen had a relationship with a special education faculty member at another university who provided staff development and administrative consulting concerning some aspects of inclusive education, apparently mostly curriculum modification and adaptation. Buckley also had independent relationships with faculty members in the areas of reading and ESL. However, the faculty members were not part of the school community, except to a partial degree at Hamilton where Whole Schooling Research Project staff attended many faculty meetings and met formally and informally with staff members until casual, on-going collaboration began to define the relationship.

### **Leadership and the Mechanics of School Change**

Given the actual situation in project schools, our discussion of building level leadership will focus almost entirely on the interactions of full-time professional staff members. The methodology used to identify schools for inclusion in the Whole Schooling Research Project meant that in all schools the principals saw themselves as leaders committed to creating or maintaining schools that were consistent with the Whole Schooling Principles. They all saw leadership in this area as one of their primary responsibilities. Three of the principals (Hamilton, Armstrong, and Buckley) took their positions with the understanding that their job was creation of an inclusive school. This did not mean they had substantial higher-level support, however. The Valley View and Detroit school districts both had long histories of very segregated education for students with disabilities and district-level special education leadership that did not support an inclusive vision for Hamilton and Buckley. The Hamilton principal told us that in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Mooney, Jonathan and Coles, David. *Learning Outside the Lines: Two Ivy League students with learning disabilities and ADHD give you the tools for academic success and educational revolution.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.



beginning she thought of her school as “its own school district” because she could not mesh her vision of an inclusive school with prevailing district policies and procedures. As she became successful, and as a relatively new superintendent gained strength and the long-time special education director retired, the district changed until this principal became an assistant superintendent at the close of the project. Buckley is part of a huge and very troubled urban district, but it does have higher-level administrative support in an Executive Director who oversees a group of ten schools that includes Buckley. Beyond that, however, Buckley continues to struggle in a district that is in major financial and pedagogical difficulty.

Only two schools enjoyed clear support for their inclusive efforts from the district special education department. The special education director working with Rogers High School has pursued Whole Schooling in her doctoral studies and is making an effort to change very traditional thinking district-wide. One of the co-principals at Evergreen is also the district’s special education director. Although the principal at Armstrong also has district-level support for her K-3 primary school, students leave for an upper elementary school that does not share the inclusive philosophy. The principals at Avery and Meadowview seemed to be following personal inclinations in their efforts to create inclusive schools, sometimes finding support elsewhere in the district, more often finding barriers, and in practical terms often following the Hamilton “model” of seeing the school as its own district.

In all cases, the goal of creating an inclusive school that was at least loosely compatible with all of the Whole Schooling principles was not articulated in a clear, formal vision statement. In no case was there a clear, community-wide mandate for change. At the same time, principals attracted to the Whole Schooling framework shared a belief that change cannot be imposed from “the top” but must somehow grow up from the roots. That is, that the teachers would have to be the ones to embrace the Whole Schooling principles and then work together to put them into practice.

Observations of school meetings and interviews with administrators and teachers made it clear that however correct this belief might be, it presents significant challenges to formal efforts to bring about institutional change. This was confounded by the fact that none of the principals had deeply developed visions of what their schools would look like once the change effort was complete, or even well underway. The data suggest two reasons for this:

- Lack of models: there are very few fully inclusive schools in the United States and none that were easily accessible for the principals or other school staff. Principals are therefore inventing their visions, drawing bits and pieces from all aspects of their experience.
- Unwillingness to articulate a vision for fear that teachers would see it as a mandate and react defensively.



Principal and teacher leader together draw an image on an inclusive school in a professional development seminar of the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling

Even when addressing less radical change than fully inclusive schooling, school leaders are often in the position of creating the vision as they go:

One irony that participants mentioned often concerned the fundamental ambiguity of some aspects of change. Said one, "As visionaries, we don't know what it's going to look like in the end." To go where no one has gone before is ultimately to be surprised in one way or another, no matter how well you have done your homework. As much as they know that schools need some kind of stability to get from one day, month, and year to the next, leaders who are successful change agents are ruefully conscious that they cannot predict where they will end up.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than painting a detailed picture of what the school "should" be like, school leaders must instead articulate a coherent set of beliefs, create a school community that shares those beliefs, and then work with all members of the community to create a system of practices that embodies those beliefs.

The formal mission statements of project schools do not differentiate them from schools which have no commitment whatsoever to inclusive education or other Whole Schooling principles. The Evergreen mission statement is typical:

*We, the Elementary Staff of Nantucket Community Schools believe that all students can learn. We are committed to providing our students with a positive learning environment designed to foster academic and social growth, individual achievement will be measured through formal and informal assessment. We accept the responsibility to educate our students to become productive learners and contributing members of our school community.*

Hamilton's goes a little further, but still does not take the plunge and make a specific commitment to the belief system outlined in the Whole Schooling framework:

*We believe that all students can learn and that learning is enhanced by a combined effort of school, family and community. Students learn best in an environment which integrates curriculum, is developmentally appropriate, and addresses diverse intelligences, learning styles and interests. Students will develop respect for self and others and become cooperative, contributing citizens of a technological society.*

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any educator who would not offer whole-hearted agreement with the Evergreen mission statement, even if he favored schools run with military-style discipline, lock-step instruction offered to students grouped rigidly by ability, and a curriculum tied entirely to abstract, "textbook learning". One can infer a little more from the Hamilton statement, with explicit references to partnership with family and community, developmentally appropriate curriculum, and diverse student learners, but it would still be embraced by educators who believe that students with disabilities "belong" elsewhere or who see economic and social inequalities merely as realities to be accepted rather than as dimensions of diversity whose negative consequences may well be avoidable.

---

<sup>3</sup> Nadeau, Adel and Leighton, Mary S. *Visions and Values* section.

Indeed, in the many meetings project staff attended where teachers and administrators talked about their goals and beliefs, they were couched in general terms and colleagues did not challenge each other to clarify their meanings or to make sure that there was genuine consensus with respect to core belief rather than just choice of words. Some individual teachers at every project school were strong innovators who demonstrated their beliefs by example, but with a very few exceptions, they were unwilling or even unable to articulate their beliefs and how those beliefs shaped their classroom practice. There was little or no opportunity for other teachers to infer the beliefs by observing these classrooms because no opportunities for visiting each other's classrooms typically arose at any of the schools.

One result of participation in the Whole Schooling Research Project was creation of the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling (MiNIS). At the meetings, which led to the network's formation, participating teachers talked about the need to see what other teachers do, but also the difficulty of sharing beliefs and practices in one's own school. They said it was very difficult to talk to colleagues at one's own school about classroom practice and beliefs because the social system did not really allow it. The idea of a network was appealing because it was far more comfortable to be reflective and analytical when talking to teachers who work at different schools. Likewise, they felt far more comfortable observing in a classroom across town, or even

across the state, than in a classroom across the hall.



Teachers sharing at initial formation meeting of the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling.

Several of the project principals, specifically those at Hamilton, Armstrong, and Buckley took leadership roles in forming MiNIS. The principal at Meadowview was also a strong supporter, although less personally involved. Avery came to the project late and was so financially stressed that participation was very difficult, although the principal and several teachers endorsed the idea. Of the project elementary schools, only Evergreen chose to stay away from any involvement with the network, probably for the reasons described elsewhere.

Because it was the only high school that remained in the study for the full project

period, Rogers has not participated in Network activities to date; so far, all Network meetings and activities have focused on elementary school issues.

Creation of the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling was a valuable step in building a professional climate in which individual teachers and other members of the school community can begin to look at the details of educational practice and how they support or work against the shared beliefs of those professionals. In the initial organizing meetings, teachers spoke about how much easier it is to share beliefs and methods with counterparts at other schools, and also about the value of visiting back and forth to observe different approaches to inclusive teaching. Through contacts made in the Network and also the multilevel teaching group that was formed later and has an overlapping membership, relationships across schools have continued to develop. Recently, those relationships have deepened to the point where participating teachers

have begun to talk very honestly about their own core beliefs, their ease or difficulty of making various changes in teaching approach, and specific concerns they have about their current classroom situations. The group has reached a point where there can be collective reflection and brainstorming, clearly energizing the participants and presumably leading to continued development of genuine Whole Schooling classrooms. Additionally, both the MiNIS network and the multilevel teaching group now included active members from several schools that were not members of the Whole Schooling Research Project itself. So far, these “new “ members are from the district where Hamilton is located at where Hamilton’s former principal is now a district-level administrator. In addition, a few members of the teaching group are teachers who have long been associated with the Whole Schooling Consortium itself but do not teach in project schools.

The approach of creating cross-school networks has been invaluable to the school renewal process, yet it also points out two concerns. First, it took a very long time to build relationships of sufficient trust to allow teachers to speak frankly and to offer and receive constructive criticism or participate in reflective discussions. A key role for a school leader would therefore seem to be to work constantly to nurture a school climate where this kind of openness and trust can exist on an on-going basis among faculty and staff at one school. It may well be that teachers who participate in the cross-school network will take their new approaches and begin to help build a genuine community of professional collaboration within their own schools. Indeed, this may be a very effective way to accomplish such a goal; such an outcome remains to be observed. However, the relative high cost and slow progress<sup>4</sup> of such efforts leaves us looking for other avenues to accomplish this same goal, perhaps in addition to the cross-school networking or sometimes in place of it.

Participation in a genuine collaborative teaching community is described as “professionalism” by Nadeau and Leighton:

Professionalization of the school culture was key. Older teachers did not think much about practice [in our school]. Seasoned practitioners may well have settled into a set of routines that made some sense under the old regime and dealt effectively with idiosyncrasies of that system. It may sometimes be harder to win their cooperation for change. Many participants viewed mentoring and peer coaching as essential ingredients of reform. They described the importance of intellectual honesty and mutual respect. Faculty meetings, drop-in visits, and even hallway encounters became venues for discussion of the value of ideas and strategies and the results of experimentation.

Likewise, in their book on professional teacher communities in high schools, McLaughlin and Talbert<sup>5</sup> conclude that the principals who are successful in creating teacher communities that bring about effective school-wide change stress creation of school cultures where collaboration, sharing of resources and knowledge, and willingness to be publicly reflective. Both of these descriptions of professional behavior describe bringing the accomplishments of the Michigan

---

<sup>4</sup> The costs of cross-school networking are both financial (providing release time for teachers to engage in planning and in visiting) and educational (when substitutes have to take over participating teachers’ classrooms). Because both of these costs must be controlled, progress in network-building remains slow.

<sup>5</sup>McLaughlin, Milbrey W. and Talbert, Joan E. Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Network for Inclusive Schooling and the Multilevel Teaching Group inside a single school. Creating such a professional community inside the school is the most critical accomplishment for school leaders seeking to create a truly inclusive school.

McLaughlin and Talbert contrast two leadership styles that were observed within the study. Within one leadership model, the principal sees his role as promoting the development of teachers as individuals; within the other, the principal is more concerned with the professional faculty as a group. The former style is exemplified in the McLaughlin and Talbert study by a principal who says: “My main role is to work with teachers to make them as productive as possible. And to make them feel good about coming to work every day. “ His strategy for accomplishing this is focused on individual teachers:

I do a lot of walk-throughs and acknowledge things that are going on that are really good. Little Notices. Also just verbally telling them. They like the typed notes better than the handwritten. It looks like you are being more official. And then the other part is, if you have a good idea, you come to me, and if I’ve got scrounge the money from somewhere, if it’s a good idea, I’ll say, ‘Well, let’s do it. We’ll figure out how to get it done<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast, another principal has a collective view of the school community and his role within it:

I see myself as the person who is ultimately responsible to see to it that everything that goes on at this school comes together in a way that’s positive, and that the parent community, students, faculty, and staff work together to achieve our goals and objectives<sup>7</sup>.

The authors describe this principal’s approach as working to “make the uncertainties associated with changed student needs, academic background, and social circumstances into occasions for faculty problem-solving and educational intervention. To this end, he devised a number of cross-cutting, integrating strategies, such as committee structures, school-wide planning groups, and annual faculty retreats, to create opportunities for ongoing discussion and, in the process, build a sense of community responsibility and engagement. He also initiated the Program Improvement Council, comprising students, teachers, parents, and community people.”

Although this principal’s efforts were still underway at the time of the study, McLaughlin and Milbrey could already report significant positive changes at the school, particularly within a single departments which was emerging as a model for the rest of the school to emulate. This principal was able to support a group of more innovative teachers in a way that avoided the tendency of such a group to be marginalized by those who favor the status quo and to be seen as a positive model for everyone else. Indeed, overall a primary result of this principal’s leadership style was “dispersal of leadership” so that informal leaders developed throughout the school community, included not only faculty but also other staff and parents. The principal who emphasized encouragement of individual teachers alone did not accomplish a significant level of school-wide change.

---

<sup>6</sup> McLaughlin & Talbert, page 104.

<sup>7</sup> McLaughlin & Talbert, page 101.

All of the principals in the intensive study schools fell somewhere between these two versions of school leadership. None exerted as powerful an influence on school culture as that described by McLaughlin and Talbert, but all saw their roles as more than simple support of individual teachers. All of the principals sought to create a shared sense of mission, but all were confounded to some extent by the need to help such a vision evolve from the school community rather than attempt to impose it from “the top.” In addition, all of the principals were still defining the notion of an inclusive school even for themselves.

Patterns of leadership at the various schools varied with respect to the degree to which formal leadership was dispersed. One school had two co-principals; one had an administrative structure that included the position of “teacher leader,” an individual selected by the school faculty to take on a full-time administrative role. Another school had an informal teacher-leader, a teacher who had acknowledged leader status within the school professional community, but no special title and no release from normal teaching responsibilities. At still another school, the principal relied primarily on support staff rather than classroom teachers to collaborate about the development and implementation of the school mission. In the remaining schools, dispersed leadership was less clearly structured. Groups of dedicated staff members often worked together for short or long periods of time, and sometimes gained strong administrative support but other times not.

Evergreen had co-principals whose division of labor was not absolute: one was also the district special education director and took primary responsibility for issues that directly affected students with IEPs. The other concerned herself more with general classroom practice and her own strong commitment to alternative grouping of students, namely multiage classrooms in lower elementary grades and looping classrooms in upper elementary grades. In most discussions with staff members and at most meetings researchers were invited to attend, the “special education” principal was dominant. Indeed, conversations with special education staff often made no mention whatsoever of a second principal at the school. However, researchers had the definite impression that with respect to the day-to-day operation of the school and the curriculum alignment process that was consuming most school-wide collaborative effort, the “general education” principal was the primary leader<sup>8</sup>.

The two co-principals seemed to work well together and the partnership appeared to allow a more conscious formulation of school mission than emerged at some of the other project schools. At the same time, however, the domination of inclusive education (with respect to students with disability labels) by someone who was also the special education director in a district whose other schools were not inclusive put the “include all” component of Whole Schooling more into the category of a special education program than a pervasive philosophy. When, at the end of the project period, three of the students with severe disabilities had been withdrawn by their parents in favor of segregated settings, the “special education” principal seemed quite content to simply conclude that these students “needed” a different placement. There was, so far as we could tell, no effort to examine what had been done to see whether anything could be done differently in the future. Since all three were withdrawn because their parents felt the students were not genuine members of the classroom and school communities, their leaving should have generated some discussion about the school’s mission and what could be done to make it “work” for the most challenging students. This simply did not occur.

---

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between “special education” and “general education” principal was never made by anyone within the Evergreen community and the terms are used here only to distinguish between the two overlapping spheres of interest and responsibility.

Hamilton was the school with the formal position of “teacher leader” in its administrative structure. During the years in which formal data collection was taking place, the teacher leader seemed to function in a traditional role of assistant principal as disciplinarian, spending most of his time involved in mediating difficulties of individual students and occasionally also working with individual teachers. The year after the project ended, both the principalship and the teacher-leader positions changed hands. A new principal was installed when the former principal moved to district-level administration, and a new teacher-leader was elected. These two individuals work very closely as a genuine team; both compatible personal styles and the fact that both are new in their roles help create a true partnership.

Both Evergreen and Hamilton are relatively large schools with 500-600 students. Avery is far smaller, with only a few more classrooms than grade levels. Here there is no funding available for two official school leaders, but a strong partnership exists between the principal and the art teacher. Avery is a magnet school whose mission is to infuse the arts throughout the curriculum, so it is not surprising that the art teacher plays a pivotal role. The art teacher herself told us that her role at this school was vastly different, and vastly more rewarding, than the role she had filled as a mere “specials teacher” at other schools in the past. Long-time faculty members said, however, that it was not just the formal mission of the school but the vision and energy of this particular teacher that made the difference: the school had not experienced the same kind of leadership team before the current art teacher arrived at the school.

Indeed, the art teacher did concern herself with the formal mission of the school, working hard to infuse the arts into all aspects of the school curriculum. She described her involvement in the math curriculum as the area where she felt the most success in taking art into the regular classroom, but her own efforts in the art room reflected involvement in all content areas. Her leadership, however, extended far beyond anything tied directly to an arts emphasis, no matter how broadly defined. Two clear examples were observed during the one year in which Avery participated as a project school in the study:

- Schoolwide “book clubs” were established for all grade five students. The art teacher, the principal, and the grade level teachers worked together to create these clubs, which involved all grade five students and met weekly during the staff lunch hour. These clubs were the brainchild of the art teacher, with strong support from the principal, but also required a strong collaborative effort and willingness of all the participating teachers to give up their break time for both planning and actually meeting with the clubs.
- The art teacher used personal connections to get a very large number of computers donated to the school. During the project, she was occupied with getting the equipment up and running, and with getting useful software to allow the computers to genuinely complement on-going classroom activities. In addition, she was in the brainstorming phase of designing a program where students at the school would use the computers to being to learn economics and finance. At the end of the Whole Schooling Research Project, she was refining a plan where she would get community members to donate seed money, “at least \$2,000 but preferably \$10,000” that students would collectively invest in financial markets and then track and manage via their computers. This project was intended primarily to teach the young, inner-city students about the world of finance, but also to raise money for the impoverished school.

The division of labor in this school was one where the principal established an overall school climate and handled the complicated paperwork involved in a large, urban school system. The teacher-leader's were more project-based, but also helped shape the growth of a school mission that indeed turned out to be consistent with all of the Whole Schooling principles. Beyond her role as a manager, the principal was particularly involved with building school community, increasing parent involvement, and becoming more inclusive with respect to disabilities.

Armstrong Primary School was a rural school with a close-knit faculty and staff and an extraordinarily caring environment. The school had been established as an inclusive school and the principal had had more freedom than is often available to choose the staff. This undoubtedly



Specialists discuss needs of children and support for teachers.

was an initial factor in creating the comfortable professional community of the school, but maintaining such a community required continuing leadership. At Armstrong, the support staff (social worker, speech therapist, special education teacher) worked not only with each other but also with the principal to build a coherent school community. Support staff felt that their role, which involved a great deal of co-teaching, allowed them to keep classrooms connected as they moved from one to the other. In a sense, they provided the string out of which the school community network was built. Because they spent their time in general education classrooms, their knowledge of the general

curriculum and of the entire student body was far greater than is typical in schools where support staff have their own resource rooms or support students through pull-out and pull-aside practices.

Beyond helping to connect all of the classrooms and teachers, the support staff formed the core of a crisis team that is described in detail in the “support students” section of this report. The crisis team performed a leadership role in addition to a support role both by modeling positive behavioral support techniques even under crisis conditions and by making it possible for teachers to risk including students who had a clear potential for becoming disruptive or even violent.

Meadowview and Buckley Elementary Schools both had relatively tradition leadership structures, even though both had some very untraditional staff members and administrators. In both cases, teacher-leaders emerged from the school staff primarily by virtue of their own interests and skills. Other staff members remain relatively free to work with these informal leaders or not, depending on personal preference. Both schools were going through administrative changes during and after the research project; these kinds of informal leadership systems appear to be quite resilient during times of stress on the overall school community.

A central task for any school leader attempting to bring about significant change is inculcating a shared vision or value system within the school community. In order to create a community where Whole Schooling can become framework for both change and on-going practice, the vision or value system must address all of the issues outlined in Table 2.

In all of the schools, the issue of creating a genuinely inclusive community was addressed by the school leader(s), but to varying degrees. With respect to students with disabilities, the



commitment was strongest at Armstrong, Hamilton and Evergreen, where students with a wide range of disabilities were indeed being included in general education classrooms. There was a striking difference between schools, however. At Evergreen, inclusive education was viewed as an option on “the continuum” of means for providing special education services to students. While most teachers and staff seemed to believe that it might be the best option for *some* students across the entire disability spectrum, it was nonetheless seen as a special education program rather than an educational philosophy that extended to all members of the school community.

<b>Table VI.2-2: Issues to Be Addressed in Building a Vision for the School</b>		
<b>Inclusion</b>	Disability, giftedness, ESL, at-risk, racial/ethnic diversity, etc.	Some aspects on the table at all schools
<b>School community</b>	Membership Structure and supports	Not formally addressed, except perhaps at Evergreen
<b>Professional collaboration</b>	Ongoing, draw on all resources	Varying models, not addressed as in issue in itself
<b>Parent involvement</b>	Numbers of parents Type of involvement	Minimal attention
<b>Student empowerment</b>	Domains Support for	Minimal attention
<b>Outside constraints</b>	State mandates District policies Community goals/values Fiscal realities Accountability (all levels)	Addressed to varying degrees at all schools, except for community goals/values

At Hamilton, there was a growing belief among some members of the school’s professional community that inclusive education was a matter of social justice rather than special education. Thus, while teachers were beginning to believe that the students with disabilities would receive the best educations when well-supported in general education classrooms, they also were coming to the conclusion that including the students benefited the entire school community. We suspect that the difference between the two schools is in part attributable to a difference in the belief systems of the schools’ principals. While Evergreen’s principal was also the district special education director and deeply steeped in the notion of “special,” Hamilton’s principal was a general educator concerned with building a caring community that served all of its members well. Thus, our impression was that Evergreen’s principal focused on details of methods and practice, while Hamilton’s was far more concerned with creating a broad shared value system.

The school leaders at Buckley, Hamilton, and Evergreen all made extensive use of formal meetings to explore options and concerns, and to build a shared vision for their schools’ futures. While Armstrong, Avery, and Meadowview also had faculty meetings for this purpose, meetings seemed to be a less central method for bringing about change. At these schools, the principals leaned more toward leading by example and to working through other professionals to bring about consensus.

The small size of her school probably made leadership by example easier for the principal of Avery than it would be at any other school, but her powerful presence was undoubtedly unusual even for a small school. Sharon was involved in all aspects of the school's operations on a daily basis, filling in or assisting in classrooms, taking on responsibilities such as a fifth grade book club, planning and participating in many events that brought parents into the school during and after normal school hours, and generally creating an environment where every student was highly valued.

One of the most striking characteristics of Avery was the presence of many plants, both inside and outside the building. An avid gardener, Sharon uses gardening in many ways within the school. A few years ago, grant money was obtained to create a butterfly garden near the school's entrance. Although the garden had fallen into some disrepair, it continued to have many flowers and, we were told, to attract many butterflies. Inside the building, potted plants were everywhere. Sharon used care of these plants as a calming activity for students with patterns of behavior problems as well as with students who were merely having a bad day or needed some special attention. Students referred to her for discipline were often immediately set to work on a plant-related activity, and almost any time one visits the school one will observe a student or two attending to the plants. Although a technique like this is open to abuse, as when a student spends all day tending plants and little time engaged with the general curriculum, we did not observe such excess at Avery. Instead, the plants seemed to function as a "positive behavioral support," providing a way for students to take a time out, to engage in a calming activity, and to do something where they could feel success and pride. They also created a strong bond between the principal, who clearly loved both her plants and her students, and students, including many who in other settings might have had very adversarial relationships with the school principal.



Aside from the plants, the shared spaces at Avery contained many other items that helped demonstrate the adults' pride in student accomplishments and a desire to bring the outside community into the school. A visitor to the school's eyes are immediately drawn to a collection of imaginatively painted and decorated wooden chairs, which are a permanent part of the school décor (and not to be sat on). These chairs represent a large art project undertaken a few years ago; their presence in the hallway not only showcases student work but also defines the school's focus on the arts and also immediately gets one's imagination going. Aside from the usual student artwork adorning the walls of the hallways, there are also mobile displays intended primarily for visiting parents that display current work, often tied to a family activity.

Bobbie, the principal at Armstrong, also presents a very strong example to the staff although the physical appearance of the school is very different. She does not hesitate to share strong concerns with community members and efforts she makes at problem solving are not hidden from view. Her method of thinking and feeling aloud provides a model and, perhaps, an inspiration to other members of the school community.

All of the schools rely on innovative teachers to bring about change, but to varying degrees. In some cases, it seems entirely up to individual teachers whether they take notice of work done

by others, and equally a matter of personal preference whether innovative teachers choose to share their ideas with their colleagues. In other cases, there is a deliberate attempt by the school leaders to bring such teachers to the attention of others, to encourage them to collaborate, and to encourage others to take notice. As in the case of structuring meetings to arrive at a preplanned outcome, developing teacher leaders is a tricky business. In an atmosphere where teachers do not routinely visit each other's classrooms, talk about either the details of their practice or their underlying goals and beliefs, nor meet together to examine practices and beliefs developed elsewhere, it is difficult to capitalize on the potential of innovative teachers to become teacher-leaders.

All of the schools had this problem to a significant degree. Indeed, in many cases, innovative teachers operated almost in secrecy, even when they had professed administrative support. To some degree, this appeared to be a teacher preference – the innovative teacher wanted to feel special and different, and therefore was not inclined to make it easy for others to borrow ideas and methods. In virtually every case, such teachers talked about the enormous amount of work it took to maintain their innovative classrooms. While they implied that others might simply not want to do that much work, we also suspect that they were not eager to give away the fruits of the work so that others could have a “short cut” to achieving similar outcomes. A more practical consideration is that just like Sharon's gardening, the innovative teachers' practices were very closely tied to personal interests and beliefs. Thus, sharing those practices may well be something they feel cannot be effectively done, or that can be effective only as a result of a major invasion of personal privacy.

As we said earlier, the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling has proved to be an avenue for getting around some of the difficulties in leadership by innovative teachers. Indeed, when an innovative teacher talks about his or her practices at a network meeting, colleagues at the home school seem to feel pride, whereas the same talk “at home” might engender resentment or rivalry. A second approach was used at Armstrong, where support staff moving from room to room saw it as part of their responsibility to “spread the word” and keep teachers informed about successful innovations in other classrooms. Although less widespread, the co-teaching model in place at Evergreen may also accomplish this goal to a more limited extent. There, co-teacher partnerships operate by the half-day, with a co-teacher assigned to one classroom in the morning and another in the afternoon. All of the special educator co-teachers share office space in a single room. Thus, there is some opportunity for word to spread among the special educators and then, perhaps, out to other classroom teachers. No one spoke about this, however, and its effects were certainly slower and subtler than at Armstrong. Nonetheless, it is likely that part of the reason that of two innovative teachers, Steve and Tina, the one with a co-teacher was the one whose ideas were more likely to be picked up by colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

In a setting where members of the professional community do not really know what each other are doing, nor what they are trying to do, it is enormously difficult to build a shared vision or a consensus about how the school community “should” operate. Even though the ultimate goal may well be to change the practices of individual teachers in individual classrooms, school leaders were all searching for means to accomplish this in a “democratic” way. As observers, it appears to us that attention to the items in Table 2 indeed provide avenues for building a stronger

---

<sup>9</sup> Although we do suspect that co-teaching helped publicize Steve's practices, we believe that other factors were probably more important. It may be that Steve's status as one of very few male teachers and the fact that his innovations were more easily exportable made it much easier for others to adopt his ideas. Steve had a reputation as the “most cutting edge” of the teachers, but from our perspective, Tina was also “cutting edge.”

professional community. Once that community comes into its own, some classroom level changes might well occur on their own. More importantly, it will become possible to have the kind of professional collaboration that will encourage teachers to work together and to support each other to create a school consistent with the shared vision. None of the schools in the study were yet far down the road to building such a community, although all were at least warming their engines.

### Democracy At The Classroom Level

Democracy at the classroom level is in many ways easier to achieve than building-level democracy. In schools where individual classrooms are relatively self-contained communities with one teacher, as was the case in all of the project elementary schools, teachers with an interest in student empowerment and classroom community can more or less do what they please to further this goal. Barriers can be imposed from higher levels, and indeed all schools faced the problem of preparing students for statewide assessment and therefore of adhering to a detailed curriculum imposed by the state. At a lower administrative level, principals and district-level administrators can either create barriers or facilitate development of strong, mutually supportive classroom communities. Because the schools in the study were self-selected, it is not surprising



Teaching collaboration through experience!

that all of them had principals who gave teachers enormous leeway in creating their classroom communities.<sup>10</sup> There were certainly no requirements that classrooms contain neat rows of desks, maintain relative silence, or complete certain textbook pages on certain days.

There is no question that school classrooms do not function as true democracies. Students cannot choose the curriculum, set all of the rules of behavior, nor elect to go elsewhere if they do not like the place in which they find themselves. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of room for sharing of power between teacher and students, and among students, and for defining the culture of a particular classroom.

Teachers in the Whole Schooling Research Project used a variety of methods for creating classroom communities, and also varied in the importance given to this activity. On one extreme was Shelley, a first grade teacher, who said that her primary concern during the first six weeks of school was building community. Only after that did she bring curriculum up to equal status in her thinking about her classroom. The other extreme that exists in some schools was not observed in the Whole Schooling Research Project schools. This extreme is represented by teachers who see their students as a group of individuals, each in the room to accomplish only their own goals, with a high value on competition and independence that outweighs potential community values of cooperation and collaboration. Although we did not observe such classrooms within the study, there were a few classrooms that were closer to that extreme than to Shelley's.

<sup>10</sup> One exception may prove to be Meadowview, where there was a change in principal in the last year of the study. So far, this principal has sent mixed messages and it is not clear how the school culture will readjust after she has settled in.

## When is a classroom a community?

From the point of view of the Whole Schooling study, a number of criteria must be met in order for a classroom to be considered a community:

- All students physically present in the classroom have full membership in the group, regardless of academic abilities, racial/ethnic/linguistic background, socioeconomic status, or disability.
- Students share responsibility for the success of their peers.
- Students have a repertoire of strategies for providing assistance to peers and for requesting assistance from peers.
- Students and teacher share a value system that makes explicit both rights and responsibilities of all community members (including adults)
- Students have a voice in planning how they spend their time
- All community members are valued for their strengths and contributions.



Teacher conducting classroom sharing and planning meeting. Note the lack of overt symbols of authority, how the teacher intentionally placed herself on the same level as the children.

Intensive school classroom teachers used a variety of techniques to build community, and some techniques were observed across classrooms and across schools. These are summarized in Table 3.

With respect to democracy, classroom communities must routinely empower all of their members both for decision-making and for engaging in the day-to-day and moment-to-moment activities of the classroom. While various parameters are set either by the teacher or by outside forces, those parameters are as unrestrictive as possible and in any case leave a great deal of room for local control over the conduct of the classroom.

Michigan, like most other states, is responding to a movement generally referred to as “character education.” Associated with this movement are many attempts to define “character” and to delineate the rights and responsibilities of students in schools. Unfortunately, much of what parades as “character” is actually passive submission to authority. Rights are often confused with responsibilities, and many activities that are neither end up categorized as one or the other. For example, one of the researcher’s children brought home a notice from school that a “right” of all students was to donate to charity and therefore all students must exercise that right

<b>Classroom rules/laws</b>	Shared code of conduct makes sense for all members of the classroom community	Code is based on a desire to achieve classroom goals, rather than to conform to external authority figures
<b>Agenda setting</b>	Given some parameters provided by the teacher, students help plan the day, the week, the unit, as developmentally appropriate	There is room to explore individual interests, proceed at varying paces and to varying depths, and allow for limitation such as limited attention span
<b>Time allocation</b>	Students have a voice in allocating their time to items on the agenda, both as a group and individually	Adults provide assistance in learning to allocate time appropriately; students are given room to make adjustments as needed
<b>Peers as resources</b>	Students view their peers as resources and are free to draw upon those resources in most contexts	Adults help all students identify the areas in which they are resources and help students draw upon peer resources
<b>Evaluation of work</b>	Students understand the purpose of their work and share in determining appropriate means for evaluating its quality	Adults offer a repertoire of approaches to evaluating student work, with respect to both process and product
<b>Classroom functions as a social unit</b>	Students plan and carry out events that serve to enhance group membership and connect to the larger community, including both the school and parents	Adults value social functions as an integral part of the general curriculum and work to make sure all participants share the values of the classroom community

by bringing in old shoes for a charity shoe drive. While one may argue that a responsibility to be charitable is part of “good character,” it is stretching things just a bit to then argue that the “right” to be charitable is a basic right and that it must be fulfilled very specifically in a way determined unilaterally by people in authority.

In general, the kinds of codes of conduct generated under the character education banner consist of long lists of “responsibilities” assigned to students, along with a few pseudo-rights that actually accrue benefits to the authority figures far more than to the students to whom the rights are ascribed. Oddly, current notions of character appear to be connected to the idea that people are primarily, if not exclusively, motivated by extrinsic rewards or desire to avoid punishment. For example, in a recent court case where a parent was trying to protect her child’s privacy rights by not having classroom grades announced publicly, a judge deciding against the parent stated that the desire to avoid humiliation was a valuable and powerful motivator for school success. In accordance with this belief, tied to posted codes of conduct or classroom rules are posted behavior charts of various types. In some, there is a token attempt to offer “positive” support by marking down only positive evaluations of behavior. Of course, not having any (or many) positive markers (stickers, hatch-marks, etc.) is just as negative as old-fashioned black marks. Other classrooms are more straightforward and have charts that record “violations” using one method or another.

In one classroom, there is a chart that has a labeled pocket for every student. If a green slip is protruding from the pocket, the student is in good standing with respect to classroom conduct. If a blue slip is protruding, the student is “on warning.” If a red slip is protruding, then some action is under way, usually involving reporting the “bad” behavior to the parent and completing some sort of penitential activity. While a

researcher was observing in this classroom, a parent dropped by. Another student, not her son, immediately greeted her in order to bring to her attention that her son was “on warning.”

While it is possible to imagine that such systems could function in a way that genuinely builds community, allowing students to help each other learn to adjust their behavior to an agreed upon standard, we did not observe this happening. In such a classroom, the student running up to the visiting parent would presumably have outlined the ways in which she and her peers were helping the student “on warning.” Instead, such charts served the traditional function of providing a public forum to adults to vent frustration with students and a means to “motivate”



Inclusive, multi-age teacher records students' descriptions of what they do and how they are in their class for project researcher.

students by subjecting them to public humiliation when for whatever reason they have deviated from prescribed behavior.

In a Whole Schooling classroom, or indeed any genuinely inclusive classroom, any code of conduct must make sense for all members of the classroom community and there must be consensus about both the code and any means used to enforce (or evaluate compliance with) that code. In many classrooms in the Whole Schooling Research Project, standard codes of conduct were posted on the wall of the classroom. These appeared to remain constant from year to year, created by the teacher or at least adopted by the teacher without any consideration of the specific needs or characteristics of the classroom

community to which they are applied. As described above, some classrooms also had behavior charts of various kinds.

In most of the classrooms that came closest to following the Whole Schooling principles, however, we did not observe such materials. In a few classrooms, teachers had substituted behavior principles associated with cooperative or collaborative learning for those found in more traditional classrooms. These, too, were apparently created without consultation with students, but in most cases it was clear that considerable effort had been put into explaining the principles and why they benefited the entire classroom community. Moving further toward genuine student empowerment, a few classrooms had posted codes that appeared to have been generated, or at least adapted, by the students themselves. Finally, in a few classrooms such materials were entirely absent, replaced by a strong emphasis on a few guiding principles that permeated all aspects of classroom life. For example, some teachers had worked with students to develop a shared understanding of personal space and the extent of such personal space, acceptable approaches to adjusting space requirements to accomplish specific tasks or take into account individual needs, and procedures for dispute resolution should any community member feel unjustly treated.

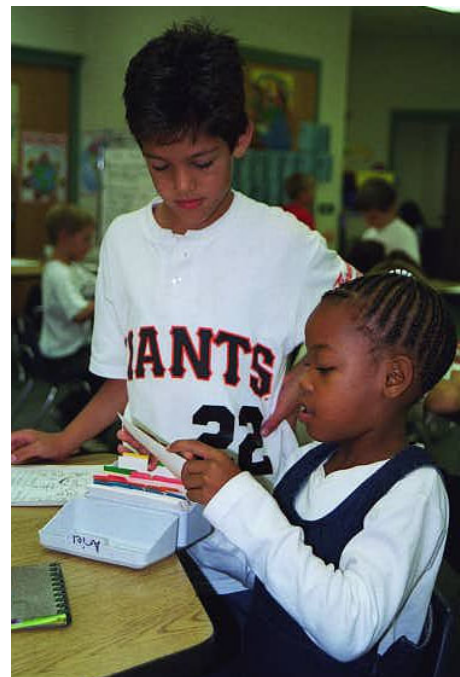
Beyond setting global parameters for classroom management and student behavior, Whole Schooling Research Project teachers also varied in the extent to which their students influenced

the daily agenda, and even longer-term plans for classroom activities. Some teachers at almost every school included agenda-setting as a routine morning activity undertaken when students were first settling into the school day. Some teachers used formal charts and schedule formats, others created more flexible agendas by writing on blackboards or other erasable surfaces. First grade teacher Shelley, for example, used the blackboard to create an agenda in web format. Students worked with her to recall work in progress and work already planned. She then added any items that were part of her plan for the day and students were also free to propose activities. We observed several occasions, for example, where students proposed following up on a topic raised tangentially on a previous day or which had captured greater interest than Shelley had expected. The students then worked with Shelley to come up with a proposed schedule by estimating time required for various activities, thinking about the nature of the task (group work, independent work, requiring teacher support, etc.), and also the flow of the day. Sometimes items would be eliminated or postponed; if postponed, they would be left on the blackboard so as not to be forgotten in later agenda-setting discussions.

Shelley would return to the agenda frequently during the day, asking students to evaluate how things were going and making changes as needed. If the class reached a point where insufficient time was available to move to a next agenda item, Shelley would point that out and ask for suggestions of different ways to use the time. Sometimes she would propose an activity that was guaranteed to get student support, particularly when she suggested a physical activity to allow everyone to be up and moving for a little while.

Third grade teacher Larry refined this approach with his somewhat more mature students, working more judgments about time into agenda-setting discussions. For example, he worked with students to decide when they would need a warning that a work period was about to come to a close: the time required would depend on the activities underway. He also worked on telling time, as did Shelley, asking students what the clock would say “five minutes before stopping time” or what time they would be stopping if they spent 45 minutes on an activity. These approaches of course teach a great deal about both telling time and time management, but at the same time they allow the students to exert far more control over their day than is possible in a traditional classroom.

One of the basic tenets of both Whole Schooling and inclusive education is the view of the classroom as a learning community in which students learn at least as much from each other as from their teachers. For students with disabilities, peers are often viewed as “natural supports” who can assist with many aspects of the school day at least as effectively as teachers and support staff. Whole Schooling goes further by making mutual support a goal among all students. Students must be empowered to offer and seek assistance when it is needed and cooperative work must be facilitated until students have learned to cooperate independent of adult intervention most of the time. Whole Schooling Research Project teachers used a wide variety of approaches to creating learning communities, ranging from more or less standardized approaches to cooperative or collaborative





learning to much more unique methods. One unique and effective method that was observed in Julie's second grade classroom was a technique she called "One, two, then me." Students were not to ask her for help until they had first sought the assistance of two peers. Furthermore, she often recommended specific individuals as resources on specific topics. This provided a clever means for designating less able students as genuine resources: if a student had received extensive extra help with some task, he or she then became the resource of choice on that task. When Julie provided one-on-one or small group assistance, she made sure that she left the students prepared to assume this role by identifying resource materials, providing models for reference, and so forth. Thus the student could serve as a resource even to a student who was completing even a much more complex version of the task at hand.



Students setting learning goals together.

Evaluation of student work is an aspect of education that greatly influences classroom climate and the degree to which a classroom community can genuinely be built. Not surprisingly, many Whole Schooling Research Project teachers worked constantly on refining their approaches to evaluating student work, both work in process and final products, and on teaching students to evaluate their own work and the work of peers. Across many classrooms, teachers used two general strategies to shape evaluation: "personal best" and "just right" tasks. For example, Melanie taught her multiage upper elementary school classroom to evaluate potential free reading books quickly to make sure they were "just right" for their reading abilities. She then expanded the concept of "just right" work to apply to all of the tasks students undertook in her classroom. If a student defined a task in a way that

was not challenging and not a genuine learning activity, it was not "just right." Similarly, if a student attempted a task that was so difficult he did not even know where to start, he would be assisted in finding a "just right" starting place and task definition.

The notion of "personal best" is closely tied to "just right." In Larry's third grade classroom, students were reminded daily that the goal for every day at school was achievement of a "personal best". When students shared work with peers, or simply presented it to Larry for review, the question was the same: is this a personal best, and if not, what would you have to do to make it a personal best. In many classrooms, students helped select the work that would be kept in their portfolios to document progress through the year. The criterion for selection of such work was often being a "personal best." This approach allowed teachers to move away from standardized grading, which does not work in classrooms where students are working at a variety of levels and in any case creates a climate of competition antithetical to building community.

Almost all classroom in this country use social events as a means of building a sense of community, no matter how minimal that sense may be. Holiday parties and open houses in some form are universal, at least in elementary schools. In the majority of classrooms, however, these activities operate independently from the "real" business of the classroom and are often presented to the students (often by "homeroom mothers") rather than planned and executed by the students themselves. Schools and classrooms in the Whole Schooling Research Project

demonstrated a wide range of community-building activities that were far more effective, and consistent with the Whole Schooling principles, than the traditional parties.

In some cases, these events were still largely planned by adults, but with clear community-building goals in mind. For example, students completing the school reading program at Evergreen were offered rewards such as an evening when they were permitted, even encouraged, to roller-skate through the halls of the school and then get together for snacks. When Steve learned that the high school homecoming parade was coming up, he asked his fifth grade class whether they would like to participate by building and manning a float. His class then became the first elementary school class ever to participate in the high school parade. While some planning was done at school, the float itself was built at the home of one of the students with the assistance of both Steve and several parents. This project's most obvious outcome was a strong sense of classroom community, but it also afforded Steve the opportunity to work on a variety of skills, especially math skills, in an authentic task and also to forge stronger connections with both parents and high school students.

In a second grade classroom at Hamilton, students worked with their teacher to put a new twist on the traditional Valentine's Day party. They planned a tea for their parents, creating and producing menus, transforming their classroom into a tea room, and then filling the roles of restaurant staff while serving tea and sweets to their invited parents. Again, this event helped forge stronger bonds within the classroom and to increase parent involvement at the same time that it provided an authentic context in which the teacher could address a wide range of academic skills.

While the kinds of methods and approaches described in Table 3 are often considered the domain of only middle and upper class schools, this proved untrue within the Whole Schooling project. Perhaps most striking was the success achieved at Avery and Meadowview with respect to creating truly democratic classrooms with empowered students. Indeed, we observed a third grade classroom at Avery, which serves the most impoverished community in the study, that could easily have been exchanged with a third grade classroom at Hamilton, the most affluent school in the study. The book clubs and parents-invited activities at Avery were as successful and at least as effective as those taken for granted at more affluent schools. These results make it clear that democratic classrooms and student empowerment are not merely a privilege for the affluent few but a viable educational culture for all students.



Lunch club participants have fun and decide on activities for the week.

## CONCLUSION

We think it is notable that in the inclusive education movement, we find little discussion in the literature about democracy and democratic ideals. Yet, as we have discussed in this chapter of our report, democratic functioning, at minimal levels, is a pre-requisite to an inclusive school. Neither, on the other hand, does the literature on democratic schooling refer to inclusion of students with disabilities as an integral component. The same can be said of other progressive education movements and philosophies, such as whole language and other constructivist



approaches to learning, in which democracy is seen as an essential component. Indeed, three researchers in this project participated in several meetings and interactions with some identified leaders in these arenas during the study period in which inclusive education was intentionally ignored or outright rejected. In the schools we observed we saw important movements towards the merger of democracy and inclusive schooling and many gaps that were apparent. There is a great need for educators concerned with democracy, social justice, inclusive education, and child-centered, constructivist learning practices to understand the interrelatedness of these concepts and forge additional research, dialogue, and policy initiatives towards this end.