DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 687 EA 028 591

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TITLE	Principals' Perspectives on Factors Which Facilitate and Block Powerful Learning.
PUB DATE	1997-03-00
NOTE	32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Acceleration (Education); Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Educational Change; Elementary Education; *Leadership Styles; Organizational Development; *Principals
IDENTIFIERS	*Accelerated Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a year-long case study that examined the use of gifted-and-talented teaching strategies, which are similar to those used to create powerful learning, in three accelerated elementary schools. The paper explores, from the principals' perspectives, school, teacher, and community factors that promoted and/or blocked powerful learning. Data were gathered through indepth interviews with each of the three school's principals, interviews with eight teachers, and observation of the eight teachers' classrooms. The study found that: (1) providing basic supports necessary to teach well is essential; (2) building capacity and providing opportunity for individual change is critical; (3) there is a need for growth and change as a community; and (4) the principal in an accelerated school must pay conscious and constant attention to explicitly communicating a vision of the school and powerful learning. (Contains 23 references.) (LMI)

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ED 410 687

Principals' Perspectives on Factors Which Facilitate and Block Powerful Learning

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Paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association in Chicago, Illinois, March 25, 1997.

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Principals' Perspectives on Factors Which Facilitate and Block Powerful Learning

The Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) is about changing schools into places where all students have the opportunity to achieve at high levels. The processes of the Accelerated Schools Project - taking stock and inquiry, and working in cadres (Hopfenberg et al, 1993) move schools towards institutional change, while the ultimate goal of ASP is to create a school where learning for all children is powerful. Powerful learning allows students to construct their own knowledge through challenging, stimulating and integrated experiences.

One of the challenges of the Accelerated Schools Project is to create an environment in which teachers are encouraged to create powerful learning situations. In layman's language, a classroom where powerful learning occurs regularly could be described as a classroom which operates much like a gifted and talented (g/t) classroom (Levin, 1995). Typical g/t curriculum grows out of students' interests, involves students in real and active ways in their own learning, is based on big ideas with details and facts as part of the larger whole, and challenges students with its depth (VanTassel-Baska, 1992). The learning environment in the g/t classroom is centered on students and often draws from constructivist theory relative to content, process, and product (Tomlinson, in press). The National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project describes powerful learning similarly through five components (1996): authentic (connected to real life), interactive (students interact among themselves and the real world), learner-centered (students construct own knowledge by exploring and discovering, builds on learners strengths, draws on student's interests and expertise), inclusive (engages all learners, opportunity to

learn for all), and continuous (holistic, connects to other disciplines, connects to the world). For purposes of this paper, the distinction to be drawn between components of powerful learning and g/t strategies is that g/t strategies are not considered by some to be inclusive.

Teachers cannot create a powerful learning environment alone; it must happen in partnership with students, parents, colleagues, and the principal. Many have examined the principal's role in ASP (Davidson, 1992; Davidson & St. John, 1996; Chenoweth & Kushman, 1996; Christensen, 1993 ,1994; Mims, 1996), but few have investigated the link between powerful learning and the principal. How does the principal facilitate or block school level transformation necessary for powerful learning? In what ways does the principal promote or hinder individual teacher change that leads to powerful learning? How does the principal's influence on the larger, institutional change of the school level promoted by ASP connect to the personal, individual change required for classrooms to become places of "powerful learning?"

This paper explores these questions by reporting on phase one of a year-long case study examining the use of gifted and talented teaching strategies (strategies similar to those that characterize powerful learning) in three accelerated schools. While the year-long study's broader focus addresses a variety of perspectives, including teacher, district, and community perspectives, this paper uses the frame of the leader's role in institutional and individual change to explore, from the principals' perspectives, school, teacher, and community factors which promote and/or block powerful learning. An underlying assumption of this paper is that a classroom where powerful learning is the norm requires personal, individual change on the teacher's part. In order for that change to occur, what factors from the principal's perspective influence the possibility of this change occurring?

The Principal in a Restructuring School

In a review of literature on traditional and restructuring schools, Christensen (1993) suggests that the principal of a restructured school becomes a facilitator rather than a manager. How does the principal in a transforming school influence the likelihood that classrooms will change? One important way is for the principal to facilitate development of a learning community guided by a shared vision to which people are truly committed (Senge, 1990). A common vision is important to a learning organization, but that vision is no guarantee that teachers will do things differently in their classrooms. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that using curriculum, or an educational platform, to build community is a way to transform schools. The principal as keeper of the shared vision can help the school remain focused on its future, can keep individual efforts moving in a stream together. Creation of a school community where people learn because of intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation is influenced by the principal. Most change begins with the individual in a highly personal way, but it is equally important for the individual to be a part of a learning community where growth is the norm (Fullan, 1993). Having a shared vision of the school's future and keeping that picture in the forefront of the school's collective mind is an important element in transforming classrooms. Often, the principal is the person who keeps the vision in the forefront and who establishes a climate which encourages growth.

A second way the accelerated school principal influences powerful learning is the extent to which he/she encourages a participatory organization. Building cooperation and consensus, demonstrating tact, developing and building upon ideas and suggestions, being open to dissenting views, consulting with people before making changes affecting them, utilizing suggestions and dealing with concerns are critical to encouraging a participatory organization (Yukl, 1994). When schools

continue to operate hierarchically, change becomes something being done to the teachers and the students instead of being done by them. Paying attention to power relationships and trying to change those complex relationships affects a school's capacity for transformation (Sarason, 1990). As a leader in a changing organization such as an accelerated school, the principal must actively model value for and commitment to the school's picture of the future and support the participation of all in that future. The nature and strength of people's belief systems shape the school's capacity for change, so change from the inside out, change that is driven by the teachers is the real basis for making classrooms "more powerful." As a principal, recognizing that classroom change is driven by teachers and enabling their participation is critical.

A third way the principal influences powerful learning is the degree to which he/she creates a climate which encourages teachers to change classroom practice through risk-taking, systematic reflection on practice, and continuous assessment of student learning. ASP calls for teachers to treat all children as gifted and use the strategies and curriculum they usually reserve only for gifted children with all children. While Christensen believes (1993) risk-taking and experimentation are the norm in a restructured school, many teachers in accelerated schools have found it difficult to transform the concept of powerful learning into consistent classroom practice. Recent research suggests that "schools that set aside formal time for discussions of powerful learning such as focus groups, study teams, or collaborative teams of school members are more likely to implement and support implementation of powerful learning in the school" (National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project, 1996, p. 12). Teachers and principals understand what powerful learning is on a personal level; most have experienced powerful learning situations personally. But, that understanding is rarely transformed into consistent

instructional practice. Pockets of excellence exist in individual teachers' classrooms, but widespread use of innovative strategies has not occurred. Principals influence classroom change through the degree to which they develop a learning community of participatory staff committed to growth and change.

Research Design

A case study design was used to investigate the question of if g/t methods are widely used in ASP schools serving low-income students and if not, why not. Three Chapter I schools designated as Schoolwide Project schools[1] which are also part of the Accelerated Schools Project[2] are the sample for this study. These schools were selected for the study because they serve mainly low-income children and, as part of the Accelerated Schools Project, they have indicated a strong commitment to transforming their schools into places where all children are treated as gifted and talented.

This paper presents findings from the first phase of research in the schools: the principal's perspective regarding factors which support and/or hinder powerful learning. Extensive interviews with three principals were conducted in the summer and fall of 1996 and are the primary data sources for this paper. Prior to those in-depth interviews, several steps were taken. First, informal discussions were held with each of the three schools' principals to gather general information about the school, its community, and its staff. Next, the researcher surveyed each school's principal and teachers to identify three teachers in the school for observation and interview: a traditional teacher, a nontraditional teacher, and a teacher in between those two. Talking with and observing different types of teachers

[1] SWP status is an option first encouraged in the 1988 reauthorization of Title I. Up until 1995-96, this status was limited to schools where 75% or more of the students were poor (60% in 1995-96, 50% thereafter). SWP status is designed to improve the entire school through a disciplined process of establishing a SWP committee of parents and other school staff, engaging in year-long needs assessment and planning, and then implementing the plan.

[2] Schools in ASP must have support from at least 90% of the faculty. ASP is based on three premises: unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths.

allowed for varied perspectives. Approximately forty hours of observations (at two different points in the school year) were conducted in eight teachers' classrooms (three teachers at two schools and two teachers at one school). Initial interviews with these eight teachers occurred after the first observation. Follow up interviews with the teachers are currently being conducted.

In the formal interviews with each principal, an interview guide was used in the interviews. Interviews typically lasted for about an hour. Follow up interviews with principals (ranging from sixty to ninety minutes long) were conducted in early winter and were more individualized, with the researcher drawing on the initial interviews as well as classroom observations and teacher interviews to develop questions to explore with each principal. All interviews were semi-structured and audiotaped. Audiotapes were used to develop notes of basic content from the interviews. Other sources of data from the larger study, audiotaped interviews with the selected teachers from each of the schools and participant observation in these selected teachers' classrooms, were used as triangulation points (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data collection steps are outlined in more detail in Appendix A. Data sources and their relationship to the study's research questions can be reviewed in Appendix B.

Principal interview notes and audiotapes were coded (see Appendix C) and analyzed initially by listening and reading through the notes in the discovery phase (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This discovery phase allowed identification of salient beginning points in each of the interviews. These beginning points were refined through charting the data visually, where categories were changed, combined, or eliminated. These "chunks" of data were examined through the lens of influences on institutional and individual change: learning community, participatory organization, and climate which encourages change in classroom practice. Using

the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), three broad themes were identified from the principals' interviews which seemed to control the degree or extent of these change forces: the principal's leadership style; the principal's view of professional development; and the principal's beliefs about teachers, students, and parents.

Three Accelerated Schools and their Principals

The schools in the study, Springs Elementary, Rutledge Elementary, and Johnson Elementary[3], are located in coastal South Carolina. One school is rural, one is urban, and the third is located in the industrial outskirts of the city. All schools serve at least 90% African American students, and all are designated as Chapter I Schoolwide Project schools.

Springs Elementary is a rural school serving 90% African American children in grades pre-k to five. Approximately nine out of ten students are on free or reduced lunch. The faculty of the school is mainly Caucasian, with only four of fifty teachers African American. Springs' faculty voted to join the ASP in spring 1994 and began the process during the school year of 1994-95. The general tone of the school is one of welcome and warmth. The school is an attractive physical plant, and the office staff is friendly and helpful. The school serves as the community center, with a drop-off program at the school beginning at 7:00 a.m., an after school program for homework assistance and enrichment, a summer enhancement program, and parent involvement programs which have strengthened in the past year. The principal of Springs Elementary is a middle-aged, African American woman born and reared in this rural community, although she lived for many years in the Northeast. Under her leadership, a new school was built and the teaching staff reconstituted. One strongly senses that this is "her school and her

[3] The names of the schools have been changed.

community." Her leadership style is strong and dynamic; she makes decisions that affect instruction without consulting with the faculty, even though the ASP decision making process is in place[4]. She is a powerful personality who is in charge of the school.

Rutledge Elementary School is an inner city elementary school. 98% of the pre-K through five students are African American with 97% on free and reduced lunch. The faculty is a blend of Caucasian and African American teachers. The school, located in the historical part of the city on a busy thoroughfare, is sandwiched between a booming retail business section of the city, a local college, and a public housing project. The school building is unattractive and physically in deplorable condition. The principal is a middle-aged Caucasian woman. Rutledge Elementary joined ASP in 1991 during this principal's first year and is in its sixth year as an accelerated school. While Rutledge's principal does not live in the community, she is accepted and respected by the parents of the community. Her leadership style is direct and honest; she is open to others and supportive of risk-taking by her teachers. She has strong communication skills and relational abilities. She makes valued connections with a diversity of people, and she describes "respect" as most important to her (MP,Tape 2).

Johnson Elementary is located in an industrial fringe of a mid-sized city. Almost all of the prekindergarten through grade five students are African American and on free or reduced lunch. The school is bordered by two busy streets. Across from the school is a community of small, modest homes. A few students walk to school, but most are bussed from three nearby communities, all of which are located in areas designated as part of the Enterprise Community[5]. The teaching staff is a

[4] At Springs Elementary, cadres meet twice a month and steering committee meets twice a month. School As a Whole meetings are held infrequently. Since many teachers commute long distances to the school and have young children, the principal tries to keep after school meetings to a minimum. Cadre and steering meetings are held during the school day.
[5] Federal designation of high poverty area.

balanced mix of Caucasian and African American staff, as well as relatively young teachers and older, more experienced teachers. Johnson Elementary is in its fourth year as a accelerated school. Johnson's principal, a middle-aged, Caucasian female, is a charismatic, articulate person who is knowledgeable about instruction. She models a strong commitment to providing a quality education for the youngsters at the school, and her personal commitment appears to inspire the staff to work extraordinarily hard to meet the educational needs of the students. A visitor to the school gets a sense of close control and monitoring of the students in this school not present in the other two schools. School rules require students to walk down a line in the center of the hall at all times, and there are often teachers at strategic points along the hallway monitoring students. The building of this school is in poor condition. The school's lighting is insufficient, and many of the rooms leak profusely during strong rainstorms. The school grounds have few pieces of equipment on the playground. Classes for four year olds and severely mentally handicapped students are housed in trailers.

Supports and Obstacles for Powerful Learning

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from the principals' perspectives as supported or refuted by interviews with teachers and classroom observations. These findings build understanding of the principal's role in promoting or hindering powerful learning. The findings suggest some of what supports, facilitates and encourages the use of powerful learning strategies, as well as some obstacles which block the use of these strategies. Findings from this phase of the study point to some directions for those in Accelerated Schools Project and other schools serving low-income students on how to "get to scale with good educational practice" (Elmore, 1996).

Upon analysis of the data, themes were identified under which factors related

to the principal's influence on teachers' use of innovative "gifted and talented" approaches with all of their students can be organized. Themes included the principal's leadership style; the principal's views on professional development; and the principal's beliefs about teachers, students, and parents.

Leadership Style

First, and most obvious as both a support and a block is the leadership style of the principal. Christensen (1993) describes the shift in behaviors of a principal in a traditional school and in a restructured school from an autocratic, reactive manager to a transformational leader who works in collaborative and risk-taking ways. The three principals are at different places on this continuum. Springs' principal is closer to the manager who reacts to outside forces and who leads most of the time in a top-down way. Rutledge's principal is opposite, working collegially with teachers, parents and community members to solve problems and make decisions. Johnson's principal falls somewhere in the middle, at times managing and supervising and at other times working as a transformational leader to facilitate change. Ideally, a leadership style which promotes the development of a learning community, where the principal encourages participation has a strong positive influence.

Enabling Participation through Support

The principals in this case have quite different leadership styles, yet they are similar in their philosophy that teachers must participate in the decision making process of the school. They are also similar in their view of the importance of support for teachers' work. These principals act to facilitate the work of their teachers by ensuring that teachers are provided with the necessary materials and resources for teaching. At all three schools, teachers select most of their resources and materials for teaching. Both Johnson Elementary and Rutledge Elementary principals involve their teachers in the budget process. Johnson's principal believes

her "job is to remove obstacles and barriers for teachers so they can do their jobs" (MFP, Tape 2). Rutledge's principal says she tries to "allow a teacher to be the best teacher she can be" (MP, Tape 2). The principal of Springs, too, sees herself as a facilitator for teachers (SP, Tape 2). A teacher at Springs Elementary agrees with the importance of the strong administrative support of her principal to her teaching:

> " --'s decisions are all for the good of the children. The school provides really well for our needs for teaching. Problems get fixed right away. We have a well run school." (SZ, Tape 1)

All the principals believe strongly that one of their primary roles is to solve problems that prevent or block teachers from doing their jobs well, and all have an open door policy for teachers and parents. The principals are all good providers; teachers in interviews say they have the necessary resources for their jobs. For the most part, observations support that many of the classrooms are well-equipped and teachers have access to varied instructional materials to use in their teaching. As is common practice, most of the teachers supplement the materials provided by the school with their own materials. However, teacher support in the form of principals' leadership varies.

Encouragement to Change Practice

The style in which a principal leads establishes a psychological climate that either encourages or discourages risk-taking. Important to encouraging powerful learning is the psychological support principals provide for teachers that enables learning and growth on the teacher's part. Springs' principal sees herself "as facilitator-- building on and extending teachers' skills-- bridging where teachers are to a new place" (SP, Tape 2). Allowing for risk-taking and failure, providing encouragement and support, as well as communicating strong, consistent messages are important components of the transformational leaders' responses and behaviors that build a learning community in the school which creates a climate to help

powerful learning happen. A teacher at Johnson says:

> " [Our principal] has helped formulate the way I teach. She (the principal) does it to everybody, by pushing us out to take courses, to find out more, to try new methods. I really have never felt afraid to try anything, and I have talked to other teachers from other schools who say 'My goodness, if my principal walked in and saw something falling apart, (laugh)" (MFZ, Tape 1)

The principal's leadership style which allows teachers to become involved in "a process of discovering a personal sense of causality" (Meza et al, 1994, p. 13) enables teachers to understand the ways in which their actions are connected to their results in the classroom. Rutledge's principal spoke clearly about her role as one of reassurance and support, a role in which she tries to help teachers see things in different ways. She says:

> " I try to have a leadership style that I would want as a classroom teacher. I remember as a classroom teacher, I wanted to be respected as a professional. I know that I wanted to have some control over some of the decisions that were made. I [try] very hard to provide for the teacher an environment in which [teachers] can feel okay about making decisions [about their kids]" (MP, Tape 1).

This principal meets individually with each teacher four times a year to help teachers figure out what they can do with students who are having limited success. Rutledge's principal sees herself as a "vehicle for information...I try to provide teachers with what they need to stretch" (MP, Tape 2). Her style as a collaborative facilitator (Christensen, 1993) has allowed her to develop a relationship with her faculty based on trust and respect. This relationship took time and some struggles. This principal describes an instance where she "had to let teachers make a big mistake" (MP, Tape 2) that they had to remedy themselves. She was honest with the teachers about the way she felt when she disagreed with their actions; Rutledge's principal told teachers that she thought they were making a mistake, but she refused to fix the problem for them when teachers realized they had erred. The teachers

solved the problem that they created. This principal's willingness to allow teachers to fail and to learn from their failure helped the staff to realize that they were autonomous. As leader in a participatory organization, their principal would not overrule their decisions. She allowed "empowerment coupled with responsibility", one of the ASP principles (Hopfenberg et al, 1993), to happen. The process was not unlike the unfreezing process described by Meza et al (1994) in which teachers test out the parameters of their autonomy with their principals. This principal developed the staff's capacity as a learning community by allowing the participatory decision making process to take its course.

Johnson Elementary's principal began her principalship at the school by sending the message that she was building a new school culture; that this was now "...a school that was embracing innovative teaching ideas, that [they] were out to meet the needs of every student that [they] had" (MFP, Tape 1). This principal set out to find excellent teachers who shared a similar philosophy, and she worked over several years to rebuild her staff into a strong, energetic group with a shared vision. As a proactive leader (Christensen, 1993), she communicates clear expectations to teachers that are consistent with the expectations developed by the school as a whole. Johnson's principal sees herself as the "enforcer" of the shared expectations that guide the school, and she describes her role as removing the obstacles or barriers that get in the way of the teacher doing her job. These principals "...have to learn how to facilitate meaningful teacher empowerment" (Meza et al, 1994, p. 17) by clearly and consistently communicating what their expectations are and by behaving in ways that are congruent with those communications. What they say and do fits together, and teacher interviews corroborate this observation.

Springs Elementary's principal is more directive than the other two in matters related to teacher autonomy in the classroom. While Springs' principal

believes that her leadership style has changed tremendously due to "the climate [in the school] and the [improved] caliber of teachers" (SP, Tape 2), teacher interviews suggest that this principal's directives about instruction shape the approaches that teachers use in their classrooms. Classroom observations provide additional evidence that Springs' teachers do follow the principal's directives. Further, inconsistencies in the messages communicated by this principal have contributed to some confusion and sagging morale on the part of highly committed teachers. One teacher at Springs says that the principal announced to teachers they may lose their jobs if standardized test scores do not improve this year. A schoolwide focus on improving standardized test scores has been consistently communicated by Springs' principal, however teachers have had limited input in determining their approaches to meeting this goal. One Springs teacher has shifted from an open-ended literature and writing process approach for teaching reading to a skills-based basal approach as a result of this principal's directive. The teacher is a self-described "team player" who wants to " do what she is supposed to do" (SZ, Tape 1). Document review of ASP cadre reports at Springs reveals that this principal encourages discussion around some issues (technology in education, professional development) but is directive in her leadership regarding instruction. With a reactive and autocratic style (Christensen, 1993), she has made decisions that affect instruction without consulting school as a whole, i.e., a mandate that teachers spend four hours daily on reading instruction (SZ, Tape 1). Springs' principal says:

> "We didn't come to a meeting of the minds with the amount of minutes I wanted the teachers to spend on reading, and I tried to get them to stop thinking about their teaching in block. 'Give yourself long periods of teaching time --like two hours, and you can always work out the things you are doing in reading" (SP, Tape 2).

While Springs teachers may believe that the reading mandate was heavy-handed in a participatory organization, perhaps the principal demonstrates one approach to

move teachers towards powerful learning in their classrooms. The principal understands that longer instructional periods can lead to greater depth in content, and she believes the teachers do not understand how depth contributes to powerful learning. It is possible the principal was attempting to change teacher behavior with the hope that the attitude change would follow. Her action may exemplify an attempt to act as facilitator of teachers' powerful learning by challenging teachers' thinking through their experiences. However, by leading through mandate, Spring's principal discourages participation, learning, and change.

Leadership Style and Its Impact on Powerful Learning

How do these different leadership approaches connect to powerful learning? At Rutledge, the teachers interviewed feel great freedom to try out new approaches because of support from their principal. Both Rutledge teachers interviewed said that they have felt no pressure from the principal to focus on improving test scores, and Rutledge's principal herself says she does not pressure teachers about test scores. She says, "They put enough pressure on themselves." Those teachers are highly reflective and are constantly looking at ways to provide powerful learning experiences for their students. From their interviews, these teachers appear more focused on moving students further academically than on improving scores on the standardized tests, and this focus on academic movement fits with the principal's view of "looking at the long term picture" with students and focusing on "the academic growth of the individual student" (MP, Tape 2). Rutledge's teachers feel less tension than others interviewed about whether or not their students are learning; they are confident that they can demonstrate their students' learning in ways other than standardized test scores. These teacher behaviors fit with the expected outcomes of working with a principal whose leadership style is transformational, proactive, and collaborative (Christensen, 1993).

Johnson teachers, too, feel supported and encouraged by their principal. One teacher, in whose class students are engaged in powerful learning on a daily basis, is a unique person who is highly reflective and who has deep commitment to helping the students at this school. The other two Johnson teachers are both integrally involved in the school governance process and participate in a number of external professional organizations and activities. Their individual capacities for personal growth are enhanced through their involvement in the larger community of the school and the district, and they attribute these opportunities to the principal's leadership. All Johnson teachers interviewed spoke about the wealth of opportunities they have for professional development. Their principal's expectation that teachers learn and grow is a personal goal that all of the teachers interviewed at Johnson had in common. This principal's leadership style, too, is effective in building the learning community of the school as a whole.

The strong, directive style of Springs' principal may have influenced some teachers' willingness to try new approaches. These teachers seem reluctant to stray from the safety zone of the principal's instructional directives. They are careful to spend the mandated amount of time on reading instruction. The Springs teachers are more focused than other teachers interviewed on teaching to the test as a way to improve student learning. In a case study of eight accelerated schools, Meza et al (1994) report that "... there appears to be a linkage between this process of making personal commitments and the process of taking personal responsibility for curricular change"(p. 16). In this school's context, the principal of Springs is reacting to external forces, and she is identifying what she thinks will satisfy those external forces. Springs' principal's mandate for reading instruction and her emphasis on improving test scores seems to have robbed some personal responsibility from these teachers. That lack of personal responsibility may affect the individual teacher's

capacity to change and grow at this point in time, directly impacting the possibility for powerful learning. Encouragement for individual change is intimately connected to what happens (or does not happen) in the classroom. Principal support for individual growth and learning is a first step in building a learning community and the capacity for change. This support for growth and learning overlaps with another area that the principal often controls: professional development of teachers.

Views on professional development

All of the principals spoke about the importance of professional development in the growth of teachers, and no real difference in attitude emerged from the interviews. All felt strongly that teachers should have many different types of opportunities for growth, including courses, seminars, peer coaching and visitations, visitations to other schools, active participation in professional organizations, and support to attend meetings and conferences. Johnson's principal states:

> "I don't have all of the answers. Staff development, I have very much encouraged that. I want teachers to go to national conferences, state conferences, county conferences, take graduate courses, read journals, take offerings that the county does, workshop seminars. I want them to bring that information back and use it in the classroom, share it with other teachers" (MFP, Tape 1).

Understanding and knowledge are key to personal, individual change which can translate to change in classroom instruction. One teacher at Rutledge described her experience at a whole language workshop as a turning point in her teaching. She completely changed her traditional, phonics-based approach to teaching reading after that workshop. The positive results she had with her students gave her the encouragement she needed to continue to adapt and change her reading instruction so that her students were more successful in learning to read and write (MZ, Tape 1).

Another teacher from Johnson shared her personal goal of exploring the learning theory of constructivism and her desire to translate that personal learning into improved instruction for her students. Johnson's principal regularly offers courses at the school which are open to the entire faculty. All three principals have taken courses with their teachers. Rutledge's principal describes how the staff decided at a summer planning meeting to require a reading strategies course for the faculty because the staff had identified reading as an area of need. The course, tailored to the needs of the staff, was offered after school on campus, and tuition was free.

Each principal approaches professional development differently. Rutledge's principal emphasizes professional development from within the school community. This approach fits with her stated desire to build on strengths of the staff (Hopfenberg et al ,1993). Johnson's teachers are encouraged by their principal to participate in learning outside of the school and to bring that learning back to the school community. Springs' principal has focused this year's professional development more on improvement of test scores. Most of the professional development choices at all schools appear to be individualized and based on need. The differences among the schools match with the context of each school. Springs' principal illustrates the growth of the teachers who are at her school:

> "Its almost as if they've arrived, not blaming and telling, but talking about needs in terms of what [we] need to do, what actions need to happen, or what materials are needed" (SP, Tape 2).

This building of a learning organization through professional development sheds light on how involvement in ASP promotes the process of powerful learning through increased teacher confidence and increased awareness of expectations for student learning.

The principals in each of the schools speak of changes in teachers and their teaching approaches. Springs' principal describes dramatic changes in two of her

teachers who in the past showed little interest in growth. This principal made a sustained effort to encourage them over time. Her encouragement and support finally paid off. These teachers are beginning to take advantage of professional development opportunities they have refused in the past. Springs' principal notes that support for teachers from each other has been a strong catalyst for change and growth on her faculty. She also notes that, while the commitment to powerful learning has been made, the staff has a way to go:

> " I start with a level a little bit higher than they (teachers) are - to fill in the gaps, provide strategies for those (hard to reach) students -- building on the individual students strengths. It hasn't been easy, but at this point we are much better at it than we were before" (SP, Tape 2).

Johnson's principal, too, has seen movement towards "powerful teaching." She has observed change in the school staff and now sees her teachers as mostly innovative, with others moving away from traditional teaching to more g/t approaches. She says:

> "I did not really know a lot of research about better ways to [teach]. I just said we are going to do something different, figuring we hadn't been successful in the way we had done it. I knew we couldn't get any worse, which is kind of a good place to be. That's when we changed and told teachers about teaching in more of the strategies that were ...gifted and talented kinds of things, talked about thinking and projects and group work and taking a theme and expanding it. Not doing worksheets but creating graphs and story maps (MFP, Tape 1).

Johnson's principal observed that teachers who were energized and excited about this kind of teaching remained at the school. Others who were more traditional left. The school's focus on doing thing in a different way has helped to build community of like-minded staff. Teacher and principal learning can be connected to individual change. Changes in the individual's attitudes and behaviors can transform the school. This example illustrates how beliefs about teaching and learning are interwoven with professional development and leads to discussion of the next

influence on powerful learning: beliefs.

Beliefs about teachers, students and parents

Principals' beliefs about teachers, students and parents, too, provide clues as to why powerful learning does or does not happen. In each conversation with the principals, the concept of sharing responsibility arose. The principal who believes that she shares responsibility with parents, teachers, and students is likely to behave in ways that enable and empower those around her. By treating parents, teachers, and students as the partners they are in the process of learning, the principal facilitates one step towards changing the traditional view of education where students are empty vessels to be filled. This shared responsibility creates a need for active participation on the part of others: students, parents, teachers. Rutledge's principal shares an example of the entire faculty deciding to decrease the class size at the primary grade level. Her example illustrates the belief in shared responsibility; this particular decision made by the faculty provides evidence for her that the collective group is stronger together and is able to make decisions in the best interest of everyone. The principals are all aware of the importance of shared responsibility; they do not all behave in ways which show their value for the concept.

Springs' principal explores ways to bridge where the parents are to where they want to be when she talks about her work on a community housing committee:

> "...I see that, hey, I can tie my parents up to do more for their children without being so negative, by saying look at this, you have this great place to stay (a new trailer). Let's work on getting you (the parent) more literate and having more confidence about yourself and moving on...So many [parents say], 'I don't have a nice place to stay. I don't have nice clothes to wear, so something is wrong with me, so why bother.' We are missing the boat with our parents. They are so far down here with their self esteem, and we are asking so much [they say], ' I can't accomplish that. [Those school people] are crazy.'"(SP, Tape 2).

This principal sees a gap between the school's expectations for parental responsibility

and what is possible for parents who struggle to provide for basic needs. She thinks aloud about how the school might use the housing angle to get parents to "come around." By supporting the need for housing through her work on the housing committee, Springs' principal sees one way to share responsibility with those parents.

These principals speak of treating people with respect and dignity, having tolerance of differences, and exploring uncomfortable issues. These behaviors underline their belief that building trust with both teachers and parents provides a basis for individual change and growth. Respect for parents and the assumption that they care deeply about their children is critical in establishing trust. Building trust requires that a climate for risk-taking and support for failure is clearly established. Trust is of particular consequence when encouraging teachers to experiment with approaches to creating powerful learning classrooms. Rutledge's principal describes the process of creating an environment for experimentation for teachers uncomfortable with taking risks. She says:

> "...[A] group of teachers had a very difficult time with my leadership style...They wanted to be told what to do. They wanted to be told how well to do it and to what extent to do it. They wanted feedback immediately. Often times, they would ask me what to do. I would say, 'Well, what do you think is best?' I think that over the years, the faculty has come to trust me, and I think that they know that I respect them as professionals, and I think that they know that I will allow them to try to take risks in their classrooms. I rarely chastise. I don't go around slapping wrists... I figure if they try something and it doesn't work, they are smart enough to figure out that it didn't work, and they adjust it themselves... I have found that what has happened is the teachers ... are becoming more reflective" (MP, Tape 1).

Encouragement to change practice is tied to creating a learning community. Rutledge's principal facilitates individual and community growth through participation and encouragement and, in doing so, increases the likelihood that powerful learning will occur.

The belief that teaching is a calling and requires a depth of commitment unlike other professions, particularly with teachers of low-income students, becomes evident when listening to the principals' comments. Spring's principal speaks passionately about the great possibilities that exist for "their" students and how they can "...get children there if [we] really, truly believe it" (SP, Tape 2). This belief is reflected in the following quote by Johnson's principal:

> "You really have to believe that you want to make a difference in a child's life. That coming to school and teaching for six, eight, seven hours a day is more than a job. That you really care about individual kids and that you want to make a difference for them...I think that teachers who have that commitment are willing to go out there and discover those powerful learning activities that are going to make that happen" (MFP, Tape 2).

This example illustrates a necessary element in creating change: emotion linked to hope (Fullan, 1997). From the interviews, one gets the sense that all of these principals are hopeful, and that despite the obstacles they face, they believe the goals are attainable. "People who are optimistic and hopeful are more resourceful and do better under difficult circumstances" (Fullan, 1997, p. 221). This hope is a strength upon which they can draw. All of the principals have strong admiration and respect for the teachers with whom they work. The principals' beliefs about trust, shared responsibility, and respect are similar, and their sense of hope is especially important. Because beliefs shape the school culture, the ways in which the principals act on their beliefs influences the desire and capacity of teachers to change.

Revisiting the Research Questions

This investigation examines the link between powerful learning and the principal by addressing these research questions:

1. How does the principal facilitate or block school level transformation necessary for powerful learning?
2. In what ways does the principal promote or hinder individual teacher change

that leads to powerful learning?

3. How does the principal's influence on the larger, institutional change at the school level (promoted by ASP) connect to the personal, individual change required for classrooms to become places of "powerful learning?"

How do these principals facilitate or block school level transformation? The extent to which the principal builds community participation in meaningful ways is related to the degree of transformation that occurs. Christensen's (1994) work on the role of the principal in transforming schools points to a need for the leader to shift from autocratic manager to proactive, collaborative facilitator. Rutledge's principal works in proactive ways to establish teacher autonomy in decision making. She consistently demonstrates her trust and respect for teachers by sharing power with others. A strong example that illustrates this trust and respect is her willingness to allow a decision made by the school as a whole that she disagreed with to go forward. Johnson's principal provides the glue for her school's sense of community as the keeper/enforcer of the school's vision. The route of Johnson's principal to clearly and consistently bring staff back to the vision has allowed the school to become an organization of like-minded people which is quite different from what the school was like before this principal began. Teachers at Springs participate in decision making, but their principal limits the areas of their participation. Springs' principal still feels that "the buck stops with her" and continues to direct the instructional approaches used in the classrooms of Springs. While teachers are involved in some of the decision making, Springs has not been transformed in a deep way. The ways in which each principal works to build a community that shares responsibility can facilitate or block the ability of the school to transform itself.

In what ways does the principal promote or hinder individual teacher change

that leads to powerful learning? The ways in which the principal establishes a climate for learning and participation affect teacher change, and the shaping of climate is linked to the principal's role. At Rutledge, the principal is a proactive, collaborative facilitator; the school climate encourages risk-taking, experimentation and learning from mistakes. Teachers have permission to fail because the expectation exists that they will reflect on their failure and learn and grow from that failure. Johnson teachers' heavy involvement in professional development in the world outside of the school enables them to grow and develop as professionals. Johnson's principal works to facilitate these opportunities, and the opportunities have allowed teachers to see a bigger picture and be involved in powerful learning themselves. Springs' principal's mandate for change in reading instruction and her focus on test scores and how to raise the scores sends a message to teachers that they are not trusted to make the right decisions. When a person feels untrustworthy, their confidence is likely to erode. Personal change is difficult at any time; it is particularly difficult when confidence and moral are low.

What is the connection between these two, the principal's influence on school change and individual change, and how does that translate into classrooms becoming places of "powerful learning?" Clearly, individual growth and community growth are linked. While it is possible for individual growth to occur in isolation, a community remains stagnate without individuals who are growing and changing. The degree to which principals are able to promote growth on both levels affects the possibility that powerful learning will occur in classrooms. So, leadership style, how they lead, how they see teachers and how that translates into sharing power influences both the individual and the community. At Rutledge and Johnson, where teachers have much autonomy and respect from their principals, powerful learning is more likely to occur on a broader scale. These two principals

talk about larger changes in their schools and observations revealed that their nontraditional teachers were extraordinary and powerful. Springs principal talked more about cases of individual change, specifically two teachers who were beginning to do things differently in their classrooms now. Perhaps the principal at Springs describes individual changes because the larger change has not yet occurred in a dramatic way in her school. A climate that supports risk taking, reflection, and failure enables the group. What principals do to create a climate on the school level which encourages individual experimentation and reflection provides a critical connection between the individual and school change in these schools. That community climate affects individual experimentation and reflection and can lead to individual change. Individual change is the only way that classrooms will change into places of powerful learning.

Making Meaning

Recognizing what supports powerful learning in the specific contexts of these three schools can enable school staffs to think carefully about how to build similar supports in their own schools. Supporting powerful learning is development of a learning community where participation is the norm. Connected closely to the capacity to learn as a community is the strength of encouragement to change classroom practice. Understanding what obstacles block powerful learning in these three schools can provide a starting point for inquiry into existing obstacles in other schools. Critical to understanding is examination of beliefs and how they are manifested through leadership style and professional development. This phase of the larger year-long study informs and will be informed by the larger case study and interviews of teachers, community persons, participant observation in schools and classes, document analysis and further interviews with the principals. When remaining phases of the study are completed and the additional data are analyzed,

those findings could shed new light on this portion of the study which is incomplete as yet.

For example, one unanswered question is whether or not powerful learning is occurring in any of these three schools. While data collection is not complete and analysis of data is still at the "looks like/feels like" stage (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), the answer would have to be that powerful learning is present in all three schools. The reader's next question may logically be, "To what extent is powerful learning occurring?" This paper cannot answer that question. But some observations about powerful learning can be made based on the data collected. At Rutledge, observation data reveals that learning is powerful for students in both the traditional and nontraditional classrooms. Rutledge's climate so strongly supports learning, participation, and community that these influences seem to be shaping classroom practice. At Johnson, powerful learning seems to be occurring mainly for the teachers. Johnson teachers are on a strong learning curve, and their "powerful" learning appears to be a powerful influence on their personal growth as professionals. That teacher learning has reached the classroom in the case of Johnson's nontraditional teacher; her students learn in challenging, integrated, and authentic ways. Powerful learning at Springs is rare and seems to be attributed to the individual teacher's personal growth.

Strong negative themes are revealed in the data: public dissatisfaction with schools negatively influences the day to day work of the school and the long term morale of the school's faculty and staff; district inequities in relation to building maintenance, support personnel, and equipment negatively affects teachers who struggle daily to teach all children, even the most difficult; and time for teachers to build understanding of what they must do to encourage student learning is insufficient. These factors appear to be obstacles to deter powerful learning in all

three schools. These and other factors including teacher training and attitudes and community perspectives warrant further investigation in the effort to understand the factors which facilitate and block powerful learning.

At this point, four lessons may be considered. First, providing basic supports necessary to teach well is essential. In each school, the principals saw this basic support as the first step in encouraging powerful learning situations. Basic supports included not only materials and information for teachers, but also support from the principals in the form of troubleshooting and problem solving in areas outside of the teachers' domain.

Second, building capacity and providing opportunity for individual change is critical. Any transformation has to begin on a personal level. Each principal provided teachers with opportunities to discuss ideas, to explore possibilities, to stretch beyond where they currently were in their thinking. The kind of psychological safety that encourages risk-taking and testing out of approaches and ideas is present in schools where teachers are not fearful. Reflective practice is common where teachers feel secure, and that reflection serves as an important piece in changing classroom practice. The principals in these schools are a major influence in shaping the climate for individual change.

Third, related to individual change is the need for growth and change as a community. The sense that the effort is a collective one and that the group is more powerful than the individual is guided by the participatory process for decision-making in the school. Where the principal is the authority, making most of the important decisions, teachers' level of trust in themselves and their abilities is diminished. In an organization which shares responsibility, the effort is strengthened by the synergy of the group. The group can learn and grow from the synergy.

Fourth, the principal in an accelerated school has to pay conscious and constant attention to what he/she says and does. Continuing to revisit the vision of what the school will be in the future and being explicit about powerful learning appears to be critical in the quest for continuous improvement. Reflection by the principal on the following questions is one way to pay attention to building community and keeping the vision as a focus: How does the way I lead empower those I work with? What do I do to build the capacity of those around me? How do I support individual change and growth? In what ways do I develop the learning community? How do I keep the staff focused on our shared picture of the future?

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