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AUTHOR Allen, Sharon M.; And Others  
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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study examined school-community relationship and its effect on program implementation in six rural South Dakota towns serving as sites for the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project (SDTP). SDTP is part of a national project to test whether providing continuous comprehensive services to Head Start children and their families through third grade can maintain and enhance the early benefits attained by the children. Family service coordinators (FSCs) act as liaisons between state agencies, community agencies, schools, and parents; make routine home visits; and ensure that families receive services in the areas of health, education, social services, and parent involvement. Data collection included participant observations in elementary schools and communities while "shadowing" FSCs during their work days; formal and spontaneous interviews with FSCs, principals, teachers, and parents; examination of school documents; and analysis of FSC journals. Preliminary results suggest that only two of the six elementary schools were at the center of community life, and identify community characteristics that influence the school-community relationship and program success. These characteristics include sense of community, community size, community norms, heterogeneity of the community, and level of parent involvement. Contains 40 references. (SV)

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Schools as the Center of Rural Communities:  
An Ethnographic Study

A Paper Presented to  
the American Educational Research Association  
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Sharon M. Allen, Graduate Student and Project Ethnographer  
Ray Thompson, Professor and Project Evaluation Director  
Jane Drapeaux, Project Director

Center for Interaction Technology  
in Education and Corporations,  
School of Education,  
University of South Dakota

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Introduction

The quantity of research articles and books published on school reform attests to the importance of reform to the American public. The public pressure for the transformation of schools has increased alongside the public's dissatisfaction with low levels of student performances. One result of the public outcry has been the establishment of The National Education Goals (Data for the National Goals Report Vol.2, 1994). The National Education Goals were created in 1990 to set standards on which to judge student achievement and to reverse the trend of low student achievement. The six National Education Goals set high expectations for education performance from the preschool years all the way through adulthood. In 1994 eight Goals were codified with the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Data for the National Goals Report Vol.2, 1994). Two additional goals were added to the original six to reflect the importance of parents and teachers in improving the education process. Two of the eight goals addressed by The National Education Goals involve the education of adults. Goal Six involves adult literacy and Goal Eight involves parent involvement in education (Data for the National Goals Report Vol.2, 1994).

Reform efforts, according to Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton, and Oakes (1995), vary greatly according to community

characteristics. Tyack and Tobin's (1994) conclusions regarding school reform were similar to the conclusions of Wells et al. (1995). Tyack and Tobin found the common element of "failure to enlist the support and ideas of the community" in their research on failed school reforms (1995).

The success of school reform in rural communities and the characteristics of the communities are of particular interest. There is a paucity of research on the experiences and characteristics of rural communities involved in successful educational reform. If one is to understand the successful outcomes of school transformation efforts in rural communities, one must first understand the concepts of communities and rural.

#### Communities

Communities are defined numerous ways in the literature. Hewitt (1988, pp. 130-131) offered the classic sociological definition of a community as, "...a territorially based social unit-such as the small town or village-that thoroughly embraces the lives of its members, who feel bound to one another as whole persons and whose sense of identification with one another and with the community is strong." The definition implies a shared sense of values, norms, expectations, sentiments, and world views. Hewitt further identified this type of community as an organic community; a community in which the members lives are rooted in and dependent on this social unit (1988). An organic community has clearly visible boundaries that members can understand and take for granted.

Butler Flora et al. used Tonnies ([1887] 1963) concepts of "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" to differentiate between rural and urban communities (1992, p.15). "Gemeinschaft" refers to a society based on personal relationships and face-to-face interactions. The word "gesellschaft" designates social relations used by members only as a means to an end; relationships are formal, impersonal, and contractual. Butler Flora et al. (1992) argued that improved transportation and telecommunication have reduced the social cohesion of rural communities and that "gemeinschaft" no longer applies to many rural communities. Butler Flora et al. used a "sense of place" to define communities in their book on rural communities (1992). Eyles (1985) and Wilkinson (1986) identified place or area, people and their institutions, and sense of belonging as three essential elements of community. Greider, Krannich, and Berry (1991) used different terminology but similar definitions for their two aspects of community: a sense of trust and a sense of local identify and solidarity. Wilkinson emphasized the importance of the social bond that exists between the people who live and work together (1986). Fitchen (1991) elaborated on the social bond between community members as the "we" or the shared identity of community members.

Community has also been defined as being the psychological aspect of social settings that serves to give members a sense of belonging (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). The research on effective school has referred to the importance

of the "school as community" concept (Battistich et al., 1995; Purkey & Smith, 1985).

### Rural

Rural has proved a much more elusive word to define. Fitchen (1991) stated that rural is most often defined in terms of that which it is not; it is not metropolitan. Butler Flora et al. (1992) spent eight pages in their book, Rural Communities: Legacy and Change, defining the concept "rural" (nonmetropolitan) and identified a definition based on county size and location. Counties that are rural and nonadjacent are counties that do not have places of 2,500 or more population and are not adjacent to a metropolitan county. Counties that are less urbanized and nonadjacent are counties with an urban population of 2,555 to 19,999 and not adjacent to a metropolitan county. Rural is by definition then officially residual from urban or metropolitan areas. The personal definitions of the concept of rural as identified by rural residents, however, lie in the landscape (Fitchen, 1991). The land includes ones' private property, the space in which social relationships are grounded, the space for sociocultural activities, and the space for economic production (Fitchen, 1991). The land also provides a physical and psychological buffer, according to Fitchen (1991).

Rural communities have the characteristics of "established communities," according to Figueira-McDonough, and are the source of the members' identities (1991). "Established communities" have the resources needed to support an organizational network

and provide the members with ties to kin, friends, and informal groups (Figueira-McDonough, 1991). Informal ties provide stability for the community and control over community members (Figueira-McDonough, 1991; Goudy, 1990).

#### School-Community Relationship

While sociological researchers discuss the concepts of communities, ethnographers describe community culture, and educational researchers discuss the concepts of schools as communities, rarely do researchers address the effects of school reform on communities and the cultures of the communities (Battistich et al., 1995; Kahne, 1994). Programs do not exist in a vacuum and the success or failure of a program seldom has one reason. By looking at the communities, schools, and families in the one can learn how the interaction of the various participants have hindered or assisted school reform.

According to research, the boundaries between schools and communities are artificial (Carlson & Dunne, 1981; Cousins, 1984; Hobbs, 1981; Versteeg, 1993; Wells et al., 1995). Parents are community members and are likely to be school staff in rural communities. The schools are typically are one of the largest source of employment for rural communities (Butler Flora et al., 1992).

Versteeg stated that rural schools and rural communities are tightly linked and interdependent (1993). Versteeg added, "A strong, vital rural community is dependent on the existence of a high-quality educational program, and a high-quality educational

program is dependent on a vital community..." (1993).

Educational researchers should consider the inter-relationships of rural communities and rural-based institutions during data collection (Newhouse, 1981). Newhouse added that schools are not mutually exclusive from the communities and are difficult to examine without including the whole community (1981). Parent and community involvement in education is another way schools and communities are linked.

#### Parent Involvement

Parents' involvement in their children's education has been identified in the effective school research as an important predictor of the success of students (Purkey & Smith, 1985; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992). Brosz identified different forms that parent participation can take in the school as "parent as audience," "parent as communicator," "parent as advocate or advisor," and "parent as volunteer and/or teacher" (1988). Waugh, Bireley, Webb, and Graham identified the characteristics of parents who successfully reared gifted children and found that the parents were active participants in their children's education (1993).

#### Project Description

The Head Start experience has recently been expanded into elementary schools through implementation of the National Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project (NTP). The NTP was funded in 1991 and implemented in 1992 to provide services to children in kindergarten at thirty-one different



sites in the United States. The NTP has been one way the federal government has addressed meeting The National Education Goals.

One-half of the children and families in each of the thirty-one sites receive NTP services. The other half serve as comparison children and families. A second cohort of kindergarten children was added in the fall of 1993. The NTP is testing the hypothesis that providing continuous comprehensive services to Head Start children will maintain and enhance the early benefits attained by the children and their families (Kennedy, 1993). The NTP will continue to serve the children through their third grade year.

South Dakota has been chosen as one of the thirty-one NTP sites. The comprehensive services at the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project (SDTP) site are provided by family service coordinators (FSCs). Services are provided to all demonstration children and their families in four component areas, social services, health, education, and parent involvement. The coordinators serve as liaisons between state agencies, community agencies, schools, and parents. The FSCs make routine home visits and work directly with parents in an effort to improve home-school communication, provide parents with educational resources, and help parents gain access to needed social services. An additional adult education component addresses adult literacy needs and parent training. Building trust on the part of the parents is an important element in developing partnerships between families and schools.

### Methodology

The main purpose of the SDTP ethnographic study is to provide descriptive data necessary to explain the results of the quantitative analysis described in the overall NTP evaluation plan. The SDTP ethnographic study also serves to fill in research gaps not covered by the NTP Core Data Set, gaps such as descriptions of the services provided by family service coordinators and the perceived effect of the services by SDTP participants.

Newhouse suggested researchers utilize observation as a research methodology when examining schools in rural communities (1981). Since schools and rural communities are closely intertwined, observation has the least amount of negative effect on the communities (Newhouse, 1981). The holistic approach of ethnography is viewed as important in understanding the interactions of the people within social institutions and in the larger context of the communities. Learning the behaviors and beliefs of community members will provide a deeper description of the program-community relationship. An understanding of the unique cultural framework of each community will aid in identified program failures and successes. An identification of the characteristics of the community that are the most conducive to successful school reform will add depth to the quantified data collection of the larger NTP study.

### Research Questions

The developing theory and position of the SDTP ethnographic study as part of a larger study guide research methods and data collection procedures. The ethnographic study as part of the NTP has specific objectives. The present study addressed two of the seven objectives proposed by the National Core Data Set. The two general research questions based on those objectives are as follows:

(1). What have been the barriers and difficulties encountered in implementing the SDTP?

(2). What are the characteristics of the SDTP which are associated with more successful implementation? What aspects of implementation are related to higher degrees of continuous successful transitions?

The SDTP ethnographic study also is guided by a number of objectives and questions that address the objectives. The questions limit the ethnographic study but also serve to guide the researcher in the choice of key informants. The questions are general enough to allow the researcher the flexibility required of an ethnographic study. The questions proposed for the SDTP study include:

(1). What are the primary services provided by the family service coordinators to families and schools?

(2). What is the perceived effect of these services by the family service coordinators to families and schools?

(3). What changes, if any, should be made in the services or the way they are provided to improve SDTP implementation?

#### Data Collection

Data collection methods remain flexible and respond to the developing theory. At present data are gathered in four ways: participant observations, formal and spontaneous interviews, school documents, and analysis of family service coordinator journals.

Participant observations are conducted by the researcher "shadowing" the family service coordinators through-out the coordinators' work days. Participant observations are conducted only in the demonstration schools and communities and not in the comparison schools and communities. The participant observations were conducted during the elementary school terms in 1993-1994 and 1994-1995 and will continue through the 1995-1996 and 1996-1997 school terms. The ethnographer spends on the average of two days per week in the field conducting both participant and non-participant observations. Participant observations are scheduled in advance and are rarely unannounced as recommended by the literature (Agar, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fetterman, 1989; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Unscheduled observations are limited to impromptu visits at the schools while accompanying the family service coordinators. Restricting observations to scheduled visits prevents the researcher from knowing a "typical day in the life of a family service coordinator." It would be impossible to

observe the family service coordinators any other way, since they typically visit from thirty to fifty families in their homes, as well as community agencies and schools. The sparsely populated communities increase the necessity of accompanying rather than trying to find family service coordinators. The entire area covered by the ethnographer is about 6000 square miles, and it is not unusual for the ethnographer to travel 250 miles in one day. The travel time in the car between home, agency, and institution visits allows the researcher to build rapport with the family service coordinators and provides the opportunity for spontaneous, private interviews.

The formal interviews were conducted in the spring of 1993, 1994, and 1995, through the use of interview protocols developed at the local site. Formal interviews will also be scheduled for the spring of 1996 and 1997. Spontaneous interviews occur during participant observations and serve to clarify questions the ethnographer has about the school, community, or family service coordinator behaviors or beliefs.

The analysis of family service coordinator journals began in September of 1993 and is an ongoing part of the local evaluation study. The journals provide personal reflections of the family service coordinators on the problems, solutions, and effective strategies utilized by family service coordinators. Since time in the field is limited, the journals provide the ethnographer with important in-sider information about the communities and their members.

All interviews, participant observations, journal and document analyses, and data analysis are conducted and documented by a single individual. A triangulation of data collection procedures helps cross-check the accuracy of data, enhances the scope, density, and clarity of constructs developed during the course of the fieldwork, and corrects biases that occur when there is only one observer (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors enrich the ethnographer's interpretations of the data and serve to check the biases of the ethnographer.

#### Data Sources

The communities are identified by the parameters designated by the federal study. The parameters defined six different demonstration school districts located in six different communities. Confidentiality of the research participants requires that communities and Project participants remain anonymous. Fictitious names have been given to both the key informants and the communities.

Interviews are systematically collected each spring on family service coordinators, and comparison and Project principals, teachers, and parents. The number of subjects has varied each year as the Project has moved through the school systems. Spontaneous interviews occurred as the need arose. In total, about 300 interviews have been conducted. Participant observations are conducted with all family service coordinators.

At the present time, there are nine family service coordinators. Journals of the family service coordinators are analyzed monthly.

### Data Analysis

The researcher utilized the computer program called HyperResearch for data management (Researchware, Inc., 1994). Sketchy notes were taken during convenient times in the field. Notes were never taken during home visits, because the observer feels it would be distracting and take away from the conversational quality of the visit. Some parents feel comfortable enough in the presence of the observer to discuss private information with the family service coordinators.

Note taking is also not done during school visits for a number of reasons. The observer is very often an active participant in the classroom food activities that are presented by the family service coordinators. Note taking and preparing food at the same time are impossible. Note taking was found to be distracting to the students when the observer did not participate in the food activities or during observations of other classroom activities. A goal of the observer is to be as unobtrusive in the classrooms as possible.

One of the times when note take is possible in the field is when the observer rides in the car with family service coordinators. There is a considerable amount of travel time due to the sparse population of the sites. The privacy of the car permits in-depth interviewing of the family service coordinators and note taking of previous observations. The presence of the

family service coordinators allows the observer the opportunity to check accuracy of observations.

The field notes are expanded to include descriptions, observations, and personal reflections when the observer returns home. The field notes are then converted into word processing documents and later into ASCII files for transfer into the HyperResearch computer program (Researchware, Inc., 1994).

Interviews, as mentioned earlier, are gathered in several ways: (1) structured interviews are entered during the interviews on interview protocols previously entered into a word processing program; (2) spontaneous interviews are hand written then entered into a word processing program; (3) some interviews of parents were gathered by tape recording and then entered into a word processing program. The taped interviews were also utilized for the ethnographer's dissertation. Interview documents are converted into ASCII files for transfer into the HyperResearch computer program, as are the field observations (Researchware, Inc., 1994).

Journal analyses contain considerably more steps. The family service coordinators hand-write their journals, the journals are transcribed into a word processing program, and lastly the documents are converted into ASCII files for transfer into the HyperResearch computer program, as are the field observations and interviews (Researchware, Inc., 1994).

The observer also collects the documents family service coordinators hand out to parents during home visits, information



the schools distribute to their families, and materials distributed by agencies. The document analysis is only cursory and is not entered into the HyperResearch computer program (Researchware, Inc., 1994).

The observer/ethnographer analyzes the data by following the HyperResearch program authors' suggestions of coding and categorizing and by following suggestions found in the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Researchware, Inc., 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Datum incidents are assigned a descriptive or directional code as the ethnographer discovers common themes. Datum incidents may be as small as one sentence or as large as several paragraphs. Strauss and Corbin have stated that a datum incident as small as a sentence can be important to the emerging theory (1990). HyperResearch has been utilized because it allows data reduction thorough coding procedures and theory development through the use of boolean statements (Researchware, Inc., 1994). Retrieval of coded statements is easily accomplished and facilitates theory building.

### Results

The longitudinal data is still being collected, therefore results must be considered tentative. Community descriptions in this paper will be much more general than one usually finds in ethnographic research because of the confidentiality levels of the larger federal research project (Agar, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fetterman, 1989; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979,1980). The six communities involved in the

SDTP ethnographic study have been given the fictitious names of Southtown, Easttown, Crosstown, Northtown, Midtown, and Westtown. The communities are located in four different counties. While agriculture is not the main source of employment for all the communities, agricultural land surrounds all six communities. The communities vary demographically.

Southtown is an unincorporated community. The ethnographer was never able to move past the outsider status and as a result has little ethnographic data on the community. The "outsider" status is literally represented by the ethnographer being asked to "remain outside in the car" while the family service coordinators called on the families. Attempts at interviewing the Southtown residents were thwarted through unreturned phone calls or through residents not being home. One parent who was interviewed met the ethnographer in the Southtown school. Little observation was possible during the limited time. Time was limited because of the constraints of the setting and the structure of the interview. If the ethnographer could spend more time in Southtown, it would be possible to develop closer ties to the informant. The informant was willing to discuss her school and family life in the limited time-frame of the interview. Since Southtown is only one of six communities, the time necessary to build quality trusting relationships with key people is difficult if not impossible.

The school and an office complex are the main public buildings located in Southtown. The Southtown school is both a

day and a boarding school. The school complex contains a Head Start pre-school program as well as k-12 classrooms. Much of the land surrounding Southtown had been sold to non-Indian settlers early in this century and is in agricultural production. Reservation and non-reservation land is interspersed which gives the reservation a "checker-board" quality. Two housing developments define the community. The Southtown community experiences many of the social problems experienced by a sovereign people dependent on another nation for policy.

The Southtown school does not appear to be the center of the Southtown community for a number of reasons:

1. Many of the people living in and around Southtown send their children by bus to Westtown.
2. Southtown is also a boarding school.
3. Residents from surrounding communities send their children by bus to school in Southtown.
4. Children who have trouble adjusting to non-Indian schools are often sent to Southtown.
5. Many of the community's population move frequently and, according to Figueira-McDonough (1992) and Goudy (1990), mobility hinders community attachment.
6. Employment takes many of the Southtown residents outside the community which, according to the literature, weakens community bonds (Eyles, 1985; Goudy, 1990; Greider et al, 1991; Hewitt, 1988; Wilkinson, 1986).
7. There is little local control over the Southtown school,

since the school is a federal school. There is little "blurring of boundaries" between the community and the school which place schools in the center of a community (Wilkinson, 1986; Wells et al., 1995).

8. There is little community involvement within the school, which Gleadow and Bandy have cited as important in viewing the school and community as an integrated system (1983).

Westtown is a larger community than Southtown but still small by most standards. Westtown is located in a rural non-adjacent county as defined earlier in the paper (Butler Flora et al., 1992). Westtown is surrounded by agricultural land, but it is diverse in employment opportunities. The Westtown elementary school is the only elementary school in the community and receives children by bus from a number of neighboring smaller communities. The Westtown school building houses a pre-school and grades k-12. Two housing developments are located outside the Westtown city limits.

Observations of Southtown families have been restricted in Westtown for many of the same reasons they were restricted in Southtown. The ethnographer has been able to spend considerable time in the Westtown school, however, and has been able to interview key informants. Westtown elementary school does not appear to be the center of the Westtown community for reasons similar to Southtown's reasons.

1. Residents of other communities bus their children to

Westtown, which weakens the school-community relationship (Eyles, 1985; Goudy, 1990; Greider et al, 1991; Hewitt, 1988; Wilkinson, 1986).

2. Many of the Westtown residents move frequently, and as stated earlier, mobility weakens ties to communities (Figueira-McDonough, 1992; Goudy, 1990).

3. Employment of some of the Westtown residents outside Westtown loosens social attachment to the community (Eyles, 1985; Goudy, 1990; Greider et al, 1991; Hewitt, 1988; Wilkinson, 1986).

4. Efforts by the family service coordinators to involve parents within the school have not been entirely successful. As stated earlier, community involvement within the school is an important prerequisite for viewing schools as the centers of communities (Gleadow & Bandy, 1983; Wilkinson, 1986; Wells et al., 1995).

Midtown contains a number of different elementary schools as well as a middle school, high school, and an institution of higher learning. Midtown has a history of administrative importance to the state and is one of the oldest communities in the state. Midtown is located in a less urbanized nonadjacent county as defined by Butler Flora et al. (1992). Agriculture employs the least amount of Midtown residents, but agricultural land surrounds the community. Midtown lies in a picturesque river valley. The school in the SDTP is given the fictitious name of Midtown elementary.

The ethnographer was able to observe three agency meetings, in some of the homes of the children who attend Midtown elementary, and in the Midtown elementary school. Parents are involved in the Midtown school as volunteers in the library and during Project sponsored food activities, through attendance at school events, and as members of P.T.A. Although participation of the parents is low, it is not because the parents do not want to participate. Most Midtown parents work outside the home, which prevents many parents from attending school activities held during the day. Parents do attend the social and athletic activities that are held in the evenings. The school actively encourages parents to become involved with the education of their children and is receptive of parents' views.

Even though the amount of parent involvement in the Midtown school has increased and family service coordinators have enhanced the home-school relationship, the Midtown school is not the center of the Midtown community. The reasons, similar in some respects to the reasons of the Easttown community, are listed below.

1. Midtown school is first of all only one of the schools in Midtown and could not be considered the center of the whole town.

2. Many of the Midtown residents move frequently, and as stated earlier, mobility weakens ties to communities (Figueira-McDonough, 1992; Goudy, 1990).

3. School curriculum planning is done at the district level and does not solely represent the views of either the teachers from the Midtown school or the parents. The consequence is loss of local control by the parents of the children who attend Midtown (Wilkinson, 1986; Wells et al., 1995).

The Easttown community is similar in some respects to the Midtown community. Like Midtown, Easttown is also located in a less urbanized non-adjacent county. The Easttown elementary school, only one of a number of elementary schools in Easttown, was built in 1993 and first utilized in January of 1994. Easttown also has a middle school, a high school, and two institutions of higher learning.

Easttown school is unique in that it contains both the comparison and the demonstration groups for the Federal research project. Two older schools were closed, and the combined student body was sent to the newly built Easttown school. Numerous activities were designed by the principal in an attempt to "build a community" of the Easttown parents. The Easttown principal and teachers send numerous notes, monthly calendars detailing school activities, and suggestions on how parents can assist their children with their education to the Easttown parents. The school correspondence as well as the family service coordinator help build the school-family relationship.

Easttown community agencies are involved in the Easttown school in a number of ways. The agencies donate a number of supplies and goods to the school as well as send representatives

for "Career Days." "Career Days" activities involve mini-courses on different careers. Each profession brings samples of the equipment it uses or sells, gives a short presentation to a small group of students, and gives pamphlets or other physical reminders to the children. The children rotate between three different career people and then return to their classroom to share their experiences with their class and write a thank-you to each person.

Parents are little involved in the classrooms at Easttown school and with school activities other than athletic or evening school programs. A journal entry of one of the family service coordinators provides examples of a family service coordinator's frustration with the lack of parent involvement and the reasons for the lack of involvement:

When asked, parents have told me they'd rather just stay home after along day at work; they have too many meetings to attend already and they feel this is one they can cut out "Why should we put so much effort into the Project when I don't even know if I'll be in it next year; I'm just too tired; I get enough 'training' from other sources. I don't need to attend another meeting to get even more." The school has found their attendance at PTO is really down since they've moved into the new school. It was stated at a PTO meeting, "People will attend as long as there is an issue they are riled about (like the building of the new schools), once the people feel comfortable with



things they won't attend." According to those guidelines it must mean that we're doing great...

The quote demonstrates why, in spite of the efforts of the family service coordinators to involve the parents in the school, parents remain uninvolved in the schools. The literature also offers an explanation for the lack of involvement. Figueira-McDonough (1991) cites the transfer of functions from primary groups (families) to that of secondary groups such as schools. Parents consider it the schools "job" to educate their children and not their concern. The above quote also shows the involvement of the parents in activities that are not school related. Since parents are little involved in the school, the ethnographer feels the Easttown school is not the center of the Easttown community. A summary of the reasons are as follows:

1. Easttown school is first of all only one of the schools in Easttown and could not be considered the center of the whole town.
2. Many of the Easttown residents move frequently, and as stated earlier, mobility weakens ties to communities (Figueira-McDonough, 1992; Goudy, 1990).
3. Efforts by the family service coordinators to involve parents within the school have not been entirely successful. As stated earlier, community involvement within the school is an important prerequisite for viewing schools as the centers of communities (Gleadow & Bandy, 1983; Wilkinson, 1986; Wells et al., 1995).

The last two communities are alike in many respects. Both communities are in rural nonadjacent counties, are similar in demographic variables, and have similar community norms. The schools in both communities provide the main sources of social activities and are the main outlets for volunteerism for the two communities. The communities value their schools highly and, as noted in the following excerpt from the ethnographer's field notes, the prominent placement of the Northtown school provides evidence.

...The smell of hogs was overwhelming as I drove closer to my destination. Hogs must play an important part in the commerce of Northtown. A huge farm implement dealer on the edge of town was evidence of the main occupation of the area. The implement dealer looked even larger than it probably was, because the town looked so small. Two huge grain elevators stood like sentinels on either side of the road that was the main street. At the other end of main street one could see the High School. I was not positive where the grade school was, but I knew that if I drove the whole length of town... I would find it. The grade school was located close to the high school... During the long drive home I reflected on the placement of the elevators and the schools. There seemed to be a connection between their placement on main street; a connection of the present and future of the community. The present seemed symbolically represented in the businesses and the day-to-day commerce of

main street. The future was symbolically represented by the school children and the hopes of the community for the children.

The following quotation is from a parent from Crosstown. While the quotation is quite lengthy, it is central to the ethnographer's developing theory. The parent defined the qualities of a good parent, provided insight into her views as the primary "educator" of her children, identified the position of the school as the center of the community, and gave her views on "outsiders." Fictitious names have been given to the parent, her husband, and the family service coordinator. The parent is given the fictitious name of Martha, her husband the name of Sampson, and the family service coordinator is given the fictitious name of Heloise. The first quote is from the ethnographer's field notes which were written after a visit to Martha's house with Heloise. The second quotation was part of Martha's tape recorded interview given at a later date.

...Martha talked about the new people moving into their community and was obviously not in favor of it. She verbally demonstrated what Heloise has told me about the community's distrust of outsiders. Martha said that there were two families from Iowa who wanted to buy farms there. Martha said, "What do the 'Iowegians' want here anyway? They won't fit in, and they won't like it. They won't stay long, because they just will not fit in. Every time new

people move it they cause problems. We have good kids here, but the new kids are always a problem..."

[My] goal in life is to get the kids raised to be a contributing member of society. Anyway I can be involved with my child makes my job easier, because I have more contact time. It bothers me when I have to send them out to school; for those hours someone else is in charge of them. I have to trust the school system and the teacher that they are coming home with the values that I am trying to foundation them with here. So when I am at school helping with these Transition Project things, it makes me feel better as a parent that they are not polluting them. Our school is excellent. I get a lot of reassurance as a parent about how warm it feels. When you go to Easttown... you know there are kids there who did not grow up there. Here in Crosstown there is a sense of continuity. Sampson went to school here, his father and grandfather went to school here too. They know what they got out of it and they expect quality and things to be stable. The school isn't quick to jump on the band wagon to add this or do that. It is built up through generations here. We don't have an influx of new people moving in that do not have ties to the community. People that do not have that sense of ownership that "this is our school." It is this pride of our community in our town.

The transients that move in, I should not call them transients, because if they like it here they stay. But they come in with different ideas. They come in... just this year we've had some... and are problems with discipline. They come from different schools that are a lot less personal... been a difficult adjustment because these people that are coming in are so different. I don't know if you would call it a community code of ethics. There is this line where the kids have to be accepted by the rest of the kids in the class. We dress reasonably here. We don't dress in gang dress. This one student is just sulky, doesn't like school, and doesn't get attention from the other kids. They don't like that because they like school. They know their parents expect them to be in school. It is difficult to talk to him because they don't have anything in common to talk about. He is not conforming to this community code.

The success of the SDTP in Northtown and Crosstown attests to the abilities of the family service coordinators. Both family service coordinators are "outsiders" but have been accepted into the schools and communities. The family service coordinators have successfully involved parents in the classrooms. Each week one of the teachers called different parents to ask them to help in the classroom. The Northtown principal stated in an interview in 1995:

...teachers invite the parents in and the school invites them to come anytime. The most successful thing was to invite the parents in for lunch. It was my idea. The parents came by the basketfuls. At the beginning of the year I always send a note home asking parents where they want to volunteer and teachers use that list throughout the year.

The parents are not only highly involved with the Crosstown and Northtown schools, but the type of involvement has changed with the help of the SDTP and the FSCs. Parents are utilized by the school as "teacher volunteers," which represents a change from the way they were utilized before the SDTP was implemented. An interview of a Crosstown parent demonstrates how she feels about her involvement in the classroom and how her relationship with the teachers has changed:

Gotten to know the teacher better too... You are in the room helping them and then they've asked me to help with other things. You develop a better relationship with them. Talk to them more outside the school too. It's probably more child related, but it is better than it has been before. Then [before Transition Project] you were just another parent... They never had a volunteer program here until two years ago. They didn't even like parents coming into the school. I have always volunteered, but think I volunteer more because I am in the classroom now. Before

that they just had you cut paper. Now you get to do better things...

Further evidence of the utilization of parents in the classroom was observed by the ethnographer. The following is an excerpt from the ethnographer's field notes that were written in 1995 after a participant observation in Northtown:

...Two parents had been asked by the teacher to each take a center, plus the teacher had one, and Heloise and I had one... The parents were instructed during recess what to do at the centers. Before we started, the teacher asked each child to introduce their "friend." The children of the mothers stood beside their moms, with their hands on their mother's shoulders, and one at a time introduced them... The children were beaming and obviously very proud to have their mothers present... The teacher was warm and friendly... She was obviously pleased to have guests... she made us feel special and comfortable... The centers were make-shift rickety old card tables. The mothers skillfully kept the centers from collapsing...

The high level of parental involvement in the schools, the frequent and positive interactions of the parents with school staff, and employment of community members within the schools are a few of the reasons why the ethnographer believes the schools in Crosstown and Northtown are the centers of their communities. Other reasons are as follows:

1. Parents and teachers have developed closer relationships because of SDTP activities.

2. Parents are involved in the schools.

3. Activities in the towns are scheduled around the schools' activities. Spring break is held at the Crosstown school during state basketball tournaments so the students can attend the tournaments.

4. Principals are expected to be active in school extra-curricular activities as well as community activities.

5. Few Crosstown and Northtown residents are employed outside their respective communities, thus they do not have identities outside their communities.

6. School facilities are used "after hours" for community activities.

#### Discussion

Data analysis is ongoing and conclusions are based on tentative results and interpretations by the ethnographer. Throughout the data the characteristics of sense of community, community norms, community size, heterogeneity of the community, level of parent involvement, and the school-community relationship reappear. Wells et al. (1995) noted similar community characteristics, but did not identify the sense of community. The identification of community characteristics is an important element in understanding school transformation.



### Community

Schools cannot be the center of the communities unless the community has a shared sense of community as a common bond; there must be a sense of local identity, solidarity, and trust (Fitchen, 1991; Greider et al., 1991; Wilkinson, 1986). The extent to which community is present or developed in a local population can influence the level of common goals and achievement by that population (Wilkinson, 1986). The presence of "community" in both Crosstown and Northtown have influenced the positive community attitudes and support of the Project in the schools. The reluctance of both communities to change, as was noted by Martha in the previous quotation, and the success of Project in spite of the reluctance further attests to the importance of the sense of community and the success of the family service coordinators. The family service coordinators in Northtown and Crosstown have been successful in enhancing the sense of community within the members.

The size of the communities involved in the study herein was related to the heterogeneity of the members. The rural nonadjacent communities were smaller and more homogeneous than the urban nonadjacent communities. The rural communities of Northtown and Crosstown had the highest sense of community. The communities that were small enough to have daily interactions among the members but large enough to be self-sufficient were found to have the greatest degree of transformation.

The rural community norms and values identified in the quote from Martha illustrated the effect of the community norms on conformity of the members. Community norms and values can have a conforming effect on community members and have an effect on the outcome of school transformations. According to Wells et al., community norms and values play an important part in the formation and implementation of educational policies (1995). The family service coordinators in Northtown and Crosstown were successful in identifying the community norms and values and designing the SDTP to fit within those norms and values.

#### Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in the educational experience of their children is more likely to ensure the success of the children (King, 1994). As local policy makers, parents should not be underestimated (1995). Smith (1984) cautioned that schools and communities are on a collision course because of decreased government funding. Parents that are involved in their schools can make better decisions regarding the future of the schools (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano, & Daly, 1995). Communities that place schools in their centers are more involved in the schools and more supportive of school reform (Wells et al., 1995). The family service coordinators have assisted the schools in improving the level of parent involvement in all the project schools. The communities with the highest levels of solidarity and trust, as identified by Greider et al., were the most

involved with their school and experienced successful school transformation (1991).

Because of the family service coordinators assistance in improving the school-community relationship, SDTP demonstration schools have begun to include parents more frequently in their daily schedules. Schools with the highest sense of community have included parents to the largest extent.

Family service coordinators have also been instrumental in developing adult literacy programs and assisting parents with completion of G.E.D. and baccalaureate programs. Parents that have become more involved with the schools have become less apprehensive about the school settings and more likely to want to receive further education themselves.

#### School-Community Relationship

The parents in the Northtown and Crosstown schools believe that a student's educational needs are best served by a close and cooperative relationship between the home and the school. The relationship between school and home exemplified in Northtown and Crosstown demonstrates the effect of the relationship on parent involvement. The family service coordinators in Northtown and Crosstown have been instrumental in strengthening the relationships.

The importance of schools to rural communities is also evidenced by the placement of the school buildings. The rural communities in the study have placed their schools in prominent visible positions. As state earlier, in one of the communities

the school buildings are placed at the very end of main street itself which makes the school the focal point of the community.

#### Significance of Study

An ethnographic study is a unique approach to educational evaluation but can be quite useful to describe changes in the classroom and the effect of those changes on the community (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). While the approach may be unique, ethnography's holistic view, as described by Lincoln & Guba, is compatible with Head Start's holistic approach to families (1985).

Learning how families interact with schools and how families perceive their schools is fundamentally important to policy makers as well as practitioners. Comprehensive changes in American education can not be successfully accomplished unless the relationship between the schools, communities, and families is fully understood. The present study will serve to enlighten policy makers by providing insights into the school-family-community relationship, and the documentation and description of changes within SDTP demonstration classrooms will serve practitioners.

The present study will also contribute to the literature on schools, families, and communities. The effects of the services provided by family service coordinators to families and schools will be of particular interest. The generalization of research results, often not the goal of ethnography (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992; Spradley, 1979, 1980), has

been enhanced in the present study through random selection of demonstration schools, utilization of comparison schools, utilization of multi-sites, and triangulation of research data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers should further investigate the relationships between parent involvement levels, community norms, and school transformations. The impact of the community on school transformations is an important and but often neglected element in educational research.

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