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By

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ABSTRACT

EARLY LITERACY ASSESSMENT AS A CATALYST IN THE EVOLUTION AND FUNCTION OF SHARED LEADERSHIP AND THE EXECUTION OF LOCAL REFORM

By

Lisa Margherita Sensale

The following dissertation employs Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to describe how one rural elementary school designed and implemented a school-wide early literacy assessment system and negotiated the tensions associated with the process. Data from this qualitative case study reveal the vital role participation structures play in the change process. Structures, such as agreed upon norms and division of labor, can mediate the development of collaborative tools that facilitate staff engagement in goal directed behaviors. The analysis illustrates how these structures helped teachers achieve consensus and consistency as they scheduled, learned about, and reflected upon early literacy assessments, engaged in professional development activities, documented and shared assessment results, celebrated their successes and ultimately managed the accountability and instruction tension.

To Westchester Elementary

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CHAPTER 1

Assessment, Accountability and School Reform in America: Setting the Stage for the Research Study

The school reform movement in America is typically described with respect to one of two accountability models propelling policy change: *external* reform models which dictate from the outside what schools must be held accountable for and *internal* reform models which encourage teachers to create and abide by their own accountability systems (Pearson, Vyas, Sensale, & Kim, 2001). Internal and external accountability models are generally perceived to be diametrically opposed and essentially incompatible, but this is a rather simplistic assumption to make about the context of educational reform. Both models have co-existed and evolved as basic tensions or dualities (Wenger, 1998) throughout the history of education, and schools have learned to successfully operate within both at the same time. The belief that internal and external accountability models exist as mutually exclusive entities is a direct result of policies that privilege one model, and essentially one type of evidence, over another at a particular point in time.

The accountability scale is currently tipped in favor of external models; schools and their constituents are told exactly what they will be held accountable for, what they have to gain if they meet or exceed the expectations, and what they are likely to lose if they fall short of the established goals. Although such accountability frameworks have been created with the best of intentions (e.g., the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 1965; No Child Left Behind

[NCLB], 2001) they have severely undermined the complexity of educational change by failing to acknowledge evaluation as a multidimensional, recursive process where value judgments are influenced not only by the tools and methods that are used, but by the audiences and purposes they are purported to serve. In the current climate of external accountability, most stakeholders are removed from "the best information needed to make the most ethical judgments and the most valid decisions possible-about individuals, groups, and whole classes of students" (Pearson et al., 200l, p. 180).

One reason that external models are favored over internal explanations for change pertains to the way the success is generally measured. The success of a reform effort has traditionally been calculated according to "scale" or the number of schools reached by the initiative. Consequently, scale is largely discussed with respect to the adoption of external reform models which are far-reaching. In spite of efforts by some researchers to reconceptualize scale in favor of a broader definition which focuses on the complex interactions and exchanges that support and sustain a desired trajectory (Coburn, 2003), the research reporting on reform efforts does not make these mediation practices visible to those not involved with the reform effort, and on some occasions, even to those who are even most directly involved. A second reason for why external models are preferred thus concerns the unsteady and conflicting record of research on reform from the inside. While enough is known about the elements of fruitful change (e.g., teacher prerogative, shared visions, collaboration, instructional strategies) far less is known about the mechanisms that mediate school improvement. For

example, little is known about how leaders use internal assessment systems to mediate school-wide development and instructional change, and what that looks like. Halverson (Halverson, 2003; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett & Thomas, 2005, 2007) has begun to build a picture of change from the inside with his examination of how local school leaders use assessment data and other artifacts to drive instruction and create a professional learning community. However, this picture is still extremely limited. Little is known about the change process from the inside, for example, when it comes to change in literacy practices and school-wide norms.

In Florio-Ruane's (2002) call to shed more light on the inner-workings of education systems, she reminds us that, "as applied researchers in the human sciences, we work to illuminate teaching and teacher education in an ongoing way, and by means of sustained, expansive, responsive, critical, and multivoiced scholarship" (p. 214). Accordingly, I argue that an expansive[2] framework that allows researchers to take a closer look at both the structures and processes of change could contribute much to the school improvement literature.

The study described herein captures the evolution of a teacher initiated, literacy change effort in one rural elementary school and is framed by the following primary and supporting questions:

[2] Grounded in principles of Cultural Historical Activity Theory, Engeström has put forth a model of "expansive learning" to describe how learning communities evolve and function. The term "expansive" signifies a process that is dynamic, iterative, social, activity oriented, and mediated through conceptual and physical artifacts. Moreover, it represents a framework that attempts to make the change process visible.

- How can the development of a school-wide, early literacy assessment system serve as a catalyst in the evolution and function of shared leadership and the execution of local reform?
    - How does the tension between assessment for accountability and instructional purposes manifest itself during the development of a school-wide early literacy assessment system?
    - How does shared leadership evolve, function and ultimately mediate the accountability and instruction tension posed by the creation of a school-wide, early literacy assessment system?

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is used to explore how teacher commitment to an assessment guided reform effort facilitated the development of shared understandings while simultaneously building an exceptional community of learners and leaders. In doing so, object-oriented activity systems are taken as the unit of analysis in order to efficiently capture the dynamics of teachers' work lives (i.e., relationships among individuals, resources, the rules and norms that affect their teaching and involvement in change activities and how division of labor is distributed among community members) and explain and understand the outcomes of a variety of professional development activities. In short, this endeavor is an "empirical account of a community of practice" (Barab, Barnett & Squire, 2002), or an "existence proof" (Borko, 2004) for how school improvement can be supported when goals, expectations, and leadership are shared. This study supplements the reform literature by drawing attention to the systemic

nature of the change process and providing researchers with the tools to unpack the motive, goals, and instrumental conditions associated with developing shared understandings of literacy and assessment.

Structure of the Dissertation

The chapters that follow describe school reform in greater detail, with particular emphases on leadership and professional community in the realm of literacy and assessment, and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as an analytical tool. Chapter Two, "Illuminating Consequential Activity in the School Change Process" paints a more pointed picture of the four bodies of literature guiding this research and as such, represents the conceptual framework for this study. Specifically, I present a historical account of educational reform efforts within the context of accountability, describe the leadership literature as it applies to school change, and explore the scholarship on professional learning communities. In the final section of the chapter I specify the components of CHAT and explain how the theory can bridge the gap that currently exists among the aforementioned bodies of literature and ultimately explicate assessment driven change within a learning community. Chapter Three, "Methodology" describes the nature of the research, including what research methods were employed and how data were collected and analyzed. Chapter Four, "Object-oriented Activity Systems and Tensions in the Process of School Change" describes the findings as they relate to the conceptual framework. An activity systems analysis, to elaborate, is applied to the data to capture the broad patterns of activity that unfolded in one elementary school's pursuit to build a

school-wide literacy assessment system and effect student learning. Moreover, participation structures that aided in the change process are identified and explained, as are the tensions that the teachers had to negotiate in the assessment reform process. Chapter 5, "Conclusion and Discussion" sheds light on the findings by relating them to previous research and discusses implications for future policy, practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

Illuminating Consequential Activity in the School Change Process

This research study falls at the intersection of four bodies of literature which collectively form the framework through which I describe and analyze a unique school change initiative. The literature review that follows is divided into five sections. The first three sections provide a context for understanding assessment and accountability as they relate to school reform. The first section documents the direction educational reform has taken over the last 40 years with a particular emphasis on outcomes-based and learning-centered accountability models. The second component addresses the shifting perspectives of leadership in the school change process, which is closely connected to the third section on professional learning communities.

Each of these bodies of literature has much to offer a reader about assessment use, accountability, leadership, and communities of practice. They also leave unexamined key questions that, I argue, can be addressed by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which I explain in the fourth section of the chapter. The success of assessment-based reform initiatives hinges on the participation of leaders and other individuals within the community. An established link between leadership, teacher learning communities and assessment, however, is missing from the current scholarly literature. Cultural Historical Activity Theory has the potential to reveal how community interactions around assessment can help schools meet their goals. The fifth and final section

of this literature review presents a brief synopsis of the literature and communicates the significance of the study.

Riding the Change Waves

The clarion call to improve public education in America has had a very long history and is consistently marked by mounting public concern. Whether the cause for alarm is underscored in the media or national policy documents, the motivation behind such channels of communication is the same, to hold some individual or group accountable or responsible (Johnston, 1998) for our schools, be they failing or thriving. The grounds for concern are typically situated in sub-par performance outcomes on standardized tests of achievement. Assessment as an accountability tool dates back to as early as the 1840s, when Horace Mann instituted a standardized written examination to monitor school efficacy in the state of Massachusetts (Pearson et al., 2001), and has become ever more salient following the launch of Sputnik. The Soviet Union's presence in outer space invoked a great fear that America was at risk. The education system was attacked for failing to teach the subjects of math and science adequately, and the curriculum was subsequently reformed (Lieberman, 1998).

If Sputnik pointed to the educational system as a whole as wanting, the Civil Rights Movement brought to the forefront the inequities that existed among racially segregated schools and led to the federal government's passage of Title I in the mid 1960s, to ensure that at-risk and disadvantaged children were receiving an equitable education (Asp, 2000; Fullan, 1998; Lieberman, 1998; McGill-Franzen, 2000). Moreover, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

of 1965, of which Title I is the cornerstone, required compensatory education programs to periodically remit scores on "objective" tests for evaluation purposes (Asp, 2000). Around this time the Coleman Report was published, revealing astonishing news; programs that had been developed to alleviate educational inequities were not producing better results. The report pointed its lens away from the school toward communities and families as the primary source of school inequities. Family socioeconomic status (SES), not school curriculum, was the most significant determiner of school success (Lieberman, 1998). The document challenged researchers to begin an extensive foray into school life to identify and document factors within schools impacting student success. Such research endeavors unmasked an "implementation problem", where teachers were faulted for not administering the policies and programs necessitated by the federal government (Lieberman, 1998).

During the period spanning 1973 through 1978 the RAND Corporation conducted a national study of four federally funded programs designed to support student learning and school change and discovered that policy makers attached quantity to school success; the more money invested in education, or the greater the number of programs adopted by schools, the greater the likelihood of positive school change (McLaughlin, 1998). Accordingly, the RAND Change Agent study reported that programs were not always implemented successfully, and even if they were, they did not guarantee long-term success after funds were withdrawn (McLaughlin, 1998). The problems were plentiful during this decade of implementation, as Fullan (1998) has documented; schools were adopting

innovations without questioning their validity; programs were developed with little or no regard for local school context, essentially preventing teachers from contributing to the reform and reinforcing the view that innovations would work in any setting. Teachers were perceived to be passive providers of miracle educational programs rather than qualified professionals, thus supplanting the notion that the process of school change is part of a complex social system reliant on roles, relationships, values and adequate resources. Educational policies and literature at the time did not examine *what* characteristics made schools successful, and furthermore, *how* to generate successful school change practices (Fullan, 1982).

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) acknowledged that our nation was in jeopardy, once again, in their report entitled "A Nation at Risk"; students were being outperformed by their international counterparts on tests of academic achievement; millions of Americans were found to be functionally illiterate; performance on high school standardized tests and college aptitude tests had declined drastically, while the number of remedial mathematics classes increased by 72 percent (NCEE, 1983). Excellence in education was largely assumed to be a function of, and consequently could be driven by, high expectations, "the level of knowledge, abilities, and skills school and college graduates should possess," and "the time, hard work, behavior, self-discipline, and motivation that are essential for high student achievement" (NCEE, 1983). The report subsequently advocated for greater accountability in the form of more testing, more homework, more time in schools, more classes

and stricter high school and college admissions and graduation requirements, in addition to higher standards for teacher preparation programs. The Effective Schools Movement, or Meaning Decade (Fullan, 1998) was born.

Effective school change, in this new movement, would be a function of institutional support from the top-down, and greater teacher input from the bottom-up. Professional leadership, shared visions and goals, high expectations, monitoring systems and home-school partnerships were all factors consistently identified by researchers as having a positive impact on school success (Mortimore, 1998; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988), but the role that teachers played in this process was not adequately described. In 1986, "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century" (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1986) highlighted the need to make teachers the center of school reform, trusting their knowledge and expertise for preparing students, rather than some external force (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). A period of restructuring soon followed; it addressed issues ranging from how time was to be used in the classroom to who would be participating in the decision-making (Blase, 1998; Miller, 1998; Schlecty, 1990). Site Based Management (SBM) had been presented as a framework for decentralizing schools, but as researchers like Leithwood and Menzies (1998) have found, school administrators who were put in charge of school budgets, personnel, and programs essentially controlled the movement. Moreover, as DuFour and Eaker (1998) contest, restructuring often focused on non-academic issues such as student discipline, parental involvement, and staff morale.

Schools did change, but the broader purposes of schooling (i.e., teaching and learning) were lost in the process.

In 1989, President Bush, the elder, along with the National Governors' Association established a set of educational goals for the year 2000, later adopted as the Goals 2000 Act (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2000) under the Clinton administration, mandating every state to set standards for educational achievement, including what teachers were supposed to teach and what students were supposed to learn in various subject areas (Pearson et al., 2001). In accordance with this law, the government also had to provide schools, districts, and states with the resources necessary for meeting challenging standards--a feat executed and managed with varying degrees of success (Superfine, 2005). Holding teachers to high standards, however, appears to have been a much easier task. The report, "What matters most: Teaching and America's future" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996), for instance, not only outlined more rigorous standards for teachers including using National Board standards as a benchmark for proficiency, but also attached rewards and consequences to performance (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). It is vital, indeed, to hold teachers to high standards, but in Mulford's (1998) words, "Teacher empowerment without accountability can lead to anarchy, whereas accountability without empowerment can lead to subservience" (p. 633). In spite of such concerns, federal legislation continues to emphasize accountability over opportunity, or capacity-building (Goertz & Duffy, 2003); nowhere is the accountability privilege more vivid than in the existing No

Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (USDE, 2001) of the second Bush administration.

Outcomes-based Reform

Accountability has been an integral part of the reform rhetoric of this era. Both presidential candidates in the 2000 election used the policy initiative as leverage for their platforms, and when George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2002 (more commonly known as the NCLB Act of 2001) he positioned testing as "the cornerstone of reform" (Bush, 2000). In doing so, he made it compulsory for schools to show measured gains on large scale, standardized assessments in order to receive federal funding.

Standardized assessments are generally favored by policy makers because they are (a) relatively inexpensive, (b) easy to implement and score, (c) easy to change, and (d) able to provide visible results to stakeholders (Linn, 1998). Their value as accountability and reform tools, however, is largely contested (see Amerin & Berliner, 2002; Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002; Pearson et al., 2001). First, the assessments provide incomplete information. These tests often lack instructional and curricular validity because they assess curriculum in a fractured manner; tests often focus on a select domain of what actually gets taught in schools (Haladyna, Nolen & Haas, 1991; Paris, Lawton, Turner & Roth, 1991; Sacks, 1999; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1999). These same tests, however, serve as benchmarks for what students are to know and be able to do at particular grade levels and thus signal what is valued (Paris et al., 1991) and

what is ultimately taught (Herman & Golan, 1991; Johnston, 1998; Smith, 1991; Shepard 1990, as cited in Sacks, 1999). Second, the summative nature of the tests often prevents teachers from receiving results in a timely manner, making such assessments inadequate for making informed instructional and placement decisions. Third, schools operating under the same policies and outcomes-based accountability measures respond and perform in different ways (Elmore, 2001), which is a significant indication that external mandates alone are not enough to foster school improvement. Lastly, although external accountability models promise more flexibility and local control for states and school districts, administrators and teachers are still essentially required to implement prescribed programs and meet certain requirements (e.g., Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2001). Consequently, stakeholders react to meeting minimal expectations instead of reflecting on current practices and generating new knowledge.

Learning-centered Reform

Research and policy documents, at one time or another, have held curriculum, students, families, programs and standards accountable for student learning. Teachers, however, are consistently identified "as the sine qua non of every school change effort" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Although a significant portion of educational reform initiatives have viewed teachers as knowledgeable to the extent they are able to transmit information to others, there is an overall expectation that teachers will be agents of change within and outside of the classroom. In order to be such advocates, teachers need to question and examine their own assumptions and practices as well as the policies advocated

by their schools and communities. The goal of such inquiry is to ultimately "[alter] practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental change in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 279). Teacher learning within school based change efforts under this framework

> occurs as a consequence of collegial efforts among teachers to identify critical school issues and to invent ecologically valid ways of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting site documents as well as interviews with colleagues, staff, parents, and students. Learning to use data for collaborative decision-making is thus both a cause and a consequence of changing school culture. (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 286)

Likewise, as Darling-Hammond, Ancess, and Falk (1995) state,

> Rather than driving instruction, [assessment] evolves from teachers' own development as learners and professionals, and from their ideas about learning and curriculum, which create the basis for assessment and are then informed in turn by occasions for examining student work. (p. 18)

Policy initiatives regarding assessment and school change, however, often ignore the research highlighting the importance of school context, including teachers' beliefs, their perception of their working environment, the support they receive from peers and administrators, their sense of autonomy, and the collegial and consequential conversations that ensue around teaching and learning. In spite of fractured policies, there are schools that have taken the initiative to develop their own methods of assessing student progress, and that have credited the process for their improved teaching and learning as well as their students'.

Literacy Learning Communities Working on Assessment

There are several examples of reform efforts in which assessment has led the way by providing a positive image of student learning and a central role for

teachers in the assessment development, scoring, and interpretation processes. Many of the endeavors have been district wide (e.g., Hoffman, Roser & Worthy, 1998; Worthy, Hoffman, Roser, Rutherford, McKool & Strecker, 1998) and supported by consultants who shared relevant research, modeled instructional practices, and facilitated meetings or "study groups" like the Primary Language Record (PLR) (Falk, 1998), the South Brunswick Early Literacy Portfolio (Salinger, 1998) and the Bellvue Literacy Assessment Project (Valencia & Place, 1994). Others essentially focused on teacher understanding and use of a particular assessment, such as the Work Sampling System (WSS) (Dorfman, 1997; Meisels, Jablon, Marsden, Dichtelmiller, & Dorfman, 1993; Nicholson, 2000). Teachers generally labeled their experiences within the assessment projects as positive, noting how the tools provided evidence of student performance and a means for communicating progress with others. In addition, they often commented on the usefulness of collaborative meetings around the assessments. Conversations regarding the effects of the Bellvue Literacy Portfolio on instruction and student learning outcomes, for instance, quickly led to discussions about curriculum. Intellectual discussions arose around the scoring of portfolios, where teachers pondered issues such as the value of the project and modifications for various grade levels and ESL students. Teachers, as Valencia and Place (1994) have conveyed,

> had a deep understanding of why [they] were engaging in each activity, a commitment to trying it out, and the understanding that [they] could modify the tools, procedures, and rubrics as [they] went along. (pp.147-148)

Although some participants expressed their frustration with their lack of ownership in the process (e.g., Hoffman et al., 1998; Worthy et al., 1998) and the amount of time that was required (e.g., Dorfman, 1997), the projects offered teachers an environment to develop shared understandings of the reading and writing process.

Reflections on Learning

Analysis of the above assessment-driven studies of reform highlights the importance of collaboration and reflective practice in reform agendas. Moreover, it shows that when teachers are afforded the opportunity to take ownership of the issues and concerns that surface in schools they embrace them with all of their complexities (Roehler, 1992) and facilitate change. The change process not only calls for actions to be taken, but also for

> ongoing knowledge building where the aim is to achieve greater individual and collective understanding of the grounds on which the decisions should be taken and for evaluating evidence collected of the consequences of those decisions. (Wells, 2002, p. 209)

The assessment driven reform efforts described here were charged with fostering greater teacher understanding of assessment and student learning and were supported by external consultants. Many of the assessments were also created and administered by volunteer teachers or external sources, engendering a narrow view of ownership and active participation. Furthermore, the focal point of this group of studies is static; the assessment tool itself and how it is used to document student learning and ultimately inform instruction do not change. Although collaboration appeared to be integral to each of these projects it was often treated as a side effect or consequence rather than a significant resource

or process. Absent from these studies is a focus on cultural norms and values and the function of structural supports.

Fullan (1996) contends that we should not be asking "how we can make the system cohere, but rather how we can help educators achieve greater coherence in their own minds and efforts" (p. 420). This, he adds, can be accomplished by addressing the process through which beliefs, values and norms are formed and by highlighting new conceptions of professionalism in the field of teaching, in addition to tending to structural concerns, such as leadership. Culture and complexity are thus brought to the forefront of school improvement and with them, an understanding that school teaching varies from context to context. Researchers have contended that a commitment to reculturing involves a commitment to developing and honoring professional learning communities within schools (e.g., McLaughlin, 1998; Miller, 1998). This means moving beyond traditional norms of individualism and viewing and allowing educators to act as researchers and intellectuals as well as leaders (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Miller, 1998; Richardson, 1990).

Leadership in the School Change Process

A Historical Perspective on Leadership

Leadership has been defined and redefined across eras and across contexts, but for most of the twentieth century it was presumed to be about power and control (Rost, 1991). The start of the twentieth century was fraught with criticisms about the quality of American education and reform was heavily influenced by business concepts such as the need to be more efficient, and

corporate models that developed school objectives by assessing program costs against program efficacy (Williams-Boyd, 2002). The superintendent and the school board made their marks as early as the 1800s, and the former conducted his business according to standardized algorithms advocated by Horace Mann and his associates (Williams-Boyd, 2002). Superintendents perceived teachers to be expendable since they were simply workers hired to carry out specific mandates, which of course, was contrary to teachers' own beliefs.

The position of principal came about towards the end of the nineteenth century and was first seen as an instructional leader, or "principal teacher," and in light of a growing population, an authoritative figure in charge of formal decisions such as hiring and firing (Williams-Boyd, 2002). In the 1950s when inequities were becoming ever more apparent, the principal was in charge of holding teachers accountable by following the demands of administrators and ultimately producing results. The principal's job was held to be a set of skills or "peripheries" that could easily be assessed (Rost, 1991), like the ability to communicate and effectively manage a staff, a position rivaled by the belief that the role was dynamic and supported by other staff members (Williams-Boyd, 2002). The essence or "content of leadership" in this latter view not only includes what leaders need to know about their profession and their school in order to be successful, but also knowing how individuals behave and react, knowing how to introduce change, and being able to envision a larger purpose (Rost, 1991). It was not until the 1980s that shared leadership made its impression, but the guise

of Site Based Management or Site Based Decision-Making did not offer teachers much in the way of leadership (Taylor & Bogotch, 1994).

"The new social realities of teaching" (Lieberman & Miller, 2000) view every teacher as a potential leader (Fullan, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). According to Darling-Hammond (1996)

> If we have learned anything about change it is that all of the actors in the system need to develop first hand deep understanding of new ideas and of the complex kinds of practice needed to carry them off. This is beginning to happen most productively where people are creating hyphenated roles for themselves as researchers, teachers, and policymakers engaged in *doing* policy, school reform, and teaching as well as looking at it. (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 665)

Successful change thus involves reculturing the profession: moving away from individualistic approaches to teaching towards collegiality and whole school success, viewing teachers as intellectuals instead of technicians, and taking responsibility for performance by holding high standards for all students as well as teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2000).

Building Leadership Capacity

> Leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning. This definition supports a transformational perspective on leadership, defining it as the 'ability to empower others' with the purpose of bringing about a 'major change in form, nature, and function of some phenomenon.' (Bennis & Nauss, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994) (as cited in Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001 p. 24)

Leadership capacity, the ability to participate skillfully in the leadership process (Lambert, 2002) and instructional capacity, "the capacity to build worthwhile and substantial learning" (Cohen & Ball, 1999), go hand in hand in the process of education reform. Both are multidimensional, requiring interactions

among content, context and materials, and both are positioned as ongoing and dynamic processes. Transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbach & Ryan, 1997) has been used to describe leadership that moves beyond formal and unitary concepts, which focus on a leader's traits (e.g., flexibility, self-confidence) (Yukl, 1981) or behaviors, (e.g., manager, decision-maker) (Hallinger & Hausman, 1993), to include reciprocity and collaboration among all key players for the common good of the school. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1997) had initially categorized transformational leadership along eight dimensions: vision building; goal setting; intellectual stimulation; individual support; modeling best practices and organizational values; showing evidence of high performance expectations; creating a dynamic school culture; and developing structures for shared decision-making. Having acknowledged that the literature on transformational leadership failed to also include managerial or transactional dimensions, they included four more: a focus on community; staffing; instructional support; and school monitoring activities (Leithwood et al., 1997). Ultimately, what this and other related research (e.g., Lambert, 1998, 2002; Spillane, et al., 2001, 2004) has pointed to, is the distributed nature of leadership-across content, context and activities.

Distributed Leadership

To view leadership through a shared or distributed lens is to position teacher activity, mental as well as physical, as "*stretched over* the school's social and situational contexts" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). A distributed perspective

focuses on leadership *tasks* such as building a school-wide vision and how those tasks are interpreted, dissected, and enacted by leaders. Furthermore, a distributive perspective examines how tasks are *socially* distributed across multiple people and how they are a function of *situational* constraints and affordances posed by the material (e.g., assessment tools) and cultural (e.g., participation norms) artifacts (i.e., tools) through which people interact (Halverson, 2003; Spillane et al., 2001). A distributed perspective not only describes the leadership process, but also highlights the complexities involved in creating a professional learning community (Halverson, 2003, 2006; Halverson et al., 2005, 2007).

The research linking distributed leadership, assessment, and professional learning communities to school reform is fairly thin. Halverson and colleagues, thus far, are the only individuals to explore this connection (Halverson, 2003, 2006; Halverson et al., 2005, 2007). More specifically, Halverson (2003) has investigated how school leaders designed and implemented artifacts that ultimately led to the creation of a community or system of practice. Over a two year period, for example, he examined how one elementary school executed an assessment program, monthly meetings about practice, and a school improvement program and uncovered how conversations around student data continually shaped and strengthened local capacity by nurturing multi-level interactions and legitimizing community practices.

Professional Learning Communities

> A community is a multigenerational group of people, at work or play, whose identities are defined in large part by the roles they play and relationships they share in that group activity. The community derives its cohesion from the joint construction of a culture of daily life built upon behavioral norms, routines, and rules, and from a sense of shared purpose. Community activity also precipitates shared artifacts and ideas that support group activity and individual sense-making. A community is multigenerational, that is, it exists over time and individuals. In short, a community differs from a collection of people by the strength and depth of the culture it is able to establish. (Riel & Poplin, 2001, p. 2)

> To change the system, we must alter the rules, roles and relationships that define it. To make any lasting change in the structure, corresponding changes must occur in the shared beliefs, commitments, meanings, values, lore, and traditions in which structure is embedded and from which it gains its permanence and stability. (Schlecty, 1997, p. 135)

Learning organization, community of learners, professional community, learning community, communities of inquiry, communities of practice, knowledge [building] communities, educative communities, and learning circles are all phrases used to describe organizations, companies or schools, working together towards a common goal. Despite having been labeled as a "management fad" within the business arena during the early 1990s (Senge, 1990) the paradigm has burgeoned within the field of education with the same fervor. A successful learning community is one that assumes an inquiry stance towards change (Lieberman, 1995; McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001). Central to this idea is the belief

> that the work of inquiry communities is both social and political-that is, it involves making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated and used; and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001)

Professional communities are able to function when both structural conditions such as teaming and time for planning, and cultural conditions like shared values

and leadership, are cultivated (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Gallagher, Goudvis & Pearson, 1988; Lieberman, 1995; Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996). Such a stance translates into effective professional development when teachers are presented with opportunities and supports for capacity building, including occasions for ongoing collaboration, shared decision-making, practice, risk taking, and inquiry and evaluation in the realm of theory and practice (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knight, 2002; Lieberman, 1995; McCotter, 2001; Seashore Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996). The aforementioned environment, more importantly, validates teacher positions, makes knowledge and experience visible and exposes tensions that need to be addressed (Olson, 2001) while simultaneously highlighting the critical nature of discourse in the change process.

Developing a Professional Learning Community

Most research conducted on learning communities has been influenced by work conducted within the field of anthropology (e.g., Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The study of learning communities as appropriated by educational scholars, however, has focused on the *creation* of communities, while anthropologists have largely focused on communities of practice that have been in existence for thousands of years (Palinscar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). Nevertheless, the literature on communities of practice, in and out of schools, converges around three major themes: a common *domain* of interest, *community*, and *practice* (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Wenger and colleagues (2002) have argued that despite the pervasive nature of communities of practice, they may need to be cultivated nonetheless. They write,

> A plant does its own growing, whether its seed was carefully planted or blown into place by the wind...However, you can do much to encourage healthy plants: till the soil...supply water...secure the right amount of sun exposure...Similarly, some communities of practice grow spontaneously while others may require careful seeding. (p. 13)

Although they exist in many forms and styles, communities of practice (CofP) are supported by the same basic structure. First, a CofP shares a *domain* of knowledge that forges a sense of common identity and holds members accountable. The domain could be as specific as knowing how to identify a child in need of special services or as broad as school reform, but the issues at hand are not pre-determined. Rather, they evolve with the community and are dependent upon its needs at a given moment in time. A domain that is well developed ultimately serves as a declaration of what knowledge the community has agreed to take responsibility for (Wenger et al., 2002).

Community, the second integral component of a CofP, is the "social fabric of learning" (Wenger et al., 2002) through which relationships are built (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is here where individuals share ideas and ask questions as they work toward building a common vision and establishing trust. A community is contingent upon regular interactions around a shared domain of interest. All third grade teachers in an elementary school building would not be considered a community of practice unless they met regularly, in formal or informal settings, to

build shared understandings of practice around their domain (Wenger et al., 2002).

The third component of a CofP is *practice*. Wenger and associates (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002) define *practice* as the shared language, stories, theories, documents, tools and norms that a community develops over time. This knowledge repertoire can include elements that are explicit and concrete such as "how to" manuals, as well as elements that are tacit and more obscure, such as the ability to determine if a student is listening without making eye contact.

Education reform scholars who have appropriated the CofP framework to define and shape their own initiatives have done so not only to empower teachers by building expertise and commitment to the profession, but also with the intent to improve student learning outcomes (Marks & Seashore Louis, 1997). Conversation-based inquiry groups, for example, help cultivate teachers' sense-making by "[mirroring] current developments in the psychology of learning and [paralleling] what teachers are now learning is best for educating youngsters in their classrooms" (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001, p.11). Context, "that which weaves together" (Cole, 1996, p. 135) both the structural and cultural aspects of schooling, without a doubt, is a vital component of educational reform.

Literacy Learning Communities at Work

Many change models that support teacher inquiry and focus on the broader purposes of schooling (e.g., Palinscar et al.,1998; Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myhre, & Woolworth, 1998) have had conversation and community

dialogue at their core, and external consultants supporting the endeavor. They have varied with respect to scale, as some were conducted at national (see Lieberman & Wood, 2001), district (see Hamilton & Richardson, 1995; McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001; Richardson & Hamilton, 1994), and school levels (see Stokes, 2001) and need, with some inquiry projects focused on individual teacher interests (see Tierney, Tucker, Gallagher, Crismore, & Pearson, 1988) and others on school or district needs. And they have also varied with respect to participation requirements--some programs relied solely on volunteer teachers, leaving a community of inquiry to develop among a select few.

Countless testimonies have been documented regarding successful communities of inquiry within the area of literacy, but The National Writing Project (NWP) (Lieberman & Wood, 2001) may very well be the largest and most enduring professional development agenda known to education. The NWP, which remains active, encourages teachers to articulate and manage their own dilemmas with the support and collaboration of a network of peers and other educational specialists. It was built with the understanding that teaching is more than just a series of heuristics, involving cycles of learning and evaluation, and embedded in lectures, workshops and experience. Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) have identified a number of characteristics underlying the structure of the project including: the setting of broad and challenging agendas; opportunities for indirect learning and collaboration; acceptance of multiple perspectives; and facilitative rather than directive leadership roles. The project helped teachers

become more aware of their roles as both consumers and producers of knowledge.

At the district level, both The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) (McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001) and the Practical Argument Staff Development program (Hamilton & Richardson, 1995; Richardson & Hamilton, 1994) positioned teachers as active learners and professionals as they used evidence in their questioning and remediation of current practices. Likewise, Stokes (2001) described inquiry based learning at a school that began with an entire staff committed to creating performance benchmarks and administering, scoring, and evaluating assessments, but ended with individual teachers focusing on their own areas of interest.

These projects are noteworthy because they possess a number of characteristics that define effective professional development (see Putnam & Borko, 2000), including situating teacher education within classroom practice and student data and empowering teachers by letting them know that their knowledge is "legitimate and worthy of respect as knowledge to be shared, improved, built upon, and used in other contexts" (Lieberman & Wood, 2001, p.179). Missing from this corpus of studies is a more detailed picture of how communities function with respect to cultural factors, of which inquiry is just a part, *and* structural conditions, like leadership, teamwork, and tool use, which span both elements. Accordingly, it is imperative to ask how communities hold themselves accountable (Richardson & Placier, 2001) in an era of top-down reform and high

stakes testing: How do they formulate, debate, and evaluate their problems and consequential actions?

Reflections on Learning

The literature described up to this point brings to the forefront a variety of different components relating to school capacity. Internal and external accountability models for instance, are generally perceived to be catalysts for reform. Likewise, leadership and learning communities are viewed as tools in the change process. Capacity, however, is a function of both structural and cultural elements and how they ultimately interact with artifacts. As such, assessments, leadership, and communities of learners should not be viewed as stand-alone solutions for improving teaching and learning in schools. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has the potential to reveal the intentional nature of change and how assessment, leadership and community work together.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is a framework that embodies the collective and mediated nature of human activity (Engeström, 2001). It expands upon Lev Vygotsky's concept of mediated action (Cole, 1996; Cole & Engeström, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) by bringing the complex interactions an individual can have with his or her community to the forefront, and addressing how activity systems actualize and reproduce (Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Although the activity system is taken as the primary unit of analysis, it is supported by a three-tier structure of activity. The collective activity of a community driven by an object-related motive sits at the

uppermost level. The activity, however, can only be realized through a set of discrete goal-driven actions undertaken by an individual or group at the middle level. Once goals are attained and behaviors are institutionalized, operations emerge at the bottom level (Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Engeström (2001) elaborates,

> Goal-directed individual and group actions, as well as automatic operations, are relatively independent but subordinate units of analysis, eventually understandable only when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems. Activity systems realize and reproduce themselves by generating actions and operations. (p. 136)

Barab, Evans and Baek (2003) illustrate the hierarchical distribution of components as they pertain to preservice teachers in the table below:

Table 1

The Hierarchical Distribution of Components in an Activity System (adapted from Barab et al., 2003)

Hierarchy of Activity Components	Activity System: Preservice Teachers (adapted from Blanton, Simmons & Warner, 2001)
Activity [cultural] *Motive(s)*	Preservice training *Professional qualification*
Action(s) [conscious] *Need(s)*	Participating in lectures, writing field notes *Professional teaching position; course credit; intellectual development*
Operation(s) [automatic] *Conditions*	Gripping writing and manipulating instruments; expressing preconceived beliefs and attitudes *Classroom and online environment and tools; learning materials and resources; faculties' teaching styles*

Cultural Historical Activity Theory provides the researcher with a useful heuristic, not a prescription, for examining data (Barab et al., 2003). An activity systems analysis would likely describe an activity system with respect to its motive and various components, and explicate the mediating components of the system as well as the actions undertaken by an individual or community.

The principles of CHAT highlight the need to address change from the perspective of the participating teachers as well as the evolving system. Engeström (1987) elaborates,

> The analyst constructs the activity system as if from looking at it from above. At the same time, the analyst must select a subject, a member (or better yet, multiple different members) of the local activity, through whose eyes and interpretations the activity is constructed. This dialectic between the systemic and subjective-partisan views brings the researcher into a dialogical relationship with the local activity under investigation. The study of an activity system becomes a collective, multivoiced construction of its past, present, and future zones of proximal development. (as cited in Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 10)

Cultural Historical Activity Theory is predicated on the notion that individuals construct knowledge by actively participating in settings that are shaped by cultural and historical events. One of the main components of the theory is that activity systems are consequential to the development of both the individual and the collective; the relationship is reflexive and can be examined by studying the systems within which individuals operate and create. What one or many know is unveiled as sustained participation in a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), where individuals and groups interact with tools, rules, and the community in order to transform a shared object or objective (Engeström, 1993a,1993b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001). The tools or artifacts that mediate

their actions manifest themselves in oral and written texts, as well as physical gestures, and can be theories or principles such as the reciprocal relationship between assessment and instruction, or instructional routines.

Learning and development of the individual as well as the community, requires "reflective appropriation" (Cole & Engeström, 1993) of tools, and analysis of self and the system. Activity theory portrays a seamless connection between thought and action and explains learning as a "you are what you do" (Nardi, 1996) phenomenon (Engeström, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). In the realm of education, one may refer to this as "teaching as praxis" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001), which represents a fusing and bi-directional relationship between theory and practice, or knowing and doing (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), respectively. Knowing is not a question of "what" or "how," but rather an "evolving communal activity" (Wells, 2002), the means through which knowledge is built and shared (Hutchins, 1993). Knowledge, therefore, is not a tangible commodity to be transferred to others, but a process of construction (Wells, 2002), where individuals internalize the inner workings of their community through dialogic activities such as discussions and debates, and externalize what they have appropriated by using and challenging the concepts created as a group. Learning and development thus could be defined as the process of moving from the highest level activity (i.e., cultural) to the lowest (i.e., automatic) or vice versa (Barab et al., 2003; Engeström, 1987). Learning and development should not be viewed solely in quantitative terms by seeing it as the sum of every individual's

knowledge-store, but also embraced as a qualitative process whereby groups or institutions can grow horizontally by expanding their network of possibilities.

Lastly, activity systems, the context in and through which engagement occurs, are nested within sociohistorical contexts (Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002) and can be overlapping; every setting has a history and it is the dynamic relationship between the system's components that permit new and related systems to develop. A staff of teachers, for example, may have the goal of learning how to incorporate an informal observational survey into their work day. Once they acquire an understanding of how to use that assessment, that artifact becomes a tool they could then use to drive instruction and ultimately impact student learning.

Engeström employs a triangle heuristic to represent the components of an activity system. Figure 1 depicts his configuration. The subject in the diagram refers to the individual or group for whom the actions are the focal point of study. The object, be it a physical artifact or an understanding, is that which the subject acts upon by interfacing with various instruments or tools. The rules of the system are the norms and expectations shared by the community, the individuals or groups who have a stake in the object and share responsibility for its transformation.

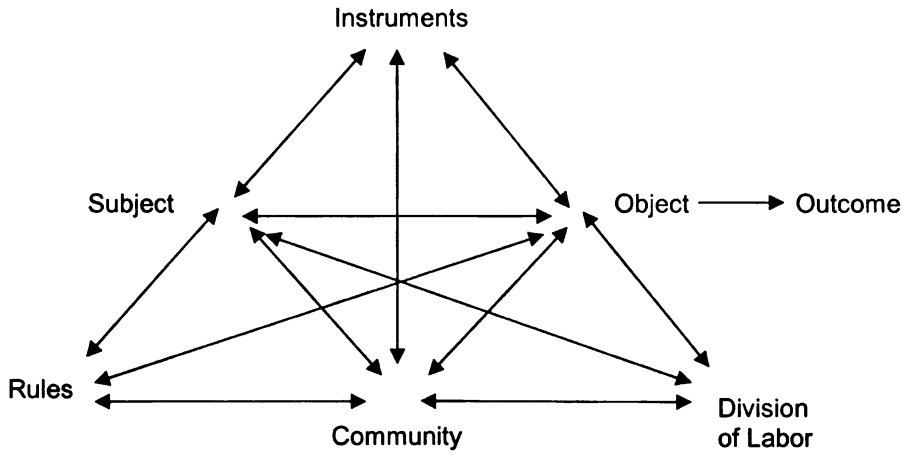

Figure 1. A model activity system adapted from Engeström (2001).

The greatest affordance that Cultural Historical Activity Theory can offer is the ability to describe the motives and means through which school change occurs. The motive to change, transform, or reconceptualize an object emerges because it is in direct conflict with some present behavior, ideal, or artifact. Once, and if, this tension or duality (Wenger, 1998) is realized, participants can pull from a corpus of potential actions, and it is through these actions that the object is transformed (Engeström, 1993a, 1993b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001; Engeström, Engeström &Suntio, 2002). The purpose of taking any action is not to make the existing tensions obsolete, but to manage them, since it is the tensions themselves that motivate change (Barab et al., 2002; Engeström, 1993a, 1993b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001; Engeström et al., 2002).

Engeström (1987, 1993a, 1993b) refers to these tensions as inner contradictions and has classified them according to four levels. *Primary contradictions* exist within one or more components of an activity system (e.g., within *instruments*) and emerge when two value systems are in conflict with one

another. Schools engaged in reform efforts directed at changing teacher practice, for example, are likely to have teachers (*subjects*) with varying conceptions of how to bring about successful change (*instruments*). Some teachers might view reform as an individual effort, while others may perceive it to be more collaborative. Although teachers in this kind of situation share the same *object*, that classroom practices must be changed, conflicting values can influence participation. *Secondary contradictions* are found between system components (e.g., *rules* and *objects*). Teachers participating in a professional development project oftentimes experience a tension between their daily teaching responsibilities and those imposed by the project and must find a way to manage this tension if they expect to bring about a change, or transform the *object*. *Tertiary contradictions* arise when the methods for achieving an *object* are at odds with other methods that are perceived to be more culturally advanced, but ultimately do not meet participants' needs. Such contradictions are often found when federal or state mandates require schools to replace their curricula with those from a pre-approved list. *Quaternary contradictions* occur between adjacent activities. If teachers in the above example typically integrated literacy instruction across subject areas but were then mandated to adopt a literacy curriculum that required focused blocks of instruction on literacy concepts alone, they would then need to adjust their strategies for teaching in the other disciplines (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009).

Cultural Historical Activity Theory, while closely aligned to Vygotsky's work, moves beyond the development of the individual and focuses on the

transformation of a system of activity (Engeström, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001). It also address issues of emotion, power and authority (Roth & Lee, 2007), foci not often addressed in studies based on Vygotsky's work (Wertsch, 1991). Moreover, unlike Lave and Wenger's theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation, CHAT views learning and development as a multidirectional phenomenon, accounts for conflict and onset of change (Engeström, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Palinscar et al., 1998), and does not make sharp distinctions between old-timers and newcomers (Riel & Poplin, 2001).

Summary

School change is an ill-structured domain by nature (Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapungavan, & Boerger, 1987). It involves a number of different stakeholders with varying belief systems and positions of authority and accordingly, a number of different methods and means of change. It is an endeavor sustained by tensions--between internal and external models of reform, and competing conceptions of teacher work. Historically, change has been perceived as a lock-step process that could be successful if the appropriate chain of command was followed. Although present-day literature provides support for teacher autonomy and underscores the importance of context and culture in the reform process, it is at odds with current educational policy that subscribes to a much narrower and more simplistic view of education.

Research linking shared leadership, professional learning communities, and the intricate process of school change in the context of early literacy and assessment reform is virtually non-existent, or at best fractured. On the one

hand, the school change literature is rather broad, as it focuses on the attributes that make an individual a good leader or the elements that make an effective community of practice. On the other hand, the literature is narrow, as it focuses on a particular program or assessment, rather than how that artifact interacts with cultural and structural elements in the process of school reform. What the reform field is missing is a more cohesive picture of how schools can successfully negotiate the tensions associated with the federal and state policies aimed at increased centralization and standardization. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides the vocabulary to discuss such meaningful activity. Activities are shaped and distinguished from one another by their objects. Once activity systems are identified, researchers work to understand the motive, goals and instrumental conditions associated with shared meaning making by focusing not only on the observable dynamics of teachers' work lives, but also by asking them to share their perspectives.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Overview

This dissertation uses Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to explain how a group of teachers from one elementary school navigated the development of a school-wide early literacy assessment system and the tensions associated with the process. This chapter begins with a description of some methodological considerations pertaining to the use of CHAT in this research study. Next, I provide an overview of the research site and an explanation of how the tensions teachers experienced during their daily work lives led them to seek out a partnership with university researchers. I then describe the participants involved in the study, my involvement as a participant-observer, and the overall design of the study-reliability and validity issues, data collection procedures and methods of data analysis.

Methodological Considerations

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides a sociocultural framework for understanding how meanings and actions are negotiated in settings in which individuals collaborate with one another to solve problems and negotiate life and work. The theory has mainly been used as a framework for studying student learning and development in early childhood settings (Engeström, 2001; Engeström et al., 2002; Wells & Claxton, 2002), technology integration in schools (e.g., Barab et al., 2002) and for studying adult learning in the workplace (e.g., Engeström, 1993a,1993b, 1999c, 2001). Few studies,

however, have used CHAT to study teacher learning in school settings and school change. Furthermore, labeled as a descriptive tool (Barab et al., 2003), CHAT is devoid of a universal set of procedures for conducting and analyzing research. Consequently, I have had to rely on a small set of CHAT studies (e.g., Barab et al., 2002; Yamagata-Lynch, 2001, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) and my own interpretation of the theory, in order to conceptualize this study. It is clear from the CHAT literature that activity systems evolve over long periods of time and must be examined against their own histories. As a result, I provide a historical sketch of the context in an effort to target the school's motives for change and understand how relationships and objects change within the system (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2004; Nardi, 1996).

The Context

Located approximately 25 miles outside of Lansing, MI is Westchester Elementary[3], one of four schools situated within a rural, predominately white and low SES community. The area is made up of family farms and small businesses, and embodies a strong sense of community, with family as its backbone (Maple Grove Properties, 2002). The township is small, housing 2,024 residents in 2000, but growing (Maple Grove Properties, 2002). Roughly 60% of the population is employed, with about 36% having reached or neared retirement in the year 2000. The school district also includes one high school, a middle school and since 1999, a K-8 charter school. The district currently serves over 1500 students, but this number is on the rise as Schools of Choice has positively impacted the

[3] Pseudonyms are used throughout the dissertation.

number of students enrolling in the elementary school. During the 1998/1999 school year 472 students were enrolled in the elementary school and approximately 50% of these students received free and reduced lunch. The number of students enrolled during the 2002/2003 school year was 506 with roughly 33% of the population qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

The Occasion for Collaboration

During the 1997/1998 school year, prior to university involvement, a team of literacy leaders (i.e., a small group of teachers interested in developing a balanced literacy program) at Westchester Elementary convened to discuss plans for reforming the literacy curriculum. A summary of a May 8, 1997 committee meeting revealed the team's perceived challenges, fears and hopes for the future. Documented challenges included time constraints, including limited time to build trust as a staff, finding support and lack of communication. There were also concerns that their team would evolve into something exclusive and non-collaborative, and that leadership would be lost. They hoped, however, for greater communication and collaboration among staff, honesty, increased knowledge and unity, and increased student learning. As in many schools, Westchester teachers worked to manage a number of tensions endemic to the institution of schooling. For example, teachers on the literacy team had to negotiate time spent on literacy activities with other teaching responsibilities. They also had to challenge the philosophy that school change depends upon a small group of individuals versus a united staff. In addition, despite limited,

piecemeal resources and minimal change in student performance, teachers had to remain motivated in order to stay on the change path.

Frustrated with consistently low test scores on the state mandated high stakes assessment, the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), the above group of teachers, along with the co-principals at the time, began searching for someone who could help them examine and revise their approach to literacy assessment. The regional education association contacted consultants at the Michigan Department of Education, who then established contact with affiliates from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) housed at a nearby university. I was one of the CIERA team of researchers. During the fall of 1998, the staff along with the CIERA researchers drafted the following set of goals for a collaborative project that would extend across a 5 year period:

1. Create and implement classroom assessments, Pre-K through 4
2. Identify performance standards aligned with the district English Language Arts curriculum and link to specific assessment tools
3. Design a plan for reporting student progress to all constituents (students, teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers, public)
4. Develop strategies for using assessment results to plan instruction and improve student achievement
5. Identify a set of pilot assessment tools to use in a school-wide assessment system

Tiered Level of Professional Development

The structure of professional development employed at the start of the project can best be described as a tiered process, with three levels of teacher involvement within the school. Teachers choosing to be involved at *Level One* agreed to participate in staff decisions and implement assessment tools. *Level Two* teachers, in addition, allowed us to observe classroom instruction and interview students from their classes. *Level Three* teachers, also known as the Core Planning Team (CPT), also agreed to take a substantial leadership role in the professional development process by accepting responsibility for planning staff meetings. These roles were never perceived to be static and changed over time.

The professional development process followed a recurring event structure. We held monthly meetings as a research team, which were always preceded by monthly meetings with the Core Planning Team to devise a plan of operation and to organize a related set of monthly meetings with the entire staff. In addition, annual professional meetings were reserved for the summer, and an annual report on the school's progress was also presented to the school board.

In Year 1, we spent most of our meeting time creating and implementing a school-wide writing assessment plan. In Year 2, our energies were largely focused on the development of a school-wide spelling program and the refinement of the writing assessment. In Year 3, we focused mainly on implementing the spelling curriculum and aligning writing assessment data to instruction, but also began work on a reading comprehension assessment. Most

of Year 4 involved maintaining and refining the writing and spelling systems, creating more consistency in reading accuracy and fluency assessments, developing grade level comprehension assessments, and a student profile summary sheet for recording and sharing data. And, in Year 5, we continued to maintain and refine the systems and administered English language arts assessments (see Appendix A for a timeline of capstone events).

Prior to CIERA involvement in the school reform effort grade levels shared a minimal corpus of informal and formal assessment tools. The assessment tools that were common across grade levels (PreK-4) at the time of our involvement included: observation, writing, oral language/discussion and running records/informal reading inventories. The tools specific to grades PreK-2 included anecdotal records, The Observation Survey, Early Literacy Learning Initiative (ELLI) assessments (an extension of Reading Recovery) and the Gates-MacGinitie. The assessments in place in grades 3-4 included performance assessments (projects), Scholastic News Reading Tests, basal assessments (from a retired series) and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP).

A Typical Core Planning Team Meeting

Core Planning Team meetings followed a predictable sequence and were not meant to last longer than two hours. A tentative agenda was usually established prior to convening by taking into consideration events that had happened at prior staff meetings and feedback from the principal, and on occasion, the curriculum director. The meeting often began by debriefing the

activities and discussions that occurred at the previous staff meeting, and those that had occurred between meetings; these events were typically shared grade level by grade level. Depending on where the staff was in their development of their assessment system, the second part of the meeting was usually devoted to developing an understanding of the content and direction of the school change process. The third part of the meeting was spent developing the agenda for the upcoming staff meeting, including the activities the staff would engage in, the procedures, and the roles that certain individuals would assume. The orchestration of the last part of this meeting was quite intentional and in some ways, served as a dress rehearsal for the staff meeting. When staff meetings were planned, the CPT made conscious decisions about when it would be best to have ideas presented by a fellow teacher, an administrator, or a researcher in order to maximize participation and uptake of the entire staff. While the principal generally opened every staff meeting, the professional development activities, by and large, were carried out by CPT teachers who were knowledgeable or passionate about the topic at hand. When CPT teachers felt like they lacked expertise in an area, CIERA researchers were asked to take the lead.

A Typical Staff Meeting

Staff meetings usually opened with a few words of introduction and encouragement from the principal. An agenda was distributed to the faculty and a member from the Core Planning Group explained each task. The staff usually engaged in small and whole-group activities and had the opportunity to communicate across grade levels. Discussions that started during the staff

meetings generally continued during grade level collaborative meetings, which were facilitated by respective grade level CPT representatives.

University Role

CIERA researchers were regarded as CPT members and were present at all planning and staff meetings and professional development events. As a research team we were present to support the effort, help with work, provide resources, including time, and essentially fade into the woodwork. When the CPT felt staff needed to build theoretical understandings of topics, for example, we located and shared relevant research articles. When the goal was to help teachers bridge theory and practice we suggested and sometimes led hands-on learning experiences such as mini-lessons, poster sessions, and data analysis activities. We wanted all teachers to experience a sense of progress and helped design situations that not only allowed for that, but also armed teachers with the tools that would allow them to experience success in the future. The school's adoption of a holistic writing assessment, for instance, prompted us to develop a procedure for scoring papers and identifying anchors or exemplars. We organized the first scoring session, but teachers used the model to facilitate subsequent sessions. As CPT members we regularly assumed the secretarial role at all meetings and took minutes, which also included synthesizing grade level documents like assessment procedures and rubrics. Lastly, we presented school progress to the school board on those occasions when the principal believed she needed expert testimony or just moral support.

Components of the School-wide Literacy Assessment System

The School-wide Writing Assessment

The school-wide writing assessment was given to students from PreK through grade 4, twice a year. In the winter students were asked to write about "My Special Place" and in the spring they were asked to write in response to "Something I Do Well." The administration procedures for each of the grade levels were similar in that they required some discussion about the topic prior to writing. In addition, students were given ample time to plan, write and edit their pieces before turning them in. Grade level adaptations of the prompts varied, but mainly differed with regard to the amount of scaffolding the teacher provided during the brainstorming session that preceded the writing task. All papers were scored against a grade-appropriate, holistic writing rubric that had a maximum score of 4.

The School-wide Spelling Assessment

The school-wide spelling plan combined a spelling assessment and curriculum that cut across the grade levels. The curriculum was composed of formative assessments that identified student progress along a continuum of developmental stages and grade-level benchmarks, and instructional strategies that helped students progress from one developmental stage to the next. Also included were instructional strategies that help students generate correct spellings of new words based on knowledge of spelling patterns, an assessment that focused on how students applied spelling knowledge in their everyday writing, and a summative assessment. The developmentally focused

assessments and instructional strategies were largely taken from *Word journeys: Assessment-guided phonics, spelling and vocabulary instruction*, by Kathy Ganske (2000), but other formative assessments existed and varied according to teacher. The end-of-the-year, summative assessment was suitable for students in grades 1-4 and consisted of a (grade-appropriate) percentage of high-utility, pattern and content words.

The School-wide English Language Arts Assessment

The school-wide English Language Arts (ELA) assessment was aligned with the state assessment (MEAP) and was given to students from K through grade 4. The assessment began with a writing sample that introduced students to the theme of the assessment (e.g., truth and honesty) and helped students connect big ideas to their lives. The students read or listened to three texts exploring a big idea connected to a theme, and answered selected response questions regarding the texts, and a constructed response item asking them to connect their answer or response to big ideas in the texts.

The Beginning of the Change Effort

When Westchester Elementary joined forces with the CIERA research team, the two worked together to develop a set of goals for the long-term, collaborative initiative described above. The whole staff committed to the change process, and the community working towards change included the school as well as the university partners. While time constraints still existed within the literacy school change effort, the accepted norm was that everyone would participate, but the work would be divided. Moreover, the school's partnership with the university

meant more resources for the school, including structured time for communication and discussion, which consisted of regular Core and staff meetings as well as time to meet in grade level collaborative groups.

The Evolution of the Study

> Qualitative data are...a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events lead to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations...good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1)

The current research endeavor was originally conceived to address concerns associated with high stakes testing, specifically the tendency to have one test do the job of many. The aim was to bring to the forefront a new notion of accountability, one that drew attention to the multidimensional and recursive nature of the evaluation process where value judgments are influenced not only by the tools and methods that are used, but by the audiences and purposes they are purported to serve. Multiple constituencies and activities within the schooling process imply the coexistence of multiple and sometimes competing needs. As such, the main goal of the original research study was to advocate for a viable notion of an assessment system,

> a deliberately organized set of assessment tools that provides all of the clients of the assessment system with the best information possible to make the sorts of judgments and decisions each client group needs to make. (Pearson, 1998, p. 280)

The research questions guiding the study, accordingly, focused on situating assessment and accountability within a larger system or network of actors and

activities and interrogated issues of content validity, client needs, value and utility of assessments, and consequential validity. As we began to address these questions and needs as a team of researchers and teachers it became apparent that this project was more about professional development and leadership in the school change process than it was about assessment. Although literacy and assessment remained at the heart of the project, the evolution of teacher leadership communities and the processes through which they were able to initiate and sustain change suggested a need for a closer look at Westchester Elementary's capacity for reform.

My first foray into the patterns and processes of community development began with a close analysis of discourse at core team meetings. Focusing on teacher engagement across two meetings, approximately one year apart, I took note of individual roles and turn taking, repetition of words and ideas, and transition points in conversations. In doing so I discovered that although the means through which the ownership of ideas were attributed to individuals differed from meeting to meeting, they were both a function of teacher and researcher interactions. Furthermore, it was clear that the appropriation and reformulation of ideas was a function of repetition and the multiple and complimentary roles that teachers and researchers assumed in the process. Relationships, indeed, were central to the development of shared understandings and a community of practice. I subsequently decided to take a more comprehensive look at the dynamics within this evolving community and asked myself the following questions: How can the development of a school-wide, early

literacy assessment system serve as a catalyst in the evolution and function of shared leadership communities and the execution of local reform? How does the tension between assessment for accountability and instructional purposes manifest itself during the development of a school-wide early literacy assessment system? How does shared leadership evolve, function and ultimately mediate the accountability and instruction tension posed by the creation of a school-wide, early literacy assessment system?

Participants

Participants in the larger CIERA study included individuals who were involved at different levels of the assessment system: elementary school students, teachers, parents and policymakers (e.g., principal, school board members). The main data sources for the purpose of my investigation, however, come from teachers and administrators (i.e., school principals, superintendents, and the curriculum director).

The Teachers

A total of 35 different teachers participated during the data collection period. They taught in grades PreK-4 and nearly everyone was female. Only three males held positions at the school when data collection began during the 1998/1999 school year and by the 2000/2001 school year no males existed on the teaching staff. Participants had an average of 9.36 years of teaching at Westchester Elementary and an average of 13.52 years teaching overall.

The Principal

The principal taught kindergarten for 4 years, and served as co-principal for 2 years while teaching kindergarten. She had taught for a total of 24 years, having also taught grades 1 and 3 during her tenure. She held both a bachelor's and a master's in Education.

The Curriculum Director

The curriculum director assumed her role in 1999 after having been in charge of school improvement, professional development and secondary language arts in a nearby district, and working for one year as a Reading Recovery teacher.

The Superintendent

Two different individuals served as Superintendent during the course of the study. The first individual, Jerome, served as principal of Westchester Elementary for four years prior to taking on the role of Superintendent in 1997. In addition, he was part of a team of five people involved in developing the 5th and 8th grade writing MEAPs. Jerome finished out the 1998-1999 school year and was replaced by Bert at the start of the 2000-2001 school year. Bert assumed the role after having completed one year as principal of the local middle school and two concurrent years as middle and high school principal and receiving the 1999 National Distinguished Principal Award from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

My Role as a Participant-observer

My position during the course of the study was that of participant-observer. I was 1 of 4 facilitators on the research team, and 1 of 2 who regularly interacted with the participating teachers over the 5-year duration of the project. I helped plan meetings, located and introduced various literacy and assessment artifacts for teachers, answered questions about literacy content and procedures, summarized and explained assessment data, and interviewed and observed participants. Although my role as facilitator was not at the forefront during the early years of the project, my involvement did increase over the years. I viewed myself as a resource, as well as a community member but my role as a participant-observer was not one of balance. Positioned as an insider, I had access to a wealth of information and the opportunity to "manipulate minor events"-such as arranging times to meet with small groups or individuals (Yin, 2003); however, since this study largely hinged upon teacher needs, values, and interactions in the process of school change, most of my time was spent listening to and observing participants' actions and reactions.

Research Design

The present study is qualitative in nature, defined by Creswell (1994) as

> an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. (p. 1)

It is a case study of one school's efforts to build a school-wide literacy assessment system and the consequences that ensue. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is used as a heuristic for framing the research. Although CHAT

does not provide prescriptions for constructing studies and analyzing data (Barab et al., 2003), it does allow one to surmise a few guidelines to follow during the design process. First, object-oriented activity systems are taken as the unit of analysis. Activity systems have histories and can be overlapping, so a researcher must observe their development over an extended period of time, as I have done in my study. Movement within the hierarchy of activity (i.e., motive-goals-instrumental conditions) is mediated by physical and symbolic components, as well as other members of the community. Varied data collection procedures, then, must be used and multiple individuals must be interviewed in order to accurately capture the multivoiced nature of the community (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Hence, the data sources for this study include a series of semi-structured interviews, field notes, transcripts of grade level meetings and meetings with individuals at varying levels of participation, and artifacts such as assessments, curriculum documents, student work and test scores.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability, in the traditional sense, refers to consistency, or the extent to which a study can be replicated in another context. In qualitative research, however,

> researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 36)

The validity of a research study, in the broadest sense, refers to its authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or truthfulness (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1991) and has two complementary facets: internal and external. Internal validity, the extent to which

the interpretation of data accurately portrays what actually occurred within the research setting, is far more important to qualitative researchers than external validity, the extent to which researcher claims generalize to those settings or individuals who are not directly studied (Maxwell, 1992). Bogdan and Biklen (1993) note,

> Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs. The setting has to be understood in the context of the history of the institutions of which they are a part. (p. 30)

This endeavor is a case study of one school and one context over a lengthy period of time. It is an anecdotal story of one community's values, complex dynamics, and "implicit contextual factors" (Wenger et al., 2002) in the process of school-wide reform, making it unwieldy to separate the phenomenon under investigation from the context. Wenger and colleagues (2002) write,

> Stories provide recognition for their protagonists; they reinforce the importance of making one's practice visible in the organization; and they help build a culture that values innovation and knowledge sharing. Stories are a powerful component of any culture, and legitimizing the storytelling process encourages people to act out the stories they would like one day to tell. (p. 169)

Although it is not the role of case study research to make inferences about a particular population on the basis of empirical data drawn from a sample (Yin, 2003), Cultural Historical Activity Theory provides researchers with the language to talk about similar activities in different settings. Moreover, applying CHAT to the data collected in this study allows for analytic generalization (Yin, 2003). Even though a nominal number of studies exist that apply CHAT to school

change, I am still able to make generalizations about the viability of CHAT as an analytical tool.

A number of steps have been taken to address internal validity. First, this study utilizes data collected over a five-year period, which presents greater opportunities to verify the results of my analyses by searching for patterns. Accordingly, long-term data collection allows one to gain a better understanding of the *whys* and *hows* of change by focusing on the web of interactions involved *in* a setting, rather than just a snapshot (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Second, data collection was systematic and focused on the activities and resources pertaining to literacy, assessment, and school change. Third, sources and methods of data collection were triangulated by bridging connections among people over time and among means, such as observations and interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the change process and strengthen the construct validity of the study (Yin, 2003). In an effort to faithfully capture leadership and division of labor in the school change process, for example, I cross-checked interview data with field notes from Core Planning Team and whole staff meetings. Fourth, as I coded the data members from my research team and dissertation committee reviewed the categories and themes that emerged, and I also had conversations with my informants about their experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for the broader CIERA study are a combination of interviews and analyses of the field notes and transcripts of planning, staff, and grade level

collaborative meetings collected from 1998-2003. Throughout the 5-year duration of this study, representative individuals from each group affected by the assessment system were interviewed. Students were interviewed about their perceptions of assessment data and its use. Teachers, parents, administrators, and community members were interviewed about their knowledge of assessment systems, questions they wanted answered by assessments, perceived need for a system, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the elementary school's current and evolving assessment system. A highly experienced transcriber and approximately four different undergraduate work-study students, not directly connected with the project, performed transcriptions of taped interviews and some meetings. Transcripts were reviewed by the CIERA researchers for omissions and other errors and were subsequently corrected when tapes were replayed for closer analyses. Although data sources were plentiful in this study, interviews with teachers and administrators and transcriptions and field notes of core planning team meetings served as primary resources in my analysis of the evolution and function of shared leadership communities (see Table 3 for primary data sources and Appendix B for interview protocols).

Table 3

Primary Data Sources

	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
Teacher and Administrator Interviews	X	X	X	X	
Field Notes	X	X	X	X	X
Meeting Transcripts	X	X	X	X	X

Data Analysis

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) does not provide researchers with a straightforward method for analyzing data (Yamagata-Lynch, 2001). Although my analysis did not proceed in a lock-stop fashion, I did abide by some principles in order to make the process more systematic. First, according to CHAT, contradictions are what drive change. This research study was largely framed around one of the most pervasive tensions in the field of education, which is also reflected in my literature review and my research questions--assessment as both an instructional and accountability tool.

After pinpointing the overarching tension, I organized my meeting and interview data into a time-ordered display (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or annotated timeline, of critical happenings within the school and created a case dynamics matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which allowed me to identify object-oriented activities, display prevalent tensions and consequential actions, and examine historical relationships among themes. In an effort to identify the salience and significance of events in the change process I employed the

constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); annotations were reduced to smaller "units of meaning" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and grouped into various thematic categories while I simultaneously compared participant responses and classified relationships. I then proceeded to identify and diagram the activity systems at work at Westchester Elementary which was an ongoing and iterative process.

Activity systems are defined by their objects,

> Activity theory is a theory of object-driven activity. Objects are concerns, they are generators and foci of attention, motivation, effort and meaning. Through their activities people constantly change and create new objects. (Engeström, 2008 p. 3)

I identified activity systems by following the objects motivating the various change activities. My first interest, however, was capturing object-oriented activity systems at the macrolevel (i.e., school-wide assessment system, writing, spelling and English language arts assessments) and was largely an attempt to set boundaries on the scope of data analysis. The nested nature of activity systems, though, calls for researchers to focus on some microlevel analyses as well. Such microanalyses were limited to recurring themes (actions) around the creation of a school-wide assessment system (i.e., scheduling, learning about and reflecting on assessment, engaging in professional development, documenting and sharing results and celebrating success). As I began diagramming the activity systems at work at Westchester Elementary, I quickly realized the cumbersome nature of the task and decided that diagramming every activity system would probably not yield great explanatory power. Rather, the diagrams would likely distract readers since their static nature cannot aptly

capture the rich activity that unfolded at the school. As a result, I only diagrammed Westchester Elementary School's activity systems prior to and during the change effort. After identifying the subject and object of each activity system, I listed and mapped out the remaining components (i.e., tools, rules, community and division of labor). Once activity components were mapped onto Engeström's triangle heuristic I began identifying tensions on the diagram.

In order to aptly capture a system of activity it is crucial to move beyond the simple identification of components (e.g., *tools*, *rules*) and focus on the systemic tensions that characterize the initiative. Many tensions presented themselves as recurring themes (e.g., school reform is an individual vs. collaborative effort; time constraints) and were fairly easy to identify. As I revisited the CHAT literature and reexamined my drawings, documenting tensions on the heuristic proved to be a messy process. After examining my first drawings, I realized that I did not accurately capture primary contradictions within components of the activity systems so I had to add those to the diagram. Moreover, after studying my initial diagram of Westchester's activity system prior to the change effort I discovered that I did not depict a secondary tension between *instruments* and *object*; the small group of motivated staff could not attain their object without the appropriate tools which posed a tension that I had to demark on a revised diagram.

Methodological Limitations

The methodological limitations of this study pertain both to its design and the data analysis procedures used. First, since data were collected over a

prolonged period of time, parameters were set in order to aptly capture a subset of recurring assessment themes; the five year duration of this study thus made it difficult to depict all literacy and assessment actions. Second, the CHAT analysis employed in this research is strictly my understanding of how events unfolded and my interpretation of the CHAT literature. Although I was able to cross-check themes that emerged from interviews and meetings with other researchers, applying CHAT to the data was solely my undertaking. Third, while I set out to document an on-going reform effort I chose to use Engeström's (2001) static CHAT diagram which clearly fails to portray (a) the evolutionary nature of reform and (b) the relationships involved in the process. The thematic analysis employed in this study and the accompanying narrative, however, more than compensate for this limitation.

CHAPTER 4

Object-oriented Activity Systems and Tensions in the Process of School Change

Overview

The following chapter is divided into four sections. The first uses Engeström's triangle heuristic to describe how the activity system at Westchester Elementary unfolded. The second describes the "core tension" (Barab et al., 2002) that motivated Westchester Elementary to reconceptualize and develop their early literacy assessment system and curriculum as a means for crafting shared understandings and facilitating school-wide improvement. By explicating this tension between assessment as both an accountability and instructional tool we are able to get to the very essence of the community, the nucleus around which all motives and activities were based (Engeström, 1987, 1993a, 1999a). The third section describes the structures that were established to support change, while the final part of the chapter addresses the complex interactions that ensued around the tension.

Documenting and Understanding Transformation through CHAT

Educational reform efforts, while touted for facilitating change, are often criticized for not sustaining the positive effects experienced during their relatively short durations. The problem, Engeström (1998) proposes, lies in the "taken-for granted" space that teachers and students interact within. While schools must operate within various rules and regulations at the institutional level, they also operate within various boundaries at the classroom level, those bound by

curricula and texts. The "taken-for-granted" or "hidden" space, lies between the two levels, and consists largely of teaching practices, and interactions between teachers (Engeström, 1998); diagrammatically, it is the lower part of Engeström's heuristic. It is the actualizations within this sphere, the school ethos, which drives one's conception of self as teacher, or student, and eventually compels change.

The activity system at Westchester Elementary prior to their involvement with university partners in 1998 is depicted in Figure 2. The *subject* of the activity system at this time consisted of a small group of literacy leaders who recognized a need for change and made a commitment to facilitate the effort. Unfortunately, they lacked sufficient *instruments* required to actualize their *object*, a balanced literacy program. Their instruments, or tools, consisted of fractured beliefs about school change, a hodgepodge of assessments, and piecemeal professional development and curriculum. The *rules* that guided the team's participation in the activity system were concomitant with time and other teaching responsibilities. Teachers, for example, were responsible for teaching and assessing learning in other subject areas and could not have literacy as their sole focus. The *community* refers to the group that the literacy team belonged to, mainly the teachers at the school and the facilitator from the ISD, and the *division of labor* refers to the responsibilities shared by the literacy leaders. The activity system, consequently, forced teachers to wrestle with two primary tensions, within *instruments* and *rules* (indicated as tensions "a" and "b" respectively), and four secondary tensions; a small group of motivated staff had to maintain their optimism in spite of a limited collection of tools and beliefs (indicated as tension

"*c*") and a history of unsatisfactory student performance (indicated as tension "*e*"). Furthermore, they had to try and achieve their object with an inadequate set of tools (indicated as tension "*d*") while operating within time constraints (indicated as tension "*f*").

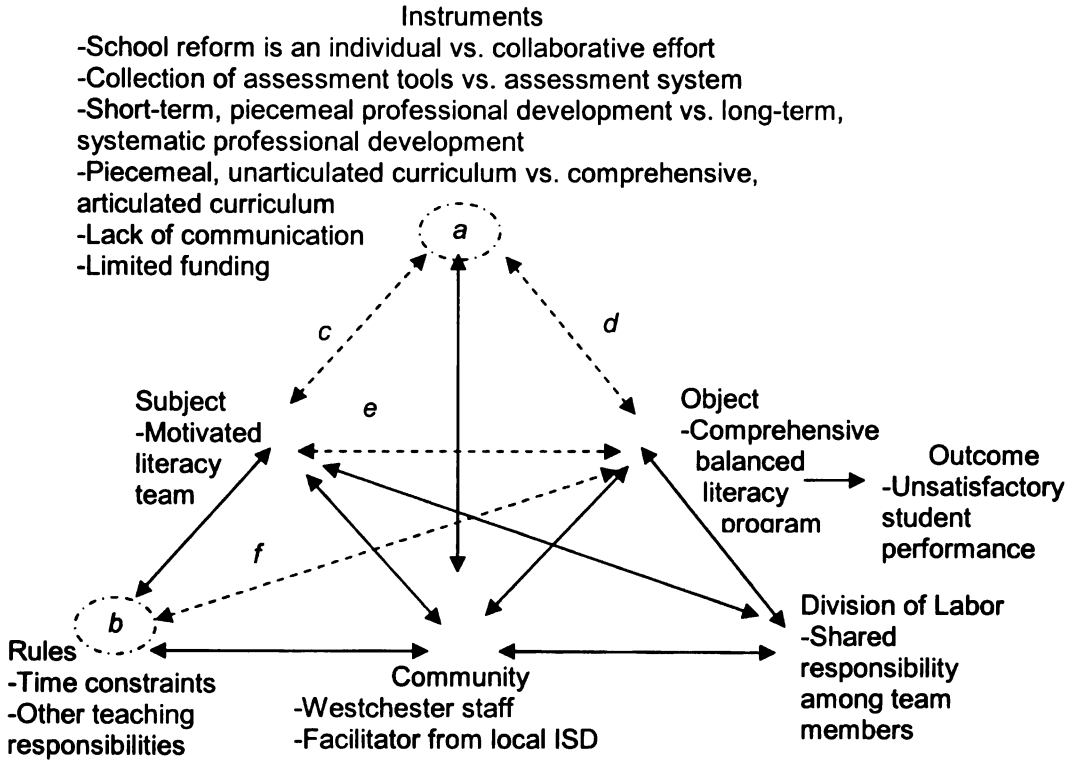

Figure 2. Westchester Elementary activity system prior to university involvement (1997-1998).

Once Westchester Elementary began collaborating with university partners their activity system changed (see Figure 3). The *subjects* of the new activity system now consisted of an entire staff, instead of a small group of individuals, committed to the school change effort. The university partnership presented the staff with various *instruments* that would ultimately help facilitate change, such as opportunities for collaboration, the notion of shared leadership, long-term, systematic professional development, and a school-wide assessment

philosophy. The *object* that was the focus of their actions changed slightly, from a comprehensive balanced literacy program to a school-wide assessment system and vision. The *rules* that guided the team's participation in the activity system remained concomitant with time and other teaching responsibilities, but also included self-selected levels of involvement and staff generated expectations for participation at each of the levels. The *community*, the individuals who had a stake in the outcome, expanded to include university partners and a curriculum director, and the *division of labor* was shared between the staff and the university.

Establishing a partnership with the university helped Westchester Elementary eliminate the tensions brought on by limited, piecemeal resources and a history of unsatisfactory performance. The primary tension within rules (indicated as tension *"a"*) remained, as did the secondary tension between rules and the attainment of the object (indicated as tension *"b"*); the staff still had to deal with time constraints and additional expectations. Westchester staff, in spite of this tension, was still able to achieve their desired *outcome* of adequate student performance.

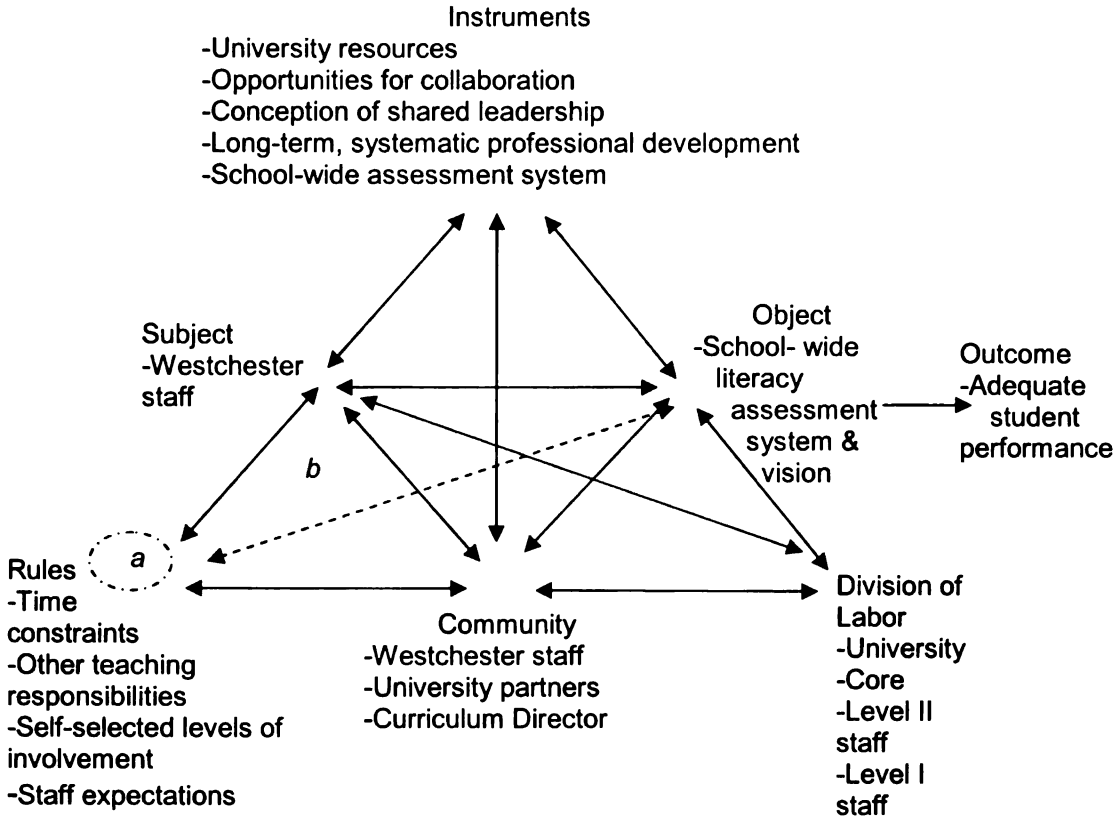

Figure 3. Westchester Elementary activity system during university involvement (1998-2003).

Cultural Historical Activity Theory makes leadership practice in the context of early literacy reform accessible. In addition, it portrays change as a function of (a) a division of labor, for which shared leadership is an integral part, (b) norms, (c) goal-driven, object oriented behaviors, and (d) artifact mediated activity systems. Although Westchester staff participated in a number of knowledge and community building activities, they were not a sufficient catalyst in the change effort. Devoid of agreed upon norms and rules of participation, there probably would not have been any collaboration or consistency at Westchester. Similarly, positive norms and professional community without the presence of goal directed activities would not have been sufficient to promote change. Absence of any one

component of the activity system would, in effect, cease to make the system function. Akin to Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) position, translating data and theory into practice is "both a cause and a consequence of changing school culture" (p. 286).

Assessment as an Accountability and Instructional Tool

Staff responses to and discussions around the CIERA Survey of Early Literacy Programs in High Performing Schools (1998) revealed a school behind the national average on assessment use, assessment training, and time spent on literacy activities. The survey confirmed their perceived need for more novel professional development but also highlighted attributes of effective schools that were present in their school, such as an understanding of the purposes and consequences of assessment, parent involvement and communication with parents; it ultimately brought to the forefront the need for school-wide performance standards and systematic assessment use.

Assessment was something that had positive as well as negative connotations at Westchester Elementary. Whether or not an assessment was perceived as an affordance or a constraint was largely dependent upon its structure and purpose. Formal, summative assessments of a standardized or high stakes nature were believed to be difficult to interpret and not useful for making instructional decisions. One special education teacher observed,

> In regard to standardized assessments, I think sometimes (teachers) don't feel like they're getting an accurate measure. I think teachers would like something that was easier for them to understand or easier for them to make parents understand because I think sometimes with standardized

> (tests) parents don't get a real good read on where their child is actually performing. (Int[4]-Chris, 11/98)

Moreover, as a fourth grade teacher shared,

> I think that all of the teachers that I've talked to are real frustrated about testing and what little knowledge that we gain from what we're using right now. A lot of them would like some kind of test that would just really give you a clear, precise picture of the student and the areas where we could work with each student, (Int-Charles, 5/99)

In addition to not providing teachers with enough information to make decisions about students, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) served as the chief determinant of whether or not a school was failing. As a high stakes assessment and one that would never fade away, teachers felt compelled to participate in a school change initiative,

> There was a determination to make changes and the level of concern was so high because our MEAP scores were so low and there were so many external pressures based on that...(Int-Patti, 6/02)

Informal, formative assessments, without fail, were regarded as the most useful overall because they allowed teachers to meet individual student needs. Such assessments included, but were not limited to, anecdotal records, Marie Clay's Observation Survey, informal reading inventories and writing tests. A Pre-K teacher shared her assessment needs,

> I want [assessments] to answer the question of what do I teach next. I [want them to] be able to give me a clear cut view of where do I go now. Okay I know that this child doesn't have the concept of 'in', 'out', 'over,' 'under,' so with knowing that, then where do I go from there. What's the best approach and then how do I reassess...(Int-Kristen, 11/98)

[4] Interview

It was also crucial for assessments to give teachers an understanding of whether or not students were at grade level. A kindergarten teacher, speaking to the need of meeting individual developmental needs and grade level benchmarks shared,

> I think both need to be addressed. I think it's important to be able to look at a specific child and see where they started, where they made it, that kind of thing. And, I do think that...as a grade level saying this is what we can expect our second graders to have mastered...the growth they need to see...that way if there's someone that's not...at...level, we can work with that child individually to get them where they need to be. (Int-Melissa, 5/00)

From an administrator perspective, this criterion-referenced information was pertinent because it reflected the quality of the school district. Likewise, this information provided a clear-cut estimate of a child's performance: below grade level; on grade level; above grade level and met parent needs,

> I want to know what level he's at. I want to know if he's growing at the level he should and if he's getting better. I want to know that he's reading at first grade level or second. (Int-PBK, 5/99)

When standardized assessments were viewed as tests that were consistent among teachers, allowed for comparisons, and informed instruction, they were viewed as affordances,

> But what we're striving for, the outcomes, that's why I think a standardized type of assessment is a good thing in some instances because you can look over what you are doing as compared to what they (other teachers) are doing and see if it is working. (Int-5/99)

Moreover, when everyone is using the same assessment then everyone is held accountable for reporting student data and using that data to evaluate their instruction.

> It holds you accountable. It forces you to look at how your kids are performing. I mean, my kids are performing the way they are because of what I taught them or what I didn't teach them...If all of the kids in my

> classroom got a "1" that wouldn't mean that I had kids...who couldn't write. It would mean that I wasn't doing something right as a teacher, so I think it forces you to really look honestly at how you're teaching and what you need to do to improve. (Int-Karla, 5/00)

In so far as assessments were needed and used as measures of accountability, they played a comparable role in instruction and could not be viewed as sufficient in their own right. The curriculum director poignantly explained this stance,

> I want assessment to be a part of what happens all of the time in the classroom. It shouldn't be an event; the MEAP is an event. Assessment should not be an event. What I would like to see is for it to be so much a part of what happens that we do not think about assessment any more than we think about turning on the lights in the morning. (Int-Laura, 5/99)

Section Summary

The description of the accountability and instruction tension provides a glimpse into the context in and through which Westchester Elementary teachers worked to facilitate change. In order to transform the culture of schooling they were currently operating within, this tension needed to be made transparent. Teachers were well aware of the constraints they needed to negotiate in order to work towards improvements and saw the need for more knowledgeable others to help transform practice. Although outside support was welcome and there was a general understanding of where the school was headed, the staff's needs and wants (as they existed and emerged) needed to be at the forefront of the change process. Crafting an instructional vision and a culture where teachers owned their own learning was an ongoing and iterative process dependent upon available resources, collaboration, trust, and assessments for instructional and accountability purposes. The dynamics involved in mediating the development of shared understandings of literacy and effective teaching are now described.

Shedding Light on the Change Process

This section illuminates the change process by zeroing in on the participation structures that allowed teachers to negotiate community development and system change, and the instructional leadership activities that helped mediate the accountability and instruction tension and the development of shared understandings. First I describe the broader structures supporting the change process focusing on division of labor and the rules and norms governing the system, as well as teacher perceptions of these supports and their involvement. Then, I take a closer look at how leadership activities were enacted and what those processes looked like in the service of developing shared understandings of literacy assessment.

Participation Structures

Division of labor.

During the summer of 1998 11 members of the Westchester Elementary staff assembled with a small group of researchers from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) to form the Core Planning Team (CPT), a group established to facilitate change at the school. It was not until September, however, that the group convened to make plans for the first official staff meeting. Attendance included four individuals from CIERA, Patti and Catherine who were co-principals as well as co-kindergarten teachers, Laura the curriculum director, Margaret a first grade teacher, Jill from second grade, Jeanne from third grade and Charles from fourth. At this meeting, one of the most important objectives targeted for the upcoming staff meeting included

clarifying the purpose of the school's collaboration with CIERA, what the potential benefits were, and the various levels of involvement teachers could assume within the project. *Level Three* was the designated tier for teachers on the CPT. *Level Two* teachers allowed researchers to interview students from their classroom and observe literacy instruction. And *Level One* teachers agreed to participate in decisions that impacted the whole school, which included the implementation of new assessment tools. Interviews with Westchester Elementary staff revealed the need and value of having a CPT, as it served a number of functions within the school improvement effort.

Westchester staff saw the CPT serving five major roles and functions in the school change process, including: (a) more knowledgeable others, (b) encouraging buy-in and ownership, (c) planning, (d) assessing staff readiness and pace of change, and (e) liaisons. As *more knowledgeable others*, the CPT was respected by their peers for their knowledge and commitment to literacy development,

> I think the core team [was] put in a really very appropriate role. They were the leaders... And I think that it's given us more than just the experts per se. I mean it wasn't that we had to wait til' David or Deanna showed up if we had questions. There were people that work here on staff that said, no, this is what they meant by when they said...This is what they meant, this is what we'd like to do. And that, I think, made it easier to implement. (Int-Chris, 5/02)

Positioned as "intellectual gophers," they sought out information (if they did not already have it) to help move the staff in established directions, asked and answered questions, and problem-solved by searching for alternatives or

solutions. As on-site experts and leaders from within the ranks, the CPT earned the respect and trust of their fellow teachers,

> And the fact that you do have the core people who are able to relate to their peers, I think that's probably maybe even more important. The fact that, if they buy into it and they can explain it and understand it, I think that puts more value perhaps than even the administrative leadership or you all, you know, all of you, with your leadership, too, because even though we respect your opinions and...the things that you do with us, I would almost say that the actual core members might be the most important key to helping the change take place. (Int-Leslie, 5/02)

The Core Planning Team promoted *buy-in* and *ownership* in a number of ways. One parent of a kindergarten and fourth grade student poignantly attributed the staff's enthusiasm and dedication to Patti, the principal.

> [Patti] is an integral part of the school. Her leadership has a lot to do with these teachers wanting to continue to give their best to the students. You can't have...you can't have someone that's in charge that doesn't understand how to talk to people, to convey the message, you know, share with them how much she cares about the education of these kids and to do it in a way that's not demeaning...I have watched the last five years this place just dramatically change, and I know that a large percentage of that is because of her leadership and the way that she communicates with her staff and the people around her. (Int-PCH, 5/02)

Likewise, the staff respected Patti for her expertise and experience as a former teacher and her involvement at all levels of the project. Speaking to Patti's personal and professional characteristics one second grade teacher noted,

> I think...as an administrator, I think she gets really down in there, whereas some administrators would kind of step back and let the staff do it. I mean, they'd check in and make sure things were going but [Patti] really has her hand in it, in the development, in making sure that things are being carried out the way they were intended and that we're all on the ball and doing what we're supposed to be doing, when we're supposed to be doing it. (Int-Jenny, 5/02)

The structure of the project, as a whole, encouraged staff ownership in the school improvement process. The staff was encouraged to voice their opinions and determined the course of change by voting. Chosen topics were honored and addressed by the CPT, regardless of personal preference or opinion. As one Reading Recovery and former first grade teacher shared,

> I know we weren't real happy...about the spelling but you know, that worked out to be something that really was timely and it was something they really needed and wanted, and put the icing on the cake as far as the staff buy-in and the development. (Int-Margaret, 5/04)

The Core Planning Team also played a significant role in the *planning* and design of meetings and artifacts. They did much of the legwork and tried hard to maximize use of the staff's time. Commenting on the CPT's function a first grade teacher shared,

> That is exactly it. They are the core. They get the information, they make the plans, come back and give us directions and tell us what we should be doing. I'd like them to go ahead and make more decisions about those other pieces; you know what should we be doing now, helping us plan what we are going to do with all of this information. (Int-Marva, 5/00)

The staff valued having different degrees of participation to choose from because it made the decision-making process more efficient. Having reflected upon the division of labor one kindergartener teacher shared,

> I mean, I think it makes more sense to have three, you know, three different levels of it as opposed to expecting everybody to be in the core team, making decisions, cuz then you have too many people with too many opinions, so you need a small set for decision making. (Int-Melissa, 5/02)

In addition, the CPT saved time,

> [The Core Team] does a lot of planning for when we get together so it can be productive in the least amount of time. I know that their hours are a lot greater than ours. And it is so that we can work efficiently. We couldn't do

> it without them. We all would have burned out a long time ago. (Int-Chris, 5/00)

The decision-making process overall went more smoothly because the CPT was able to anticipate potential hurdles and work out solutions by trying to understand why staff would respond in certain ways. For example, in a discussion of how writing assessment data should be interpreted and shared, Patti reminded the CPT of the staff's limited experience with interrogating data,

> Maybe drawing the correlation between how we look at MEAP and why we look at the MEAP scores with this piece of information might be something that would be hands on. They could really understand that. And then maybe provide us some options about different ways to look at this because...basically as classroom teachers, this isn't something we do often. Research and data collection is not something that's constant in our classrooms, so providing those opportunities for us to think beyond what's obvious would be an interesting piece for us. (CM, 9/14/99)

A large part of the planning process involved *assessing staff readiness* to move forward with respect to their motivation as well as their level of understanding. Consequently, the staff had to ask themselves three related questions: (a) What does the staff know about the topic? (b) What do they need to know? and (c) How do we get them there and increase buy-in? This kind of evaluation was captured in quotes from the principal and another Core Planning Team member, respectively,

> ...one thing this year has taught me is I can only do so much...some of [the change] has to come along on its own. Sometimes, just like you watch your students and you, you're going to change what you're doing based on the way they respond. I think it's the same way with the teaching staff...we have to watch where they're going and go the next step based on what their understanding is and where they are. And in a perfect world, we could do all these things and we could do them now. If we could hand pick the people in the building we want to do it with, we can do that. But in reality, the situation is we have everybody in this building and they're all on a different plane, let me tell you...But they struggle, they struggle at

> different things...Some people are struggling personally, some are struggling professionally, which I'm working with...everybody's at a different struggle area. (Int-Patti, 5/01)
>
> I think in the beginning I thought we'd be farther ahead at this point. But as we started, I thought no. The staff in the building was not quite ready yet. There's more that we need to explore. Like, you know, making sure people are all on the same page... Like okay, we're starting at the foundation. We're all on different levels of understanding but making sure that some of those very basic things are understood. (Int-Margaret, 5/02)

Acknowledging the staff's level of comfort was also part of the process as one Reading Recovery/Title I Coordinator observed,

> I think what I've seen from this staff overall is, the more knowledge and information they have the more comfortable they feel creating their own things, they obviously don't feel comfortable in the spelling area. So I think with more information it will come. (CM-Terry, 1/11/00)

Accordingly, the CPT had to monitor the pace of the change effort and as they learned, timing was everything,

> I think we've done a good job of that this year, of making sure, taking it slow enough or we introduced it at the right time where, you know, they're ready for that... showing them these are some of the new things coming down the pipe... because I think maybe in other instances, it's just been something, here's the new thing from wherever and this is what we're gonna do. But we actually give them time to kind of think about it, provide the information, see how it would work in the classroom, how it wouldn't work, what titles could you use, how could you plan the themes. I think that gives them a lot of good thinking without being overwhelming...we have to do the kind of development with them that a teacher would do with their students because you know, you can jump in and give all the information but then who will have gleaned it all and who will be frustrated and who will be [at the] instructional [level]. (Int-Margaret, 5/02)

Lastly, the Core Planning Team fulfilled an extremely important role as liaison. Concerned with the common good of the school, each member of the CPT assumed roles comparable to those taken on by union representatives. As members of particular grade levels they spoke on their behalf and served as

liaisons between the grade levels and the CPT. One second grade teacher commented on the availability of her grade level representative,

> She's within grade level so to have someone from each grade level is important. Because if it's someone from, say you only have two people in the building, you may never see those people. So she's always available. (Int-Joan, 5/02)

The staff also expressed the Core Planning Team's willingness and ability to respect diverse opinions and incorporate teacher input. One kindergarten teacher shared,

> I don't feel like it was someone else's decisions and I had to follow them just because I was told to...I know our representative for kindergarten does a wonderful job in bringing the information from the meetings back to us and talking to us about it and getting our feedback and stuff like that... she always comes to us and says this is what happened and what do you guys think. (Int-Melissa, 5/02)

The Core Planning Team's ability to support change, as depicted in the next sub-section, had much to do with the rules and norms (transparent and tacit) supporting the community.

Rules and norms.

When asked how the school improvement effort impacted staff and students, the principal placed great emphasis on the new culture that had emerged:

> I think it produced a culture of learning, of group learning. And it started the effective use of collaborative time because we began to use it as conversational time and we began to learn from each other. We looked at writing samples, we talked about the rubric, we started to maybe evaluate ourselves a little bit more as classroom teachers. (Int-Patti, 5/02)

Likewise, as one fourth grade CPT teacher pointed out,

> I keep coming back to that collaboration piece, but I just can't

> believe how well the grade levels collaborate now, how we come to staff meetings and communicate now, how much more we understand what first grade is doing under fourth grade, it is just incredible with the amount of sharing that goes on. And that in turn has certainly created a Westchester team spirit, if you will, among the staff. (Int-Barbara, 5/02)

When asked to comment on the principal's role in this endeavor, teachers mentioned her ability to set the tone and provide a supportive environment. One third grade teacher shared:

> You have somebody who's gonna set the tone and not just set the tone and walk back out of the room, but set the tone and be there and work through it with you, it encourages and helps everybody else to be involved. And she does have a way to talk to people who don't seem to be contributing as much involvement, to let them know that that's part of the expectation. (Int-Jeanne, 5/02)

Moreover, her approachable and non-judgmental nature helped her facilitate risk-taking and change among staff. A PreK teacher addressed the principal's willingness to be supportive:

> She's been...very encouraging. She's also been very helpful. You know, saying her door is always open if you have questions. And, you know, I think she's someone that's very open...I feel like you can approach her with...problems that you're having and that she's not judging you...thinking, 'Oh, gosh, she doesn't know what she's doing.' (Int-Christina, 5/02)

The principal also articulated the important role trust played in creating a supportive environment,

> They trust me...I think your effectiveness is somehow hinged to the level of trust people have in you. And even though I've had to say some very difficult things in evaluation processes...I think they really believe that I have the good of everyone in mind at all times. (Int-Patti, 5/02)

The principal's character traits and actions indeed, supported a culture of learning. To elaborate, the principal was well aware of the time constraints teachers had to operate within, including other subject area responsibilities and

personal commitments after school. In view of such limitations, she needed to make sure that teachers were able to meet school-wide, grade level and individual expectations for change. Staff meetings were designed to share new information with the staff, reserved for professional development activities and presented teachers with opportunities to share across grade levels. The focused, goal oriented nature of these activities were a significant factor in their success. The curriculum director called attention to this point when she compared the happenings at the middle school to those at Westchester Elementary:

> Westchester, I think, really uses the time and uses the assessment-and part of it's the collaborative time, and they're able to talk about it...But I think if they had the collaborative time without the professional development, which the middle school does, it wouldn't have been okay. (Int-Laura, 5/02)

To facilitate grade level communication, Patti scheduled time during the school day for teachers to meet in grade level collaborative teams, which were commonly referred to as "collabs"; teachers met daily for 25 minutes while students were at recess and also had planning time available during specials. Prior to the start of the 2001-2002 school year, the only time grade level teams had an opportunity to collaborate was one Monday a month after school and that time was not structured. Moreover, time was always set aside for staff to administer, score and evaluate student assessments and was published in staff memos or on staff calendars. In describing the import of the various participation structures within the school, Patti called attention to their interdependent nature,

> The most powerful [meetings] are the staff meetings but you can't have the staff meetings without the core team meeting...That's become the forum to get the common language out there. Collab teams are short and pretty specific to one, one topic, and pretty much instructional. This is what

> you have to do. This is what information we're collecting. That's it...And I don't think there's a lot of talk between themselves about things, until that forum of the staff meeting. When they get in those [groups] they spark off of each other...Lives are busy and...we have taken and scheduled X amount of minutes every month for that...(Int-Patti, 5/01)

The benefits of such collaborative time were also conveyed by the staff, as one kindergarten teacher explained,

> Kindergarten just got collaborative for the first time last year so this is only our second year of collaboration and that is extremely helpful and beneficial rather than trying to find time always after the school day to get together. Helps us keep focused and looking ahead at what is going on in the upcoming weeks as well as sharing what is happening currently in our classrooms and see if we are all going crazy at times or if kids are behaving the same way in all rooms, (Int-Anne, 5/02)

Active participation at Westchester Elementary was the established norm for change. At minimum, teachers were expected to attend and participate in meetings and to administer assessment tools agreed upon as a staff. Self-selected levels of participation allowed teachers to determine the extent of their involvement beyond the minimum expectations and supported flexible role changes. This standard even extended itself to more personal agendas, including staff weight loss:

> Yeah I know it's all team isn't it, I know isn't that funny, they're all giving us something to really work together towards whether it's Weight Watchers or writing or spelling or whatever...
> (Int-Barbara, 5/02)

The decision to take on leadership roles, particularly at the Core Planning Team level, had much to do with (a) other time commitments, (b) comfort with content knowledge and expectations, and (c) the ability to conceptualize change and accept the abstract. Jeanne, for instance, actively served as a third grade representative since the start of the project because of her comfort with and

knowledge of writing. Because of family commitments, however, she chose not to participate in Core Planning Team meetings in 2001 and thereafter. In her spring 2002 interview, the district curriculum director commented on the role that knowledge and comfort with the abstract factored into leadership,

> I think it's been very effective ... there are people who can accept an innovation on an abstract level and people who accept it on a concrete level and I think that the three tiers that you've created have allowed tier one people to see it happen even though they couldn't conceptualize it. So I think it's allowed for both types of thinking and it's allowed for the different levels of concerns about change. (Int-Laura, 5/02)

Section Summary

Context served a critical role in the change effort at Westchester Elementary. Structural supports, as in the agreed upon division of labor, permitted teacher leaders on the Core Planning Team to mobilize reform by (a) serving as more knowledgeable others, (b) encouraging buy-in and ownership, (c) planning, (d) assessing staff readiness and pace of change, and (e) acting as liaisons. The rules and norms of shared responsibility, collaboration, risk-taking, and trust that personified the community played a corresponding role as well. Taken together, these participation structures laid the foundation for creating a school-wide vision of literacy and a community of learners. The remainder of this chapter will describe the activities at the forefront of the consistency building process and how those activities unfolded in the service of building shared understandings of literacy and assessment.

Leading through Assessment

Applying Engeström's triangle heuristic to the change process at Westchester merely provides a snapshot or "macroreflection" (Barab et al., 2002)

of the activities characterizing the development of a school-wide assessment system. Although the figure depicts a static system, it actually has a history of nested activity systems. In other words, Westchester staff had to participate in a number of coordinated, goal-driven actions in order to achieve their desired outcome of adequate student performance. First, in order to incorporate new assessment tools into their school day the staff had to create new schedules. Likewise, they set aside time for learning about the assessments and how they should be administered and scored. Third, staff created routines for reflecting on the utility of the assessment and student results. Fourth, they scheduled regular occasions for professional development. Fifth, since assessments were used for instructional and accountability purposes teachers documented and shared student results. Lastly, they arranged times to celebrate their successes.

Scheduling assessment.

In order to better contextualize the activity that unfolded at Westchester Elementary, I direct the reader's attention to the bottom portion of Engeström's triangular schematic. The *subject* relates to the *community* via *rules* and the *community* relates to the *object* via a *division of labor* (Barab et al., 2003). Thus, when the Core Planning Team drafted administration schedules for familiar and new assessment tools, the remainder of the staff trusted they would not do so in haste and would also schedule assessments in ways that would help them meet their instructional and accountability needs.

Learning about assessment.

Learning about assessment comprised building shared understandings of assessment and assessment systems, and the procedural knowledge for administering and scoring three different assessment tools. A variety of *instruments* were used to mediate the staff's understanding of assessment including anecdotes, brainstorming sessions and role play. On one occasion, teachers were asked to assume the role of an elementary student as they completed a comprehension assessment in one of five formats (i.e. oral retelling, multiple-choice, short answer, summarizing task, or relating the passage to their personal experience) and then discussed the impact of the format on their experience.

Before assessment tools could be used as *instruments* for mediating the development of a school-wide literacy assessment system and vision Westchester staff first needed to develop an understanding of how each of the tools (*objects*) worked. In the area of writing, the school chose to adopt the holistic writing assessment and scoring rubric from the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), a compilation of informal, early literacy assessment tools engineered by the state and two intermediate school districts (ISDs). The writing prompt and rubric as is, however, could not meet their needs so a *secondary contradiction* emerged between the writing assessment (*instrument*) and their plan to create a school-wide assessment system and vision (*object*). The staff responded to this tension by creating a standardized set of procedures for each grade level to follow which included decisions about the nature and

extent to which pre-reading and pre-writing activities would be used, how to accommodate special education students, and how to handle make-up exams. Holistic scoring sessions gave teachers the opportunity to learn how to apply the rubric to student writing samples and time to clarify standards with peers.

The second construct staff chose to tackle was spelling. They adopted the Developmental Spelling Assessment (Ganske, 2000) and initially learned about the tool by scoring spelling samples that the CPT had collected. The CPT spent a considerable amount of time determining how to use this instrument, rooted in a developmental theory of spelling, to spur the creation of a comprehensive spelling program that would meet individual student needs as well as grade level benchmarks. Once staff developed a general understanding of the theory behind the tool, they were then able to use the *instrument* to mediate the development of a spelling curriculum (*object*).

The final component of Westchester's literacy assessment system was the development of a school-wide English language arts assessment (ELA). A prototype for a revised state assessment helped mediate the development of the school's ELA (i.e., it served as an *instrument*) however it posed both *secondary* and *quaternary contradictions*. Staff were working with a fourth grade prototype so in order to create and institute "mini-MEAPs" they needed to determine how the various assessment activities would look at each of the grade levels, kindergarten through fourth grade, which created a secondary contradiction between the assessment *instrument* and the five different grade level ELA assessments (*objects*). Moreover, they needed to discuss how to merge the

English language arts assessment with the writing assessment they already had in place. Modeling their grade level assessments after the MEAP prototype meant that staff needed to become familiar with two 6-point holistic scoring rubrics, one for writing and one for writing in response to reading; they needed to replace the 4-point scale they were used to and had do a little more work which posed a *quaternary contradiction*.

Reflecting on assessment.

Reflecting on the utility of an assessment at Westchester Elementary occurred on a regular basis and often required staff to address the procedural aspects of assessment (i.e., administration, creation process, scoring), evaluate the usefulness of the information gleaned from the data, and achieve coherence as a staff. On one occasion, the CPT asked staff to participate in a PMQ activity, where grade level groups discussed the "pluses" and "minuses" of holistic scoring and addressed "questions" that emerged from the process. This evaluation *instrument* and others like it helped the staff develop common understandings about the importance of the rubric for consistency in scoring, the ability to make within and cross-grade level comparisons, and the merit of the conversations that ensued around the scoring of student work.

Westchester staff were presented with a number of opportunities to interrogate spelling data which also helped increase overall buy-in for a spelling program. Prior to adopting the DSA, for instance, the CPT used writing samples from the holistic writing assessment as an *instrument* to mediate staff understanding about (a) what should be included in a spelling program and (b)

the potential utility of the DSA. In this case, the CPT had staff identify the percentage of correctly spelled high frequency words, common phonemes, and unique words present in student writing samples scored a 2, 3, or a 4. Teachers noted that increasing mastery of high frequency words was visible across the grade levels, but students missed a number of unique words, which seemed to be related to the control they had over phonograms. The activity provided support for including high frequency words, common patterns, and personally interesting words in student spelling lists.

Feedback on the spelling program as it evolved was generally positive. Teachers felt that familiarity with the developmental continuum made benchmarks clearer and helped students move away from memorizing. It also helped teachers individualize instruction and allowed them to observe student growth. On the other hand, teachers wrestled with managing multiple spelling groups, accommodating students at either end of the developmental spectrum in addition to those who have not met the benchmark for placement in the earliest of levels, how to assess spelling in student writing, and how to communicate spelling results with parents. As teachers became accustomed to using the Ganske tool in conjunction with their developing curriculum the number of questions they had increased. Such questions posed challenges and presented a *secondary tension* between the DSA (the *instrument*) and the staff's desire to build a shared understanding of spelling (the *object*). In order to mediate this tension, the staff compiled their questions and the CPT arranged a conference call with Kathy Ganske to gain some insight.

In an effort to reify teacher understandings of key goals and actions and maintain momentum, the CPT engaged the staff in a number of "taking stock" activities, which served as *instruments* for building a shared vision. At the end of their first year of reform efforts, for instance, the CPT guided the staff in creating a timeline of significant events (*Assessment Work Milestones*). Staff were presented with a list of specific accomplishments (e.g., *Established Core Team Planning Group, Developed Procedures for Writing Prompt*) and were asked to reflect on each accomplishment by writing answers to the following questions, *Why did we do the activity? How did the activity help us?* At the end of year 3, staff were asked to assess the status of their progress in the areas of writing, spelling and reading by focusing on items that were currently in place, what seemed to be working, and what else needed to be accomplished and refined. Staff feedback ranged from acknowledging the benefits of having a school-wide writing assessment and spelling plan but acknowledged the need for more instructional activities and better ways of communicating student results to parents and across grade levels. Furthermore, although comments focused on the need for a reading comprehension assessment, they also conveyed staff apprehension to move forward with reading when writing and spelling needed further refinement.

Engaging in professional development.

Westchester staff participated in a variety of professional development activities aimed not only at increasing their understanding of literacy constructs but also their knowledge of how to translate findings from assessment data into

curricula and practice. Sometimes research articles (*instruments*) were employed to broaden teacher understanding and reconcile the *primary tension* between theory and practice. This tension was particularly profound in the area of spelling and is highlighted in the following quote from the principal,

> Writing has been this nebulous area all the way along, so what we...did as a group, we provided a rationale for teaching writing. We did it through that avenue with the assessment first. We have the understanding there, but spelling is a totally different area, because we've been teaching spelling haphazardly, whatever may, for 100 years, so we all have a concept in our minds. So now, rather than providing some kind of assessment first and then the understanding, we gotta back track and understand why we teach spelling and what's the best way to use it and how we can go from there. (CM[5], 10/12/99)

In this instance, the CPT lead the staff in a JIGSAW reading of an article discussing the developmental stages of spelling (see Templeton and Morris, 1999) from which they learned (a) the importance of a developmentally appropriate curriculum since spelling is a developmental process, (b) that spelling development echoes the historical development of the English language, (c) inventive spelling is okay because it leads to the exploration of conventional spelling, (d) modeling analogies and how to look at words is important, (e) it is difficult to teach just using phonics since there are variations in dialects and (f) instruction should point out what students do right.

On a similar note, a draft of the book chapter "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension" (Duke & Pearson, 2002) was used to prompt teacher conversations around comprehension instruction. Teachers explored the behaviors of good readers and were introduced to the facets of a "Balanced Comprehension Instruction" model and researched based

[5] Core Meeting

comprehension strategies. The faculty was challenged to take stock of the comprehension strategies that students used while reading as well as the ones for which they provided instruction. The activity prompted teachers to think about the relationship between retelling and summary and the way in which each manifest themselves in the lower and upper grade levels; it also highlighted the value of think-alouds and the import of multiple and deliberate passes through a text. After taking stock of their own practices, teachers acknowledged the need to devote more attention to student questioning and the comprehension of informational texts within language arts and across the content areas.

Discussions surrounding student performance routinely led to discussions about practice. The staff valued the holistic writing assessment as an instructional tool because it allowed for focused discussions of writing constructs (i.e., ideas and content, organization, style, sentence structure, word choice, voice and conventions) and provided teachers with the evidence needed to make instructional decisions. The CPT presented staff with a variety of activities (*instruments*) to help translate data from assessments into practice and mediate a *secondary tension*. Immediately following the very first administration of the writing assessment, for example, grade level groups of teachers discussed the qualities associated with level 2 and level 3 papers. After identifying and documenting the characteristics of level 3 paper and discussing strategies for bringing level 2 papers up to a score of 3, the CPT presented the staff with a mini-lesson on how to teach students to add more detail to their writing by "Exploding the Moment" (Lane, 1992). Further analysis of student writing

samples revealed a need for teachers to explore options for teaching students about voice. The staff unpacked the concept of voice by examining various definitions and examples from published works (e.g., Spandel & Stiggins, 1995; student work from *Reading and writing grade by grade: Primary literacy standards for kindergarten through third Grade*, New Standards, 1999), as well as student writing samples.

Once teachers reached a level of comfort with the writing prompt, they then used the assessment as a springboard (an *instrument*) for the development a school-wide writing curriculum; this did not happen until the third year of the prompt's instantiation. The process began with an assessment of how their initial curriculum framework aligned with the curricular goals that were currently in place at each grade level and then followed with grade levels concentrating on how they were already teaching writing, and students' most recent performance on the prompts. Teachers collaborated with their grade level peers to identify teaching points and discuss activities that could potentially be used to address particular parts of the scoring rubric. They then shared their instructional writing goals and activities with one another during a poster fair. The discussions that ensued led to the establishment of three school-wide writing goals that included setting higher expectations for students, helping students stretch the content of their writing, and modeling good writing. In order to maintain the momentum of the assessment system, the Language Arts Committee (a group consisting of a few CPT members and other teaching staff) agreed to tackle the development and fine-tuning of the writing curriculum in year 4 of the project. Curriculum

development, however, continued well into year five with input from the rest of the staff.

Documenting and sharing results.

In an effort to address the need to document and share results for instructional and accountability purposes the Core Panning team (CPT) drafted a needs assessment chart (an *instrument*) depicting the school-wide assessment information that needed to be recorded and communicated year to year. Documenting student growth across curriculum areas was of great consequence in reporting to the state because it was used to determine if the school qualified for Title I funding. This information was then transferred into standard Individual Student Progress Profiles and Classroom Record Sheets for staff to review and comment on, and eventually use in their final form.

Teachers were quite cognizant of not presenting data in a way that would allow staff to be compared to one another based on their students' scores. Consequently, data compiled after the first year of the writing assessment only showed how many students in each grade took the writing assessment during each administration and the score they received, general increase/decrease information, and trends as a grade level. The data, as the staff acknowledged, did not share reasons for student performance, individual growth and/or decline, what strengths and weaknesses were present, teaching points, teacher growth and/or decline, performance in relation to reading, or how a child was feeling at the time of the administration. Although the way in which the data was presented to staff exposed a *primary tension* between what was reported and what could

have been reported, the reflection and professional development activities detailed above helped staff move forward with their agenda.

Documenting and sharing spelling progress with parents was also a concern for the staff since they wanted to increase buy-in for this new instructional approach to spelling and change how parents viewed spelling. The DSA came with a class record form that summarized student performance at a particular point in time and a student profile sheet which could be used to record student performance over multiple years. Members of the CPT showed staff how the profile sheet could be turned into a bar graph depicting student spelling development as well as grade level expectations, and thus created a useful *instrument* for communicating spelling goals and progress to parents.

Celebrating success.

Accountability as a concept and a process came to be perceived by Westchester staff as something that could carry positive connotations. Celebrations occurred throughout the year as conditions presented themselves (e.g., completion of an assessment, improved performance on school and state assessments and class work), and always at the end of every school year, often in conjunction with "taking stock" activities. Celebrations typically took the form of announcements made at staff meetings (sometimes accompanied by festive foods) and eventually materialized as tangible objects (e.g., newspaper articles, awards) that could be admired everyday. In addition, they were not limited to direct cause and effect relationships or successes solely observed at the elementary school level. Progress on the state reading assessment, for example,

was shared in spite of limited professional development in reading prior to the test. Moreover, performance on middle school assessments was shared at the elementary level.

Summary

The teachers at Westchester Elementary set out to build an early literacy assessment system and shared vision (*object*) in order to effect positive student performance (*outcome*). Previous attempts at change failed because the school lacked sufficient instruments and had staff with conflicting beliefs who were regularly dealing with time constraints. When the school agreed to partner with university researchers in a school-wide initiative, however, the majority of the tensions disappeared. The impetus for building a school-wide assessment system evolved from the staff's need to manage the prevailing instruction and accountability tension. The school was successful at negotiating this tension because they had two very important participation structures in place-*division of labor* and *rules/norms*. The Core Planning Team (CPT) was created to streamline the work and was ultimately successful in its endeavors because the members served as more knowledgeable others and liaisons, encouraged buy-in and ownership, and spent a considerable amount of time planning and assessing staff readiness and pace of change. Moreover, the school would not have been able to successfully enact their multifaceted, assessment driven professional development activities (which consequently stimulated further tensions) without trust, shared responsibility, and opportunities for staff to communicate and collaborate with one another.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Overview

My research study is a qualitative case of literacy leadership that can best be described as a coordinated web of goal-directed activities, or systems of practice (Halverson, 2003), designed to negotiate the accountability and instruction tension, build shared understandings of literacy and assessment, and mobilize school reform. It set out to document how the development of a school-wide, early literacy assessment system could serve as a catalyst in the evolution and function of shared leadership and the execution of local reform. Moreover, it examined how the tension between assessment for accountability and instructional purposes manifested during the development of a school-wide early literacy assessment system and how shared leadership ultimately mediated that tension. The results, as documented in Chapter 4, reveal the vital role that participation structures play in the change process. Structures, such as agreed upon norms and division of labor, can mediate the development of collaborative tools that facilitate staff engagement in goal directed behaviors. Such participation structures ultimately helped Westchester Elementary staff achieve consensus and consistency as they scheduled, learned about, and reflected upon early literacy assessments, engaged in professional development activities, documented and shared assessment results, and celebrated their successes.

Implications

When the stakes are high, as in our current climate of external accountability, it is rare to find schools utilizing summative assessment tools because they want to. More often than not, the tools are used to satisfy an externally imposed mandate. Westchester Elementary, however, embraced both formative and summative assessments and used them to lead a reform effort. Perhaps even more surprising is that their concentrated and persistent attention to assessment took shape prior to the passage and instantiation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (USDE, 2001); the Westchester reform effort began in 1998, but the mandates did not take hold until 2002 or shortly thereafter, which is when data collection concluded for this study. How then, was assessment able to sustain staff motivation and school improvement for so long? The activity system I captured in this dissertation embodies six characteristics inherent in professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998): (a) shared mission and values; (b) collective inquiry; (c) collaborative teams with a common purpose; (d) action oriented behavior and (e) a focus on continuous improvement and (f) results. These structures certainly helped facilitate change at Westchester, but the effort was also successful because it emphasized clear connections among curriculum, instruction and assessment (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995) and helped teachers solve practical problems (Shepard, 2000). Teachers, for instance, used assessment data to (a) inform instruction and various stakeholders, (b) measure student growth against developmental

continuums and grade level benchmarks, and (c) evaluate the efficacy of their program.

The results of this study reveal four major implications for assessment guided reform, professional development, and school-wide change. First, assessment can serve as a catalyst for change as long as the complex dynamics of assessment integration are taken into consideration: assessment tools will need to be incorporated into an already busy schedule; staff will need time to learn, administer and score the assessments; teachers must be given multiple opportunities to reflect on the utility of assessments and student results; ongoing professional development must be provided; a framework for documenting and sharing student results for instruction and accountability purposes must be in place; and, major milestones should be celebrated (see Peterson & Deal, 2002) to underscore what was done and why, along with the subsequent impact.

Second, the capacity for change is contingent upon rules and norms supporting a culture of collaboration. The participation structures at Westchester Elementary remained static as staff addressed different literacy and assessment domains and ultimately fostered ownership and trust in the change process. Lave (1997) reminds us, with respect to student learners that,

> The more the teacher, the curriculum, the texts, and the lessons 'own' the problems or decompose steps so as to push learners away from owning problems, the harder it may be for them to develop the practice. (p. 33; as cited in Barab et al., 2002, p. 104)

The same holds true for adult learners. Unlike some current top-down models of school change, the teachers in this study were not designated as objects to be

changed. Rather, they were provided with the scaffolding needed to be positioned as their own agents of change.

Third, a flexible, core group of leaders is an integral part of the reform process. Leadership at Westchester Elementary was shared but an individual's participation on the Core Planning Team (CPT) depended upon other time commitments, interest and comfort level with the subject matter, and the responsibilities that accompanied the position. Core Planning Team members had a number of tasks to negotiate, including: serving as more knowledgeable others; encouraging buy-in and ownership; planning; assessing staff readiness and pace of change, and acting as liaisons.

Lastly, school change encompasses a complex set of nested, goal-directed, tool and rule mediated activity systems that are unique to the organization and the individuals that make it up. Although teachers are shaped by the goals that define the teaching profession they are ultimately subject to circumstance, which make a "one size fits all" model of professional development suspect. Moreover, one cannot successfully coordinate all of the components of change without a professional community of practice-the social capital (Halverson, 2003)-to do so. The adoption of an assessment tool, for example, would be trivial without buy-in from the staff and agreed upon rules and expectations. Likewise, trust and clear expectations devoid of the know-how and opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions around instruction and assessment can lead to a false sense of professional community (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2000).

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): An Analytical Tool

Strengths.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory, thus far, has not been widely used as an analytical tool for examining school change efforts. My use of CHAT in this study, however, does support what others have conveyed (e.g., Barab et al., 2002; Yamagata-Lynch, 2001, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) about its value as a useful heuristic. First, CHAT provides researchers with a common vocabulary to describe habitual operations in real-world settings. Likewise, it helps researchers make the invisible components of communities and the change process (e.g., learning, cultural norms, tensions) more visible. One would concentrate on the observable aspects of a system (i.e., activity-action-operation), for instance, in order to better understand the unobservable motive, goals, and instrumental conditions of shared meaning making. An essential component of this process involves identifying the tensions that motivate activity. As I classified the internal contradictions (Engeström, 1987, 1993a, 1993b) that emerged during the reform effort at Westchester Elementary, for example, I discovered that *tertiary contradictions* (when one method of achieving an object is at odds with a method that is perceived to be more culturally advanced) did not present themselves. I was surprised by the results at first because when schools adopt outside curricula or assessments they do so because they either think, or are told, that they are better-quality solutions to their problems. One would suppose then that the adoption of the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP) holistic writing assessment, or any of the other

assessments, would have posed such tensions but they did not. Instead, they were viewed as *objects* to attain and they eventually became *tools* in the change process. Had it not been for the *rules and norms* of shared responsibility, collaboration, risk-taking, and trust along with the *division of labor* tertiary contradictions would have surely arisen.

A third advantage of CHAT is that it provides researchers with the flexibility to focus on broad patterns of object-oriented activity over time or even actions lasting minutes with individuals, groups, or even institutions as the focal point of the study. Accordingly, it highlights the intentionality of the change process, whereas goals are only "retrospective and reflexive" (Lave, 1988, as cited in Nardi, 1996) under the situative perspective. Lave and Wenger (1991) note that goals generally do not compel change. Rather, people develop an awareness of goals only after an activity has taken place, and after it has been verbally been discussed.

Another benefit of CHAT rests with the triangle heuristic created by Engeström. The diagram depicts persistent structures and helps turn abstract concepts into concrete representations. While it may not be that useful to share various instantiations of the heuristic with a teacher, discussing its components and associated tensions could increase teacher involvement in the change process. It is much more fruitful to tell teachers that they are part of a network of individuals who are actively involved in the change process than it is to describe them as "followers" as they are labeled under the distributed leadership framework (Spillane et al., 2001). Moreover, the persistent structures make it

easier for researchers to examine the interconnected nature of situations (i.e., object-oriented activities). The diagrams I have shared in this research fall under what Engeström (2001) has labeled second generation activity theory. The third generation of activity theory allows researchers to examine how activity systems interact (see Figure 4). Under this conception, joint activity serves as the unit of analysis. Figure 4 depicts two activity systems bound by a shared object, but initiated by different subjects. Use of third generation activity theory is still not very widespread among North American researchers (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) but it can be a useful tool for examining how activity systems initiated by a school may interact with district or university initiated activities.

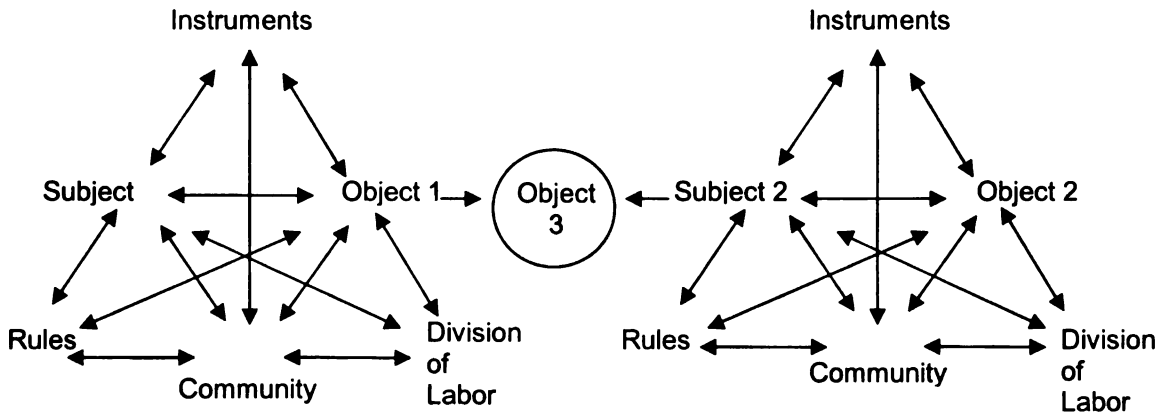

Figure 4. Interacting activity systems in third generation activity theory adapted from Engeström (2001) and Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild (2009).

Weaknesses.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory, overall, is a valuable tool in educational research. The limitations generally associated with CHAT largely point to the drawbacks of using an activity systems analysis (i.e., the triangle heuristic). The static nature of the diagram has the potential to oversimplify rich activity and has the potential to mask the interconnectedness of activities. Employing a thematic analysis with an activity systems analysis, however, can offset that issue.

Future Directions

A number of different questions arose during my research which warrant further investigation. Although this study did not focus on individual teacher development and the roles they assumed over time, there were two individuals who did play a significant role in the reform process. At the start of the study both women participated on the CPT and taught first grade and Reading Recovery, but by the end, they shared the role of school librarian and continued in their positions as Reading Recovery specialists and Core Planning Team members. They were both highly motivated individuals indeed, and one has since assumed the role of Principal at the elementary school, but what I do not know is how their beliefs, experiences, and professional roles as librarians and Reading Recovery teachers allowed them to compel change. The roles of library media specialists are changing (see Buzzeo, 2007), but how can these new roles impact students' literacy development? This is a vital question given looming budget cuts and the firing of key personnel, like school librarians (see American Library Association [ALA], 2007).

Two teachers served as co-principals at the start of the study, Catherine left at the end of year 2, Patti served through year 5 and Margaret assumed the position at the beginning of year 6. The transition from two principals to one principal appeared to go rather smoothly, but I do not have any data (other than what I have heard through word of mouth on a few visits post analysis) pointing toward sustainable leadership and change thereafter. Leadership was rather consistent throughout the study, but what happens when leadership changes? Can a new leader sustain positive change? What if that leader is someone hired outside of the current faculty pool? Zoltner's (2006) work suggests that a particular routine or activity structure can help stabilize the transition of new leaders and facilitate change, even in a high poverty urban school. Her work along with others' (e.g., Grossman et al., 2000; Spillane et al., 2004) suggests that leadership activity can also depend upon the discipline. It is particularly important for research to address these areas given the high mobility rate of teachers and leaders in urban schools and their growing capacity.

Westchester performance on state exams was lower prior to their involvement in change efforts. Although research suggests a relationship between professional learning communities and student performance (Louis et al.,1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) future research should examine whether there is a causative link. Furthermore, does the kind of professional development activity teachers engage in matter? Halverson (2006) suggests a typology describing three kinds of activities (what he refers to as artifacts) used by leaders that ultimately lead to the development of a professional community: *catalytic*

artifacts, like discussion groups that spark initial conversations; *compounding artifacts*, such as data reflection retreats, that allow teachers to focus on a particular issue; and *coherence artifacts*, like school improvement plans, that reinforce a shared vision. Does the type of artifact or activity matter? Halverson's (2006) work and this study suggest not. The success of an artifact depends on the context and the relationships that are built. Furthermore, under Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), if a researcher attempted to assess the power of a tool by isolating it from the other entities that epitomize the activity system, she would run the risk of misinterpreting the data (Roth & Lee, 2007).

Lastly, if external facilitators are brought on as consultants, as was the case in this study, what qualities do they possess that make them good moderators? I had the privilege of working with, observing and analyzing the discourse of two senior professional development experts and what impressed me the most was how they used language-questions and statements-to set the tone of meetings and scaffold learning. What impact does facilitator discourse have on teacher buy-in and school change? Researchers can better inform the evolution of a system when they are aware of their own roles and the tensions endemic to the system (Barab & Squire, 2004). Although this research was not conducted under the guise of design-based research, the researchers involved did have agendas and a framework with which to start. We hoped to impact the instructional and assessment practices of Westchester staff while contributing to extant theory and we did so by introducing a flexible, tiered level of professional development. When researchers involve themselves in change projects they may

have a greater potential for influencing theory and practice by engaging in design-based research which highlights the researcher's role in manipulating and monitoring a number of variables while involving and honoring local participants (Barab & Squire, 2004).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Timeline of Capstone Events

Table 2

Timeline of Capstone Events

Date	Activity
April 1998	Staff meeting (SM) is held to help staff gain an understanding of the purpose of CIERA and to make sure the group is "on board".
June 1998	Core Planning Team (CPT) is established to act as facilitators for people needing help on questions and to give guidance as to the direction the school is headed.
September 21, 1998	Goals for the West Chester project are discussed at SM. Teachers discuss the questions clients would want to have answered from the assessment information they receive and create a list of assessment tools used to inform each of the stakeholders.
October 19, 1998	CIERA Survey of Early Literacy Programs in High Performing Schools (1998) is distributed among staff to verify current practices, discover what the staff believes about literacy, and to gain an understanding of current grade level practices. Teachers continue their discussion of stakeholder needs and the notion of giving a building-wide writing assessment is briefly discussed.
November 24, 1998	Writing prompt procedures are discussed as well as reasons for administering it (i.e., to standardize instruction across the grade level and to develop an organizational approach to writing).
January 26, 1999	Staff participates in a PMQ activity, where grade level groups discuss the "pluses" and "minuses" of holistic scoring and additional questions.
December 14, 1998 Leadership Change	Kristen joins CPT as kindergarten representative.
February 8, 1999	Staff discusses results of CIERA survey, including what they are surprised to find, findings that were verified, and questions raised with regard to assessment, curriculum, and professional development.

March 19, 1999	Staff creates timeline of events (Assessment Work Milestones activity) occurring between April 1998 and March 1999 and focuses discussion on why certain activities were used at meetings and how they helped them as a staff. The group also talks about the components of writing (i.e., Ideas and Content, Organization, and Style: Sentence Structure, Word Choice, Voice and Conventions) and discusses how the writing assessment could drive instruction.
May 17, 1999	Grade level adaptations to writing prompt are discussed and followed by a brainstorming session on what should be the focus of the next literacy assessment.
August 20, 1999 Leadership Change	Justine joins CPT as second grade representative. Replaces Valerie, who left the school.
September 1999 Leadership Change	Bert replaces Jerome as Superintendent.
September 21, 1999	"2-4 Question Some More" activity: Teachers get together in groups and complete the following two statements about Year 1 writing prompt results: "This information lets me know..." and "But it doesn't tell me about..." An example from this activity is "This information lets me know trends as a grade level, but it doesn't tell me about teaching steps for individuals.
October 19, 1999	CPT member gives "creative spelling test" at SM. Everyone is asked to spell the words "assessment", "research", "participation", "convey" and "successfully". Using these spelling words she presents the group with the following statement: "Research proves that increased participation in the writing process better enables the learner to convey their thoughts and ideas successfully". The goal of the activity is to brainstorm evidence of good spelling skills. The staff identifies and discusses spelling program needs.
November 16, 1999	In order to explore the issue of spelling further, staff engage in an exercise related to high frequency/common patterned words. The CPT shows the full text of a 4th grade MEAP passage, and identifies the use of high frequency words, common patterns, and uncommon words not included in those two groups. The staff discusses the possibility of creating a developmental continuum spanning all grades.

January 18, 2000	Grade level pairs assess papers scored a 2,3,4 on the writing prompt, looking for connections between student spelling ability and everyday writing.
February 15, 2000	Staff jigsaws "Questions teachers ask about spelling" (Templeton and Morris, 1999). Teachers form groups and read the introduction of the article together. Next, each group brainstorms responses to the questions raised in the article and shares reactions as a staff.
March 17, 2000	CPT walks staff through Kathy Ganske's "Developmental Spelling Analysis" assessment. Staff score, in grade level groups, a portion of the assessment administered to a sample of students earlier in the week, and ponder what they learned about their students from the assessment. Later, three teachers share their experiences administering parts of the assessment to their respective classes.
May 22, 2000	Staff is introduced to the components of a comprehensive spelling program-one that provides them with 1) information to make instructional decisions, 2) developmentally appropriate learning activities, 3) a school-wide monitoring system, and 4) a plan for developing a curriculum. Grade level groups are asked to think more about the school-wide writing assessment (e.g., How do we organize the information we're getting from the prompt? How do we use it to inform our instruction? How do we communicate more effectively with students?)
June 12, 2000 Leadership Change	A spelling committee (CPT) is formed to identify common phonograms, high frequency words, and morphemes (prefixes, affixes and suffixes) for grade level spelling lists. The group discusses how to choose words, the number of words that should be included in a bank, the number of words to test children on, and the reliability of the Developmental Spelling Analysis (Ganske, 2000). Co-principal Catherine leaves the school. Patti serves as sole principal. Katie joins CPT as first grade representative and works with Margaret. Leslie joins CPT as additional third grade representative.
September 25, 2000	Goals for the spelling curriculum are articulated to the entire staff: 1) Developing a curriculum (and assessment system) that cuts across all grade levels, 2) Designing a formative assessment that identifies student progress along a continuum of developmental stages and grade level benchmarks, 3) Developing instructional strategies that help students progress from one developmental stage to the next, 4) Developing a summative assessment, 4) Developing instructional strategies

	that help students generate correct spellings of new words based on knowledge of spelling patterns, 5) Designing an application spelling assessment that focuses on how students apply spelling knowledge in their everyday writing. Members of the committee explain the grade level components of the curriculum and assessment system.
October 16, 2000	Staff brainstorms means of reporting spelling information to parents, reflects on the benefits of the school-wide writing assessment, and ponders the need for more professional development in writing. Staff votes to focus on voice for their next workshop topic.
November 20, 2000	The group is presented with numerous definitions and examples illustrating voice and is asked to explore voice in student papers in cross grade level groups. After identifying and listing the characteristics of voice that surfaced in the papers they discuss activities that could be used to promote that element of writing.
January 29, 2001	Staff meets in grade level groups to examine student writing and identify characteristics in the samples to help them develop a list of grade level expectations. Afterwards, each grade level shares their lists to create a continuum of expectations for student writing across the grade levels.
February 26, 2001	Staff reviews draft of the continuum of expectations for student writing across the grade levels started at the last meeting. Group then participates in a written and oral reflection activity in which they consider how the writing prompt has influenced their writing instruction. Lastly, the staff discusses how they have been using the results from the Developmental Spelling Analyses.
March 19, 2001	Each staff member is given a passage from the Stanford-9 along with 1 of 5 different types of reading comprehension assessments—oral retelling, multiple choice test, short answer test, summarizing task, or relating the passage to their personal experience. Individuals are asked to discuss their experience with the particular assessment format they are given. For example, what sorts of feelings did it evoke? How did the format influence the way they read the text? What aspects of their understanding could the format measure? How might the format either facilitate or interfere with their ability to accurately assess comprehension?
April 23, 2001	After reading "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension" (Duke & Pearson, 2001), the staff discuss and record the types of comprehension strategies they use in their classrooms.

May 21, 2001	Teachers reflect on the assessments that are in place in the areas of writing, spelling and reading comprehension. They take stock of where they are in each of these domains, paying particular attention to the assessments that are in place, what seems to be working and what needs to be refined, and then ponder next steps.
September 24, 2001 Leadership Change	The staff is presented with an overview of the spelling program and an explanation of how it fits within their current assessment system. Core members introduce what each grade level is responsible for and discuss the components of the program with their respective grade levels. Jeanne no longer part of CPT.
October 22, 2001	Teachers reflect on what they know about reading comprehension and how they use that knowledge to support individual students by answering questions about their guided reading practices (e.g., How many times a week are students engaged in guided reading instruction? How many different guided reading groups do you have in your classroom? How do you divide students into their guided reading groups? How do you choose the texts that students are going to read in their guided reading groups? What do you take as evidence that students have understood what they've read? Please describe what a typical guided reading lesson looks like for your grade level.)
November 19, 2001	Staff spends time developing the beginnings of a writing curriculum that is consistent with their school-wide assessment by creating grade level expectations for content within the narrative/story genre.
January 2002 Leadership Change	English Language Arts Committee is formed and assigned the task of working on a writing curriculum. Members include: Patti (Principal), Leslie (third grade teacher), Terry (Title I Director), Katie (former first grade teacher and Reading Recovery teacher), Nancy (special education teacher), Andrea (kindergarten teacher), Krista (second grade teacher), Karla (second grade teacher), Jennifer (third grade teacher) and Witney (fourth grade teacher). Jinny joins CPT as first grade representative and is supported by former first grade and Reading Recovery teachers Katie and Margaret.
January 21, 2002	Staff analyzes student writing samples scored 1-4 for generalities and for teaching points. Based on these observations they begin discussing activities they could use to address these points and move children up on the rubric.

February 19, 2002	Staff holds a writing instruction poster fair. Grade level collaboratives chose an instructional writing goal for their students and an accompanying activity, which they shared with the rest of the staff. The group discusses what they learned from each of the presentations and agree upon a few school-wide writing goals: augmenting/stretching student writing, expecting more from students, and modeling good writing.
March 25, 2002	Teachers are introduced to the 4th grade language arts MEAP and discuss adaptations in content and format for each of the grade levels.
April 22, 2002	Teachers review and comment on a draft of a needs assessment chart depicting the assessment information that is to be documented for assessing student progress. Grade level groups also discuss appropriate themes, formats, and texts for the English Language Arts Assessment.
May 20, 2002	The English Language Arts Committee shares their progress on the writing curriculum and staff takes stock of their change efforts by identifying 2 things that have worked well with their students and one wish in the areas of writing, spelling, and reading.
September 23, 202	The English Language Arts Committee shares their progress on the writing curriculum and the staff assesses where they are at with the Language Arts Assessment, clarifying content and logistics, and raising further questions.
October 28, 2002	The staff is presented with an overview of the English Language Arts Assessments and the curriculum goals for each of the grade levels. They review their grade level ELA drafts and take a close look at the 6 point writing in response to reading rubric, taking time to construct text describing the features of a 4 point paper.
November 18, 2002	Staff reviews English Language Arts Assessments in grade level groups.
January 21, 2003	The Language Arts Committee introduces the writing curriculum to the rest of the staff with "Language Arts Rock".
February 18, 2003	Staff revises and aligns ELA rubric.
March 14, 2003	Staff is introduced to the Profundity Scale, which makes sense of children's comprehension by viewing it according to several different planes of understanding (e.g., physical to philosophical planes).
April 21, 2003	Staff spends time revising the ELA, and debriefing the Profundity Scale activity on reading for understanding.

May 19, 2003	Staff calculates classroom and grade level averages on fall and winter DSAs to measure growth.
September 22, 2003	Staff compiles questions to ask Ganske about individualized spelling assessment and instruction.
October 21, 2003	CPT shares insights from their conversation with Ganske, and entire staff discusses chapter 2 of MOSAIC OF THOUGHT.
November 17, 2003	The staff discusses chapter 4 of MOSAIC OF THOUGHT in light of present practices and meets in grade level teams to identify big ideas/themes for students to study.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocols

Teacher Interview Protocol November 1998

1. How do you monitor student progress in your classroom?
    a) What kinds of classroom based and standardized assessments do you use?

    b) Which of these assessments do you find most useful in making instructional decisions?
        i) Which of these assessments do you find the least useful?

    c) Which assessments do you find most useful for making placement decisions for special programs?
        IF NEED TO EXPAND--> special programs-->special reading groups, special education, gifted programs

    d) Do you feel like you have all the information that you need? What else might you want to know?

2. What kinds of questions do you want your assessments to help you answer?

3. In an ideal world, not limiting yourself to the tools you described earlier in telling me about your current practices, what additional information about student performance would you like to have about how your students are progressing in literacy?
    a) Again in an ideal world, what other indicators of quality beyond direct measures of student performance and achievement would you want to include?

        IF NEED TO EXPAND: Student academic performance is usually considered that staple of most assessment systems, and for a good reason. In most people's minds, the quality of any program hinges on how well students are doing on assessments of the skills and processes that we, as educators, are trying to promote. BUT there might be other ways to judge the quality of literacy programs, both within the school and within the community. There might be indicators of the ways students are putting their literacy skills to work (such as graduation rates and books read at the library).do any come to mind?

4) Think about the assessment practices in your classroom. Now, think about what you know about what your colleagues use in their classrooms. How similar do you think practices are across classrooms? How do you think they differ?

5) How do you think other teachers feel about the assessment tools they use?

6) Since part of your role is to share assessment information with other people, what do you think is the most important information to share with:
   a) students?
   b) parents?
   c) other teachers?
   d) administrators?

7) What assessment information do you think is valued most by:
   a) students?
   b) parents?
   c) other teachers?
   d) administrators?

8) How do you think staff members as a group feel about the school's current assessment system?

9) We've talked a little about assessment systems. What do you think should be included in an assessment system?
   IF NEED TO EXPAND-->how do they feel about the set of assessment tools used in the school, such as standardized tests and tests that are classroom based.

10) We've had an interesting discussion about assessment systems and practices. Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not yet discussed? What would you like to add?

Teacher Interview Protocol May 1999

Let's begin with kind of a reminder of the kinds of things that we've participated in this year. If you recall, we began with the matrix activity in which we tried to layout the various audiences with which we communicate and the assessment tools from which we get information to communicate to those audiences. We concluded that activity with kind of a summary of the information needs of the various audiences. Then we all participated in the CIERA survey and we got a sense of our collective views on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. From there, if you recall, we began to focus on writing and a school wide assessment tool as our focus for the year. In that process we have worked together as a faculty in grade level groups and cross grade groups to design, implement, and score a school wide writing assessment. We've reflected on this process (reminder the PMQ meeting). We've reviewed anchor papers. In March, we moved from assessment to its implications for instruction. And now we're moving into the second round of school wide writing assessment- with that as background. Let's take stock of your current thinking about assessment practices, issues, and this project in particular.

- Let's begin by looking inside your classroom and your current set of assessment practices. Thinking back to our interview in the fall, what I'm interested to know is whether or not you have changed or are thinking about changing or adding to any of the assessment practices you started the year with? By practices, we mean assessment tools, procedures, ways of reporting and communicating with various audiences, or the way you use assessment in your classroom. (Of the tools you currently use, which of the tools that you use to do you find most helpful and the least helpful for instructional decisions and placing students in special programs?)
    - If we asked this question about the whole school, rather than just your classroom, how would you answer it?
- In the fall, one of the questions we asked was sort of an ideal world question. That is, we asked you, not limiting yourself to the tools you currently use, what additional information about student performance and literacy would you like to have? Because we've explored assessment throughout the year, I'm interested in knowing your current response to this ideal world question.
    - If we asked this question about the whole school, rather than just your classroom, how would you answer it?
- What do you think is the most important assessment change that occurred this year?

- What was your goal in participating in this assessment project? How would you evaluate progress in meeting the goal? Where would you like to see us go next?

- Let's look at your favorite assessment. Tell us about it. Where did you learn about it? What do you use it for? How do you use it? Why do you like it?

- One of the questions we asked you in the fall is what in your view you would like to see included in an assessment system for Westchester. I'd like you to revisit that question in light of the issues we've confronted and the activities we have carried out this year. Now, after eight months in this project, what would you say should be included in an assessment system for Westchester?

- One issue that has emerged in our discussions has been the question of similarity and differences in assessments across grade levels. What is your thinking about that issue? What would you like to see as common to all grade levels? How do you think the assessments should differ across grade levels?

- Now let's turn to our primary focus for this year, the school wide writing assessment. I would like to get your views about the impact of the writing assessment. (So what do you think? Is it helping us achieve our goals? Is it getting in the way? Has it been a useful exercise for us to engage in as a whole staff?) One of the reasons we undertook this project was to increase the usefulness of our assessment tools for informing instruction. How do we need to reshape the project to increase our chances of meeting this school wide goal? (Here are some things we could think about: bring in new tools, examine cases of how individual teachers use data to inform instruction, more time for professional development, develop more rubrics for other areas such reading and oral language.) Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not discussed? What would you like to add?

Teacher Interview Protocol May 2000

Let's begin with kind of a reminder of the kinds of things that we've participated in this year. We started the year with the "2-4 Question Some More" activity, where teachers were asked to complete the following two statements: "This information lets me know..." and "But it doesn't tell me about..." We also took a creative spelling test given by Jean Philo at one of the staff meetings, where our goal was to brainstorm what shows evidence of good spelling skills. In order to explore this spelling issue further, we did an exercise related to high frequency/common patterns, and discussed the issue of creating a developmental continuum that spans from the earlier grades to the later grades. We got together in grade level pairs to assess papers that were scored a 2,3, or 4 on the writing prompt, looking for connections between students' spelling ability and everyday writing, and comparing our results with speller categories outlined by Kathy Ganske in her developmental spelling assessment. We read parts of an article entitled "Questions teachers ask about spelling" (Templeton and Morris, 1999), and did a jigsaw activity. That's a quick summary of some of the things that we did at this year's staff meetings.

Now, let's take stock of your current thinking about assessment practices, issues, and this project in particular.

1. Let's begin by looking at your current classroom assessment practices and how they may have changed since last year. By assessment practices, we mean assessment tools, procedures, ways of reporting and communicating with various audiences, or the way you use assessment in your classroom and your current set of assessment practices. Have you made any changes in your assessment practices since last spring? If you have, how would you describe them? Are you thinking about changing or adding to any of the assessment practices you started the year with? (Which of the tools that you use do you find most helpful and the least helpful for instructional decisions and placing students in special programs?) If we asked his question about the whole school, rather than just your classroom, how would you answer it? In other words, which tools do you think the staff as a whole find most useful and least useful?

2. In the fall, one of the questions we asked was sort of an ideal world question. That is, we asked you, not limiting yourself to the tools you currently use, what additional information about student performance and literacy would you like to have? Because we've explored assessment throughout the year, I'm interested in knowing your current response to this ideal world question. If we asked this question about the whole school, rather than just your classroom, how would you answer it?

3. One of the questions we asked you before was what in your view you would like to see included in an assessment system for Westchester. I'd like you to revisit that question in light of the issues we've confronted and the activities we have carried out this year. Now, what would you say should be included in an assessment system for Westchester?

4. How are others (such as students, parents, community members, and board members) being informed about assessment-related changes that are occurring at Westchester? Have methods of communication changed since the project began? Do you think students, parents, community members, and board members are receiving the information that they need? If not, how can we increase the communication?

5. We've been working on spelling a lot this year. How would you describe the direction we are taking? What is your concept of a spelling assessment system? What should be included in such a system? How has your concept of spelling changed, if at all, since we first started talking about this idea? (Probe: could mention specific aspects of staff meetings, such as the jigsaw activity, introduction of Ganske assessment)

6. How has the introduction of the writing prompt influenced your classroom instruction? Describe the ways. Have you found the writing prompt useful, and how (So what do you think? Is it helping us achieve our goals? Is it getting in the way? Has it been a useful exercise for us to engage in as a whole staff?)

7. Let's talk a little more about the overall assessment project. When we started our project, we spent some time as a staff thinking about project goals. What was your personal goal in participating in this assessment project? How would you evaluate progress in meeting the goal? Where would you like to see us go next?

8. How would you describe your role in the professional development activities at Westchester? What types of professional development activities have involved you the most? When we began the project we asked the staff to make a decision about their level of involvement in the project. Are you as involved as you would like to be, or are you more involved than you would want to be? How has your involvement changed over the first two years? How would you describe the role of the CORE Planning Team? How would you evaluate the importance of having a planning team?

9. As we've looked at the earlier interviews we've noticed two themes. Many teachers have talked about the importance of having a clear developmental continuum on which to assess individual student growth, and many teachers have talked about the importance of describing expectations for student performance on a grade-level continuum. They want a system that shows how learning in one grade level builds on the learning in a previous grade level and

provides the foundation for learning in the next grade level. What is your opinion on these themes? Do you agree that we need to address both? How would you assess our progress towards both of these goals?

10. What, in your opinion, are the strongest and weakest points of the CIERA project? What would you like to see that has not been included? How do we need to reshape the project to increase our chances of meeting the school wide goal of an assessment system? (Here are some things we could think about: bring in new tools, examine cases of how individual teachers use data to inform instruction, more time for professional development, develop more rubrics for other areas such reading and oral language.)

11. Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not discussed? What would you like to add?

Teacher Interview Protocol May 2001

1. I'd like to begin by asking you to share your views of our journey over this past year as we've continued to build a school-wide assessment system. Here is a timeline of some of the things we've done since May of last year (*show 2000-2001 timeline*). How have these activities fit into your classroom?

2. Now I'd like to hear your views of the longer journey that started two years ago. This second timeline lists some of the things we've done over the course of the entire project (*show project timeline*). As you look over the timeline, describe how these activities have fit into your own classroom.

3. As you consider how this journey of building a school-wide assessment system has fit into your own classroom, how would you describe where you are in terms of your capacity to use assessment to learn more about student progress?

4. Now I'd like to ask you to consider the broader school goals as they are listed on this sheet (*show school goals*). As you think about these goals and about what we've done in the process of building an assessment system (*refer to project timeline*), how do you think we've done in terms of meeting school goals? Where would you like to see us go next?

5. How can we now broaden our focus to include not only assessment, but also the *communication of* assessment? How are students, parents, other Leslie teachers, community members, and board members being informed about assessment related changes that are occurring at Westchester? Have methods of communication changed since the project began? Do you think these other people are receiving the information that they need? If not, how can we improve communication?

6. *(If this is just the teacher's second interview, ask this version of the question)*: We've continued to work on spelling a lot this year. How would you describe the direction we are taking? How has your concept of spelling changed, if at all, since we first started talking about this idea? (*Probe: Could mention specific aspects of staff meetings*) *(If the teacher's been around since the project began, ask this version of the question):* Now that we are into our second year of working on spelling, we are curious about how your views of spelling may be evolving through the process. Has your concept of spelling changed since we last spoke? If so, how?

7. (*This question can be skipped if it was addressed in questions 1 – 4*) How has the implementation of the writing prompt influenced your classroom instruction? How is it helping us to achieve our goals (*refer to school goals*)? On a scale from 1 to 5, one being not very useful and five being very useful, how would you rate the writing prompt as an exercise for the whole staff?

Why do you say so? Are you using information gleaned from the writing prompt? What is it telling you about student writing? How are you using that information? Can you provide a specific example of something you learned about the writing of a particular student and how you used that information to guide your instructional response to that student? *(If possible, bring sample(s) to the interview that will help illustrate your answer to this question.)*

8. An outsider sitting in one of our staff meetings might describe our work as a professional development project, rather than an assessment project. Some professional development aspects of the project include staff meetings, collaborative meetings, (*if CORE member, list Core Group planning meetings*), and informal conversations with colleagues. Which of these activities have worked to advance your knowledge and level of comfort with assessment? Can you describe the ways in which these activities have been helpful? What other experiences might we add to make it better for you? How would you describe the role of the CORE Planning Team? How would you evaluate the importance of having a planning team?

9. As we've looked at the earlier interviews and participated in staff meetings, we've noticed a few themes. One issue we've started to explore is how teachers are using assessment information to meet individual student needs. What do you do (or what would you hope to do) in your classroom to meet individual student needs? What is done (or what do you hope can be done) in the school as a whole?

10. What other assessment tools do we need to add to our assessment system to get a complete picture of where we are in language arts?

11. Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not discussed? What would you like to add?

Timeline of Westchester Staff Activities:

APRIL 1998
This meeting was held to help the staff gain an understanding of the purpose of **CIERA** and to make sure the group was "on board".

JUNE 1998
Core Team Planning Group is established to act as facilitators for people needing help on questions and to give guidance as to which direction we are headed.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1998
The **goals** for the Westchester project are discussed, (1) to create and implement classroom assessment plans for grades k-4, (2) to identify performance standards that are aligned with the Leslie English Language Arts Curriculum for each grade level and link them to assessment tools, (3) to design a plan for reporting student progress to all constituents-students, parents, teachers, school-board members and administrators, (4) to design strategies for using assessment results to plan instruction and increase student literacy and (5) to identify a set of pilot assessment tools to use in a school-wide assessment system. The group then discussed what questions **clients** would want to have answered from the assessment information they received and created a list of assessment tools used to inform each of the stakeholders.

OCTOBER 19, 1998
The **CIERA Literacy Survey** was distributed to the staff to verify current practices, to discover what the staff believes about literacy and to gain an understanding of current grade level practices. Teachers continued their discussion of stakeholder needs and the notion of giving a building-wide writing assessment was briefly discussed.

NOVEMBER 24, 1998
Writing prompt procedures are discussed as well as reasons for administering it (i.e., to standardize instruction across the grade level and to develop an organizational approach to writing).

JANUARY 26, 1999
The staff participated in the **PMQ** activity, where grade level groups discussed the "pluses" and "minuses" of holistic scoring in addition to any questions that remained.

FEBRUARY 1, 1999
The staff discussed the results of the CIERA literacy survey, including what they were surprised to find, findings that were verified, and questions that were raised with regard to assessment, curriculum and/or professional development.

MARCH 19, 1999
The staff created a timeline of events (**Assessment Work Milestones** activity) occurring between April 1998 and March 1999 and focused their discussions on why certain activities were used at meetings and how they helped them as a staff. The group also talked about the components of writing (i.e., Ideas and Content, Organization, and Style: Sentence Structure, Word Choice, Voice and Conventions) and discussed how the writing assessment could drive instruction in the classroom.

MAY 17, 1999
Grade level adaptations to the writing prompt were discussed and followed by a brainstorming session on what should be the focus of the next literacy assessment.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1999
"2-4 Question Some More" activity: Teachers got together in groups and were asked to complete the following two statements about Year 1 writing prompt results: "This information lets me know..." and "But it doesn't tell me about...". An example from this activity is "This information lets me know trends as a grade level, but it doesn't tell me about teaching steps for individuals.

OCTOBER 19, 1999
One teacher gave a **"creative spelling test"** at the staff meeting. She asked everyone to spell the words assessment, research, participation, convey, successfully. Next, using these spelling words, she presented the group with the following statement: "Research proves that increased participation in the writing process better enables the learner to convey their thoughts and ideas successfully". The goal during this activity was to brainstorm what shows evidence of good spelling skills. The staff identified and discussed spelling program needs.

NOVEMBER 16, 1999
In order to explore the issue of spelling further, we did an **exercise related to high frequency/common patterned** words. We showed the full text of a 4th grade MEAP passage, and identified the use of high frequency words, common patterns, and uncommon words that were not included in those two groups. We then discussed the possibility of creating a developmental continuum that spans from the earlier grades to the later grades.

JANUARY 18, 2000
We got together in grade level pairs to assess papers that were scored a 2,3,4 on the writing prompt, looking for connections between students' spelling ability and everyday writing.

FEBRUARY 15, 2000
We read parts of an article entitled "Questions teachers ask about spelling" (Templeton and Morris,1999), and did a **jigsaw activity**. Teachers formed groups and read the introduction of the article together. Next, each group brainstormed responses to one of the many questions raised in the article. They shared their responses with the full group afterwards.

MARCH 17, 2000
Teachers were walked through **Kathy Ganske's "Developmental Spelling Analysis"** assessment. The staff scored, in grade levels groups, a portion of the assessment administered to a sample of students earlier in the week, and were asked to ponder what they learned about their students from the assessment. Later, three teachers shared their stories and experiences administering parts of the assessment to their respective classes.

MAY 22, 2000
Staff is introduced to the **components of a comprehensive spelling program**-one that provides them with information upon which to make instructional decisions, one that provides them with learning activities that are developmentally appropriate, and one that provides them with a school-wide monitoring system-as well as a plan for developing the curriculum. Grade level groups were also asked to think more about the school-wide writing assessment (e.g., How do we organize the information we're getting from the prompt? How do we use it to inform our instruction? How do we communicate more effectively with students?).

JUNE 12, 2000
A **spelling committee** is formed to identify common phonograms, high frequency words, and morphemes (prefixes, affixes and suffixes) for grade level spelling lists. The group discussed how to choose words, the number of words that should be included in a bank, the number of words to test children on, and the reliability of the Developmental Spelling Analysis (Ganske, 2000).

AUGUST 23, 2000
Spelling committee finalized what would be presented to the entire staff at the first meeting. They decided which of Ganske's word features would serve as the **core** for each of the grade level programs.

SEPTEMBER 25, 2000
Goals for the spelling curriculum were articulated to the entire staff: 1) Developing a curriculum (and assessment system) that cuts across all grade levels, 2) Designing a formative assessment that identifies student progress along a continuum of developmental stages and grade level benchmarks, 3) Developing instructional strategies that help students progress from one developmental stage to the next, 4) Developing a summative assessment, 4) Developing instructional strategies that help students generate correct spellings

of new words based on knowledge of spelling patterns, 5) Designing an application spelling assessment that focuses on how students apply spelling knowledge in their everyday writing. Members of the committee explain the grade level components of the curriculum and assessment system.

OCTOBER 16, 2000
Staff brainstormed a means of reporting spelling information to parents, reflected on the benefits of the school-wide writing assessment, and pondered the need for more professional development in writing. A vote was taken on what the next workshop topic should be and the majority chose voice.

NOVEMBER 20, 2000
The group is presented with numerous definitions and examples illustrating **voice** and is asked to explore voice in student papers in cross grade level groups. After identifying and listing the characteristics of voice that surfaced in the papers they discussed activities that could be used to promote that element of writing.

JANUARY 29, 2001
The staff met in grade level groups to examine student writing and identify characteristics in the samples to help them develop a list of grade level expectations. Afterwards, each grade level shared their lists to create a **continuum of expectations** for student writing across the grade levels.

FEBRUARY 26, 2001
The staff reviewed a draft of the **continuum of expectations for student writing** across the grade levels that was started at the last meeting. Then the group participated in a written and oral reflection activity in which they considered how the writing prompt has influenced their writing instruction and what goals they have. The staff discussed how they use the results from the Developmental Spelling Analyses.

MARCH 19, 2001
Each staff member was given a passage from the Stanford-9 along with 1 of 5 different types of **reading comprehension** assessments—oral retelling, multiple choice test, short answer test, summarizing task, or relating the passage to their personal experience. Individuals were asked to discuss their experience with the particular assessment format they were given. For example, what sorts of feelings did it evoke? How did the format influence the way they read the text? What aspects of their understanding could the format measure? How might the format either facilitate or interfere with their ability to accurately assess comprehension? And finally, at what grade levels would the format be appropriate?

APRIL
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APRIL 23, 2001
After reading **"Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension"** (Duke & Pearson, 2001), the staff discussed and recorded the types of comprehension strategies they use in their classrooms.

Teacher Interview Protocol May 2002

1. Thinking back across the 4 years of this project I'd like you to reflect on the products we've created (i.e., the assessment tools we've developed) and the processes we've used to create these products (i.e., the activities we've engaged in at staff meetings, the discussions that have taken place outside of staff meetings during collab time or more informally). What parts of this project have been most valuable and rewarding to you and why?

2. When we started this assessment project we began with a model that delineated three types of involvement in the school change process. Teachers at the first level would participate in staff decisions and implement assessment tools, teachers at the second level, in addition, would allow us to observe classroom instruction and interview students from their classes, and teachers at the third level (the Core Planning Team) would be committed to facilitating the professional development process. These distinctions were never meant to be static, as individuals' roles change over time, as they've done here. From what you've experienced, how would rate the effectiveness of this division of responsibility? What roles have you assumed in this process? Would you consider yourself an active participant in this project? Why/why not? Have you participated in this process to the degree you would have liked? If no, why not?

3. Prior research and experience has revealed that school change can be quite challenging without the appropriate leadership. Are there particular individuals within and/or outside of the school who have been particularly helpful in facilitating change? If yes, who are these individuals, what qualities do they possess, and how have they helped?

4. One of our goals since the start of this project was to develop a model of school change that could perhaps be used in other school districts. If we were to use this model in another school, what components would be worth keeping and what components might we have to change?

5. Our observations, interviews and informal conversations with you reveal that there has been some change here at Westchester. How would you describe the impact this project has had on the whole school? You might consider curricular changes, including assessment and material adoption and/or abandonment, levels of communication among staff members, the structure and content of other staff meetings outside of CIERA involvement, and the overall school environment.

6. How do you think this project has influenced your own knowledge of content, assessment and instruction? How would you describe your own growth and progress in understanding issues of literacy assessment? What evidence do

you see of that growth and progress (e.g., look at your teaching practices, the conversations you have had with others, the products you've created, etc.) Are there things you've learned as a result of this project that you wished you would have known prior to becoming a teacher? Explain. Has this project encouraged you to engage in other kinds of professional development? For example, have you sought out or are you hoping to seek out readings or conferences around literacy related topics?

7. How has the implementation of the writing prompt influenced your classroom instruction? How has it helped you meet individual student goals and the goals you've set for all children in your classroom? What is the information gleaned from the writing prompt telling you about student writing? How are you using that information? How do you know what to teach next? Can you provide a specific example of something you learned about the writing of a particular student and how you used that information to guide your instructional response to that student? *(If possible, bring sample(s) to the interview that will help illustrate your answer to this question.)*

8. How has the implementation of Kathy Ganske's Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA) influenced your classroom instruction? How has it helped you meet individual student goals and the goals you've set for all children in your classroom? Are you using information gleaned from the DSA? What is it telling you about student spelling? How are you using that information? How do you know what to teach next? Can you provide a specific example of something you learned about the spelling of a particular student and how you used that information to guide your instructional response to that student? *(If possible, bring sample(s) to the interview that will help illustrate your answer to this question.)*

9. Over the last four years we've talked about the school-wide assessments that we've been creating and implementing, though we haven't talked much about the more informal assessments that are frequently used in the classroom such as anecdotal records, checklists, teacher made tests, assignments, student-teacher conferences, etc. What kind of informal assessments do you use to assess literacy in your room? How would you rate the usefulness of these assessments in helping you to make instructional decisions? How does their utility compare to the school wide writing and spelling assessments?

10. To what extent do you use assessments to evaluate your own instruction? What kinds of information do you rely upon when making decisions as to whether or not a student has met or is working towards meeting a particular standard or instructional goal? Do you factor in information you receive from other teachers, the student's home life, whether or not the student happened to have a bad day, motivation, etc. Please explain.

11. If you were to apply for another teaching position (and we are not, by any means, encouraging you to do so) and were putting together a professional portfolio, what would your assessment section look like? To elaborate, what would you tell a potential employer about your views on literacy and literacy assessment? How would you describe your teaching and assessment philosophy? What issues are you passionate about in relation to literacy assessment?

12. Please describe the impact, if any, that this project has had on student learning. How have the school-wide writing and spelling assessments affected student learning?

13. How would you describe the impact this project has had on parents' understandings of curriculum and their children's progress? How would you describe the impact this project has had on the school board's understanding of curriculum and school progress? What challenges and successes have you encountered when reporting curricular changes and student progress to parents, students, other teachers, and board members?

14. Although we've spent much of this year focusing on writing and spelling we have managed to continue our discussion of reading comprehension which began at the end of last year and which will likely consume most of our time next year. How would you describe the direction we are taking? Where would you like to see us go next?

15. Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not discussed? What would you like to add?

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