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MAKING THE BEST OF IT:
CONDITIONS FOR OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
AND EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By

Kelly Reffitt

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ABSTRACT

MAKING THE BEST OF IT: CONDITIONS FOR OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By

Kelly Reffitt

This dissertation examined literacy achievement in first through fifth grades in a rural elementary school. Grounded in the social theory of literacy and learning and the traditional research on effective schools and classrooms, this work identified the potential components that created conditions for student literacy achievement, despite the challenges that the rural school faced, especially poverty. The study addressed the following questions: Why are the students in this rural elementary school performing so well on the state language arts assessment? What factors support high student achievement? How does the school community define the cultural models of schools, literacy, and learning? The study employed the qualitative inquiry approach of grounded theory combined with discourse analytic methods to conduct an in-depth case study of literacy skills and practices that contribute to students' ethical, social, and academic development. Results showed that school personnel helped meet students' physical, emotional, and social needs to create positive relationships that contributed to students' increased motivation, self-esteem, and resiliency. Staff provided effective literacy instruction with an emphasis on differentiation to satisfy students' academic needs. Educating the whole child led to students' academic achievement, good citizenship, and positive school experiences. The project will contribute to the paucity of mainstream research in rural education. In addition, it will increase the body of research on at-risk,

effective schools with a sociocultural perspective of schools and learning. Limitations of the study, including self-reporting and causal relationships, were discussed. Implications focused on teacher preparation, family advocacy, and administrative leadership.

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For Kathryn – all is for you.

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INTRODUCTION

Like all schools, rural schools have challenges. The implications of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation are demanding for all districts, specifically rural ones (Jimerson, 2004). Rural schools and districts are small with a low number of test-takers, creating statistical challenges when determining academic performance. Rural schools wrought with financial problems cannot compete with suburban and urban districts that offer higher teacher salaries. Also, some rural areas are suffering a population decline that reduces per-pupil state aid. The geographical isolation can be problematic for teacher recruitment, student support services, and accessibility to professional development opportunities for teachers. Furthermore, some rural schools are experiencing a rapid ethnic diversity and are finding it hard to educate students with limited English proficiency for the first time (Jimerson, 2004). Regardless, some rural schools, despite those challenges, excel.

How does a young child, even an at-risk child, growing up today in a rural community become proficient in literacy? Undoubtedly, there are many complex factors involved in a child's literacy development, such as the child's cognitive abilities, family, school, and the larger sociocultural community. Numerous studies on student achievement in literacy attribute academic success to schools with effective literacy teachers (Duffy, 2003; Knapp, 1995; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Pressley, Mohan, & Fingeret, 2005; Reffitt & Pressley, 2007). More generally, effective schools research over the last few decades has revealed school-level and teacher-level characteristics, such as

those pertaining to leadership, curriculum, assessment, expectations, classroom management, environment, and home-school relationships (Hoffman, 1991; Reynolds, Creemers, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2002; Shavelson & Berliner, 1988; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella, 2004; Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2005).

Historically, scholarship in rural settings has been underdeveloped. Why should educational research focus on rural schools? An overarching reason is the large number of students who attend our rural or non-urban schools. The Rural School and Community Trust, the country's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to issues surrounding rural communities and schools, reported that in 2002-2003, 12.5 million public school students (27%) attended school in communities less than 25,000. However, using the most conservative definition of rural -- communities in open country with a population of fewer than 2,500 -- 8.8 million students (19%) attended school in communities with a population of fewer than 2,500 in 2002-2003 (Johnson & Strange, 2005). Given the large number of students in our rural schools, we need to examine them more closely.

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover and identify characteristics contributing to literacy achievement for students at a high-achieving rural elementary school. Educators and other participants were able to speak for themselves to give their perceptions of what they believed lead to high literacy achievement. In order to contribute to the theoretical and practical knowledge base of literacy acquisition and to help fill a significant gap in the rural education literature, I used grounded theory to explore the combination of complexities that enabled them to outperform many of the other rural schools in the state. This study also sheds light on the heartbreaking and

painful realities that some of the students faced and how school personnel combated those challenges and fostered a safe, caring environment for children to learn, thrive, and be happy.

The following review of literature centers on research of effective schools, rural schools, effective literacy instruction, literacy development, and a comprehensive view of learning. The third section lays out the design and methods of the study, and the fourth section reveals the results, including discourse analysis of a home visit. Finally, the discussion section elaborates on the findings, includes the limitations of the study, and concludes with directions for future research.

PART ONE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The history of rural schools in the United States points to the lack of mainstream research conducted in these settings. In fact, rural schools became the enemy of some 19th-century school reformers and were viewed as old-fashioned and archaic amidst rapid economical, technological, and political changes. Some thought that rural schools could not serve as successful models for the institutionalization of public schools in America (DeYoung, 1987).

By the 20th century, many Americans and their leaders believed that the future of the country lay in urbanization and industrialization. Some say rural schools were poorly organized and inefficiently governed but hoped to define and implement positive rural characteristics, such as a sense of place, to educate “the whole child” as Dewey (1900) promoted. On the other hand, reformers felt the need to “improve” rural schools by documenting their inferiority and assuming them to be less intellectually stimulating, less desirable administratively, and less successful financially (DeYoung, 1987). Thus, the rural common school was taken away from the local community and forced to consolidate with other rural schools to create the one best system of education for all in this country (Tyack, 1974). Since that time, there has been sporadic interest in rural communities. Why?

Underdeveloped Rural Education Research

Given the historical background of research on rural education, a number of distinct approaches exist in current research trends on rural education that may contribute to the underdeveloped mainstream scholarship in this area: There is the Romantic view of

rural America as the 'bucolic village' with moral superiority, the preservation of rural institutions, and a rejection of everything urban; rural areas may be seen as undereducated, impoverished, culturally bankrupt, and without much economic or social value, so that consolidation of rural schools is the solution to all problems (Ward, 2003); rurality may be based on the model of deficiency, dysfunction, and irresponsibility that includes deficient cognitive abilities, deficient language, poor motivation, devaluation of education, and poor parenting skills (Purcell-Gates, 1990); and some may hold an elitist view, showing disdain for anyone not part of a diverse urban society, thus the rural community is extraneous and not worthy of concern or study (Ward, 2003). Since the number of rural schools has decreased in the last 75 years, attention has turned away from them and toward urban and suburban districts (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992).

A comprehensive abstract and review process conducted by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005, April 27) revealed that there was a lack of high quality rural research literature. In fact, after searching the ERIC and PsycInfo databases, they identified a total of 498 abstracts of various quality on K-12 rural education research studies conducted in the United States and published between 1991 and 2003. Sixty-six percent specifically studied rural education issues and 34% occurred incidentally in rural contexts. Programs and studies for students with special needs was the topic receiving the most journal articles. Many of the 40 abstracts relating to instruction compared academic achievement between rural and non-rural students. In addition, the group reported only one rural-specific study directly relevant to reading, three in reading programs and strategies, and two rural-specific studies dedicated to literacy development.

Studying Effective Rural Schools

Questions for this study emerged from my research practicum in 2005-06 in which an university professor and I examined effective literacy instruction in a rural school district, grades K-5, using grounded theory (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007). Based heavily on observational data, we discovered and identified school-level and teacher-level characteristics that promoted literacy achievement, which was supported by traditional effective schools research:

- *General Teaching Processes:* well-planned lessons; orderly environment with high expectations for student behavior and academic participation; much encouragement provided by teachers for behavioral and academic accomplishments; and high expectations for teachers in promoting student academic growth
- *Teaching through Direct Instruction:* direct explanations and modeling of literacy skills; and scaffolded application of literacy skills
- *Staffing:* experienced classroom teachers; special education teacher with much time spent on literacy skills; classroom instructional aides who tutor small groups or individuals; foster grandmothers who support the teacher and tutor students; and high school students who volunteer as teacher assistants and who sometimes work with individual students
- *Home-School Connections:* immediate student feedback on graded papers; notes and class newsletters sent home on regular basis; immediate notification to parents regarding missing assignments; and frequent interactions between parents

and teachers during special events, PTO meetings, school board meetings, and informal conversations in town

- *Progress Monitoring and Assessment:* STAR test associated with the Accelerated Reader program to determine student reading levels (three times per year); Stanford Achievement Test in the spring; state assessment in math, reading, and writing in grades 3, 4, and 5; and frequent classroom assessment on the curriculum
- *Heavy Skills Focus in Primary Grades:* letter-level instruction in kindergarten; systematic phonics instruction by first grade along opportunistic phonics; emphasis on sight words; study of word families in second grade; substantial workbook activities to support letter-, sound-, and word-level instruction; and explicit vocabulary instruction including opportunistic vocabulary
- *Substantial Skills Focus in Upper Grades:* significant skills instruction associated with workbooks/worksheets; vocabulary instruction (additional vocabulary instruction in grade 4); and extensive computer skill drill programs in some classrooms
- *Reading of Good Children's Literature and Content-Area Texts:* basal stories used primarily in grade one; combination of basal stories and trade books used in grade 2; substantial reading of trade books in grades 3, 4, and 5; a variety of read aloud methods with silent reading in upper grades; heavy emphasis of read –alouds and class discussions at grades 3, 4, and 5 for social studies and science texts
- *A Great Deal of Comprehension Instruction:* class discussions with teacher posing questions followed by students' responses; written comprehension responses;

vocabulary words connected to text; skills practiced often with social studies and science content; and constant reminders by teachers to use comprehension strategies as they are reading text

- *Participation of Accelerated Reader Program:* beginning in grade 1; individual student progress charted in class; grade level goals based on Accelerated Reader points; tangible rewards and salient notice of achievement; listed on report card to notify parents
- *Writing:* Focus on printing letters, whole group compositions of short passages, and beginning emphasis on capitalization and punctuation in grade 1; paragraph-to page- length writing by grade 2; and short stories and essays (about one page in length) in early grade 3; four and five paragraph essays, substantial practice of writing single sentences and one paragraph essays in late grade 3 and early grade 4; emphasis on details, voice, word choice, transitions, and various forms of writing in grade 4; complex planning, emphasis on ideas during the drafting phase, and high demand for mechanics, spelling, and organization on final drafts in grades 4 and 5; state test practice writing in grades 4 and 5; and writing skills practiced out of context beginning in grade 1
- *Oral Communications:* emphasis on responding in complete sentences with correct grammar beginning in grade 1; interviews and community presentations in higher grades; and explicit lessons on eye contact, volume, pace, enunciation, and posture

One missing factor in this district was the administrative leadership, since the principal played a minor role as instructional leader. Instead, distributed leadership among

teachers seemed apparent in the three different buildings. The Reffitt and Pressley (2007) study pushed me to think more broadly about literacy development and led me to examine multiple factors affecting literacy achievement in a rural school. Other than effective literacy instruction, what other factors contribute to students' literacy achievement in a high-achieving rural elementary school? Specifically, how are these factors manifested in the school?

Otherwise, only a small number of researchers have recently investigated rural elementary schools producing high literacy achievement (e.g., Mosenthal, Lipson, Sortino, Russ, & Mekkelson, 2002; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, Russ, & Mekkelson, 2004). Whereas economic status was not a factor in Reffitt and Pressley's (2007) school selection, Mosenthal and his colleagues (2002) studied the contexts and practices relating to reading achievement at six Vermont elementary schools serving low-, middle-, and high-socioeconomic status communities. Based on state literacy assessment data, two schools were identified as successful "beat the odds" rural schools. A team of six researchers conducted 8-15 daylong observations of each school with single observations of each K-4 classroom. They timed activities and interactions, created classroom maps and lists of materials, estimated the number of books in the classrooms, and tape-recorded and transcribed interviews with teachers and school administrators. Taylor et al. (2000) investigated school and classroom factors contributing to reading achievement in grades K-3 in 14 low-income schools across the U.S., of which four were rural and another four were small-town schools. Members of the research team assessed four readers per school on reading fluency and comprehension

and observed 5 times during an hour of reading instruction. Teachers completed written surveys and weekly logs of language arts/reading activities.

Generally, these researchers (Mosenthal et al., 2002; Taylor et al, 2000) found a balancing of skills instruction and holistic reading and writing activities. Teachers and administrators fostered a sense of self-regulation and responsibility in students, and parents had confidence in the school. Similarly, Mosenthal and his colleagues (2004) found that the effective schools had a constant commitment to literacy improvement by faculty and administrators. Teachers were frequently collaborative and maintained a high level of expertise and knowledge. Students were provided ample opportunities for independent reading and discussions. In the more successful rural schools, instructional strategies were consistent across grade levels and supplemental interventions were implemented for struggling readers. Transition time was kept to a minimum. Furthermore, teachers shared a common vision and often worked overtime to prepare effective lessons.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) studied the assets and challenges of small districts by visiting 25 randomly-selected districts with 300 to 3,000 students in 21 states. After observations of at least 50 K-12 classrooms and semi-structured, informal interviews of school-related participants, they found teachers who were dedicated to their students' academic and social development, often spending their own money and extra time helping students. These teachers remained hopeful of future economic prosperity in small towns where people desire to live and work and where small school districts prevail over large ones. There was a strong sense of community identity extending beyond regional differences and the school was the center of the community.

Research on Characteristics of Effective Schools

For the last thirty years, researchers have focused on effective schools and have used various methodological and theoretical perspectives to identify school-level and teacher-level factors that contribute to overall high student achievement. Literacy achievement is substantiated in the primary grades by a student's reading level, quality of writing, and performance on standardized assessments. Some of these researchers have highlighted schools where high student achievement is not to be taken for granted, such as in areas of poverty (Hoffman, 1991; Reynolds, Creemers, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2002; Shavelson & Berliner, 1988; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella, 2004; Johnson, 2002). These effective schools tend to have the following characteristics: (a) strong administrative leadership that focuses on instruction; (b) an evolving curriculum based on administrator and teacher reflections and improvements; (c) high expectations for student achievement with a clear school mission that focuses on academics; (d) safe and orderly learning environments; (e) frequent assessment of student progress; (f) excellent school and classroom management with much time on task; and (g) supportive and encouraging environments with positive home-school relationships.

Researchers from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (2005) identified the key components of success in high-performing, high-needs (HPHN) schools (e.g., leadership, instruction, professional community, and school environment), often called "beat the odds" schools. Barley and Beesley (2007) followed up with an exploratory study of HPHN rural schools expecting to find similar results with contextual differences. The rural schools (one elementary and three high schools) were identified as

HPHN based on state assessment scores and free and/or reduced-price lunch rates.

Findings were consistent with other studies on effective schools in all school settings.

Interestingly, individual case studies revealed trusting community-school relationships that facilitated principal leadership and high expectations.

Effective Literacy Instruction

Literacy is a highly contested term among educational researchers and society at large. I adopted the National Literacy Act's (1991) definition of literacy: an "individual's ability to read, write, speak English, compute, and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (National Literacy Act, 1991). For the purposes of this study, effective literacy instruction will be defined as instructional practices that produce high student achievement in assessment data from quantitative studies and evidence of achievement from qualitative studies (Allington & Johnson, 2002). Recent studies of effective elementary teachers, specifically those effective in promoting literacy (Duffy, 2003; Knapp, 1995; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Pressley, Mohan, Bogeart, & Fingeret, 2005; Reffitt & Pressley, 2007), claim that effective teachers do the following:

- Keep most of the students highly engaged throughout various activities that require them to think and that involve authentic reading, writing, and meaningful conversations.
- Teach skills explicitly, and reteach if needed, by modeling, explaining, and guiding student practice.

- Integrate skills teaching with the reading of quality literature and related writing activities. Thus, there is a definite balancing of skills instruction and holistic literacy activities along with scaffolded application of those skills.
- Practice the literacy skills across content areas like science, social studies, or math.
- Make high academic demands while fostering student self-regulation, independence, and internal motivation (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004).

Contributors to Literacy Development

Of course, parents' contributions cannot go unrecognized in this type of research. Emergent literacy foregrounds this study in that children's knowledge and skills emerge developmentally as they observe literacy experiences in their daily lives prior to formal instruction (Purcell-Gates, 1995). Their early language experiences greatly contribute to their vocabulary growth and subsequent literacy achievement in elementary school (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Morrison and his colleagues (2005) claim that the complex development of a child's literacy skills involves several factors, such as the family, the school, and the larger sociocultural community. They use Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological approach to literacy development, which depicts the child in the center encircled in broader, yet related, forces. According to this diagram, the proximal, or most immediate, influences on a child are the family, the school, and the local community, including peers. Of course, the most important setting for a child is the family environment, since that is where most of the child's time is spent. The distal sources, or the more remote influences, include the local government (school board and district), the parent's workplace, mass

media, and dominant beliefs. Even though distal influences impact a child's literacy development, the proximal sources of the parents and the school play larger roles. A child's literacy development is determined by what he or she experiences in these settings.

Educating the Whole Child

A comprehensive approach to learning recognizes not only academic achievement but also students' physical, emotional, and social development. These elements are supported by Maslow's (1943) classic hierarchy of needs that provides a theory of personality and human motivation. The five levels of basic needs are:

- ❑ Physiological needs: food, water, oxygen, sleep, and a relatively constant body temperature;
- ❑ Safety needs: security of body, employment, resources, morality, family, health, and property;
- ❑ Social needs: love, affection, and a sense of belonging in supportive relationships;
- ❑ Needs for esteem: self-esteem, confidence, achievement, and respect of and by others; and
- ❑ The need for self-actualization, which is the need to find self-fulfillment and realization of one's potential: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem-solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts.

In this taxonomy, often presented as a pyramid, the more primitive needs are grouped at the bottom of the pyramid; a person does not feel the higher need until the lower need has been fulfilled. Beyond the five levels of basic needs, higher levels exist that include the need for understanding, aesthetic appreciation, and spiritual needs. However, Alderfer's

(1969) revision of Maslow's theory (e.g., ERG theory- Existence, Relatedness, and Growth) claims that more than one need may motivate someone simultaneously and that access to the higher level need does not require complete satisfaction in the lower level need; the frustration-regression principle of the ERG theory states that if a higher level need remains unsatisfied, the person may regress to lower level needs that appear easier to fulfill. Others argue that human needs are non-hierarchical (Wahba and Bridgewell, 1976; Max-Neef, M.A., Elizalde, A., & Hopenhayn, M., 1991).

Character Education

The U.S. Department of Education and the National Education Association agree that schools have the dual responsibility of contributing to students' academic performance and character education (Benninga et al., 2006). The No Child Left Behind legislation has expanded funding for character education grants from \$8 million to \$24 million. In fact, the U.S. Secretary of Education announced in July 2006 that 13 states, including Michigan where this study was conducted, and the District of Columbia would share \$15.5 million in grants to implement character education programs that not only train educators how to teach students core ethical concepts, like responsibility and respect for others, but involved the parents and community. Secretary Spellings said, "Lessons in responsibility and respect are just as integral to a well-rounded education as lessons in reading, math, and science" (U.S. Department of Education, Public Affairs, July 26, 2006).

The multiple definitions of character often problematize the implementation of character education programs. The word, *character*, is one of those terms used in education, like *facilitator*, *partnership*, or *curriculum*, that has different meanings in

different contexts. In this study, I prefer to embrace a comprehensive definition of character and character development that seeks to build students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. I adopted the basic principles of the Character Education Partnership (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian coalition of people and organizations committed to develop effective character education in K-12 schools. Core ethical values (e.g., caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others) and performance values (e.g., diligence, a strong work ethic, and perseverance) form the basis of good character. These may be referred to as virtues or character traits. The authors explain:

A school committed to character development stands for these values... defines them in terms of behaviors that can be observed in the life of the school, models these values, studies and discusses them, uses them as the basis of human relations in the school, celebrates their manifestations in the school and community, and holds all school members accountable to standards of conduct consistent with the core values.

They affirm human dignity and meet the classic test of reversibility (i.e., Would you want to be treated this way?). Educators look at themselves through a moral lens to assess how everything that goes on in the school environment affects the character of students. They foster caring relationships among students within and across grade levels, among staff, between students and staff, and between staff and families. There is a climate of concern and respect for others. Educators find “natural intersections between the academic content they wish to teach and the character qualities they wish to develop” (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007, p. 3). They foster students' intrinsic motivation without excessive emphasis on extrinsic incentives or threats of punishment, and students are socially recognized for prosocial actions (e.g., “Thank you for waiting on me. That was a thoughtful thing to do.”). The same values that govern the students also govern the adult

members of the school community. Finally, educators foster shared moral leadership, engage families and community members in character-building efforts, and assess the character of the school, as needed.

Many schools are hesitant to embrace additional initiatives that may detract from the increased attention on standards-based accountability and academic achievement. There is not a definite causal relationship between character education programs and academic achievement; however, a growing body of research, supports the idea that a high quality character education can promote academic achievement (Benninga et al., 2006; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Chang & Munoz, 2006,).

Character education and academic achievement are not mutually exclusive goals. Benninga and his colleagues (2006) found that the good schools infused character education throughout the school, as well as, across the curriculum. Staff modeled and promoted the values they wanted the students to embrace, such as fairness, equity, caring, and respect. Another study found teacher strategies that helped raise student consciousness, such as listening, genuinely praising signs of improvement and mastery, and acknowledging student perspectives, but did not detract time from curricular components (Reeve & Hyungshim, 2006).

Poverty and At-Risk Children

The link between poverty and poor physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development is well documented. Since Lyndon Johnson declared his “War on Poverty,” in his first State of the Union address in 1964, subsequent legislation created federal, state, and local programs to help the economically disadvantaged, such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and Head Start. However, the poverty rate has continued to

remain steady since the 1970s. Today nearly 13 million children in America, or 1 out of every 6 children, live in poverty, and this number has increased over one million since 2000 (Children's Defense Fund, 2008). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2008), "Every year that we keep children in poverty costs our nation half a trillion dollars in lost productivity, poorer health and increased crime."

Poverty is one characteristic that may identify a child as being "at risk," but how is "at-risk" specifically defined and what conditions, circumstances, and characteristics place a child in the at-risk status? Donmoyer and Kos (1993), who investigated policies, programs, and practices of at-risk students, describe these students as those who are more likely, or are at risk, of not completing high school or of completing high school "without the academic, social, and emotional skills to function as productive citizens and workers" (p. 8). In the early 1970s, these students were labeled "disadvantaged," a problematic term that encompassed diverse students with different types of problems and different kinds of problem-solving skills. At-risk students have been defined by their familial and personal characteristics, such as membership in an ethnic or racial minority, low economic status, a single parent in the home, and low educational attainment by one or both parents (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill (1989) as cited in Donmoyer and Kos , 1993).

Summary

From the literature on rural schools, effective schools, literacy development and instruction, and a comprehensive view of learning, we can conclude that:

- There has been sporadic, limited interest in rural education research.
- Despite the challenges of rural schools, effective school characteristics have been discovered and identified.

- Methodologically, studies about rural schools and literacy rely on interview and survey data, along with limited observations.
- My recent study on effective literacy instruction in a rural school district supports traditional research on effective schools and teachers, except the factor of administrative leadership (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007).
- Learning encompasses a student's physical, cognitive, and affective development and is influenced by the at-risk factors of poverty, familial characteristics, and parental education.

There are a variety of factors affecting a child's literacy development. This detailed study aims to contribute to the paucity of rural education research in two ways: theoretically, by using a sociocultural definition of literacy and learning while drawing on traditional research on effective schools, effective literacy instruction, and rural schools research; and methodologically, by applying grounded theory in combination with social linguistics to understand literacy practices and events in the rural community.

I employed a sociocultural lens by adopting the social theory of literacy. This theory emphasizes the embedded nature of literacy in social relationships and institutions (Street, 1984; Gee, 1992; Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and is part of the New Literacy Studies (as in Gee, 1996; Street, 1995, Barton, 1994). Simply put, New Literacy Studies (NLS) are based on the belief that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural practices (Gee, 2000). Unlike many NLS, I included traditional research on effective schools and teachers. Therefore, this investigation makes connections between traditional research on effective schools, teachers, and literacy

instruction, along with empirical data and social theory to explain students' literacy achievement.

I utilized qualitative grounded theory methodology that is supported by connecting data from observations and document/artifact analyses until no new conclusions are entering the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Researchers enter their studies with background knowledge that influences their viewpoints. For example, I grew up in small community. I have experience as an elementary classroom teacher and possess some prior knowledge about instruction and school environments. In addition, during the 2005-06 academic year, a colleague and I conducted a study on effective literacy instruction in another rural school district.

Research Questions

Less is known about literacy achievement in rural schools with an emphasis on observations, while employing a sociocultural lens. Therefore, I focused on the following research questions:

- Why are the students in a rural elementary school performing so well on the state language arts assessment?
- What factors support high student achievement?
- How does the school community define the cultural models of schools, literacy, and learning?

The school community included personnel, students, parents, and other members of the community who participate in events and activities at the school.

METHODS

Determining Rurality

Rurality had to be determined in order to identify rural schools in the state with exemplary reading and writing test scores. Census statistics have historically been divided into urban and rural categories and areas that were not categorized as urban became classified as rural areas. The definition of urban has changed over time due to changes in settlement patterns, data needs, and technology (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). A rural area is “any incorporated place or CDP [census designated place] with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants that is located outside of a UA [urbanized area]. A place is either entirely urban or entirely rural, except for those designated as an extended city” (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994, chap. 12, “Geographic Area Reference Manual). The U.S. Office of Management and Budget identified rural and non-rural counties in the state based on the 2000 U.S. Census. New Era Elementary is located in Oceana County, an identified rural county. It should be noted that the definitions of urban and rural are the Census Bureau’s terms and other agencies or groups may use these terms to classify areas based on different criteria (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994, chap. 12, “Geographic Area Reference Manual”).

Identifying a High-Achieving Rural School

In order to identify a rural, public elementary school with high achievement in literacy, I reviewed the state’s rural schools’ English Language Arts (ELA) Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) results for the past few years (Michigan Department of Education, 2008, MEAP Test Results). Based on this data, I established a list of Michigan’s top twenty rural public schools and New Era Elementary consistently

appeared on these lists. Their test scores from the ELA portions of the winter 2004, fall 2005, and winter 2005 state assessments were used to establish literacy achievement among rural schools. Subsequent scores corroborate their achievement in language arts (see Appendix A). State averages are included in the table. In 2007, the state changed the labels for each achievement level, so that Exceeded Standards became Advanced; Met Standards became Proficient; Basic Performance became Partially Proficient; and Apprentice became Not Proficient. However, I maintained the same labels for consistency.

I targeted high-achieving rural schools but did not identify them as high-needs, that is, schools whose percentage of free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) was higher than the state's FRPL mean (Barley and Beesley, 2007). However, New Era's percentage of FRPL exceeded the state's average FRPL in both years. The principal reported that the school's FRPL averages were 47% and 55% respectively for the 2006-07 and 2007-08 academic years; the state's averages were 35% and 37% respectively (State of Michigan, 2008)

Participants

This is the story of New Era Elementary, located in New Era, Michigan and part of Shelby Public Schools.¹ The small community is situated on the western side of Michigan in Oceana County near picturesque Lake Michigan. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, New Era has a population of approximately 460 people. About 37% obtained a high school diploma (or equivalency), 26% had some college with no degree, about 6%

¹ I have permission to use the real names of the school and school personnel. All names of students and parents have been changed to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Initials have been used on student poetry.

received an associate's degree, and slightly over 15% received a Bachelor's degree. About 96% of the population is White with almost half the population having Dutch or German ancestry. The median household income is about \$46,000. Approximately 44% of the school's students were economically disadvantaged (Standard & Poor's, 2007). In the fall of 2006, the school enrolled 147 students in grades K-5 with only one class per grade. During the 2007-08 school year, kindergarten had been moved to another building, so the student population decreased to 120 students in grades 1-5 (Table 1).

In addition to the classroom teachers, the school also employed a special education teacher, three instructional assistants, a migrant/bilingual assistant, a computer/media specialist, a family advocate, an administrative assistant in the school office, and a principal (Table 2). Music, art, and physical education teachers, in addition to the speech therapist, rotated to different elementary buildings and did not participate in this study. The cafeteria workers and custodian also did not participate in this study. Therefore, they are not included in the demographic summary of school faculty and staff.

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, New Era Elementary won the state of Michigan's Golden Apple Award as the highest scoring Class C elementary school in the state based on their state standardized test scores, netting them a \$50,000 award. The school was awarded the Golden Apple Award again in the 2002-2003 school year for a second place ranking and gained \$25,000. Award funds were used to purchase books, technology equipment, and computer software. The award program was then phased out when the state of Michigan encountered financial problems. However, in September of 2007, the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence (MBLEE) chose New Era as one of the five high-performing elementary schools in the state and was chosen to

participate in the Michigan Best Practice Study conducted by the MBLEE and the National Center for Educational Accountability, a non-profit research organization and sponsor of Just for Kids. The school identification process was based on state assessment data and identified schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies for grades three through six (National Center for Educational Accountability, 2007).

MBLEE's executive director presented a banner to New Era during a school-wide assembly. He said, "We walked in this school today, and within 30 seconds, we knew we were in the right place... This school and the educators who lead it have refused to accept excuses and have worked hard to provide their students with a quality education." A featured story and colored photograph of the ceremony appeared on the front page of the local newspaper.

I made initial contact with the district superintendent and school principal in August 2006. At that time, I obtained verbal consent from both school officials to conduct the study during the 2006-07 school year and subsequent year, if necessary. In October 2006, I received written consent from the principal, and approval was granted on January 23, 2007, from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A one-year renewal was approved from the IRB on January 21, 2008.

Data Collection

I used data triangulation (Denzin, 1970) to enhance the persuasiveness and credibility of findings from the following data sources: 1) observations of classroom instruction and school activities/events, 2) ethnographic field notes, 3) audio recordings of interviews, conversations, and classroom observations, 4) video recordings of

observations, 5) faculty survey results on student achievement, and 6) a collection of artifacts, such as student work samples.

Observations and Field Notes

During the spring of the 2006-07 school year, I visited the school two days, mainly consisting of informal conversations with the principal, a tour of the school, and introductions to faculty and staff. I attended the Michigan Best Practice Study in Traverse City, Michigan, on June 19, 2007, along with the principal, superintendent, and curriculum director. The teachers preferred that I began classroom observations in the fall of 2007. Therefore, during the 2007-08 academic year, I observed each class in grades 1-5 for 1 ½ -3 hours and recorded field notes on my observations. Also, I observed and recorded the principal's interactions with students, teachers, and parents during the both academic years. I accompanied the family advocate on a home visit in December 2007 that was documented with field notes, photographs, and an audio recording. In sum, I observed 46 hours over 14 days from March 2007 to March 2008.

Because of the distance from my residence to the elementary school, I planned half-day or whole-day visits. I was sensitive to and attempted to record any aspect of teaching and learning that could have an impact on student achievement. So, I attended some non-classroom and special events, such as library and computer time, a school-wide assembly, a Science Family Fun Night, and a school board meeting.

Interviews and Conversations

I conducted informal interviews with teachers immediately following classroom observations, if possible. Typically, these conversations centered on the lesson or other classroom activities, procedures, and materials. Similar informal conversations occurred

in the office, the teacher's lounge, and even on the playground. In the spring of 2008, I conducted more formal, 30-45 minute interviews with the principal and teachers. Questions were generated based on previous observations and conversations (see Appendix B for teacher interview questions and Appendix C for principal interview questions). All interviews were audio-recorded, except for one teacher interview due to a mechanical difficulty, and I also took notes during the interviews. Two girls who participated in the Girls on the Run program and one parent volunteering in the school were informally interviewed; the interviews were audio-recorded and notes about their perceptions were recorded. In addition, in the spring of 2008, I recorded field notes from telephone conversations with a counselor from an outside agency who worked at the school and a former principal in the district who initiated the family advocacy program.

Audio and Video Recordings

I found that participants seemed at ease when I audio-recorded conversations and classroom interactions, as compared to videotaping events. Also, I was able to easily move from one speaker to another or one location to another with the audio recorder. I audio-recorded nearly 12 hours of conversations with faculty and staff, their interactions with students and each other, a conversation with a parent (Table 3). Time has been rounded to the nearest minute.

Audio recordings were stored on my laptop computer and copies were backed up on a disc and thumb drive. These recordings were organized into folders by speakers with some speakers having multiple recordings. I listened to each speaker's audio recording(s) multiple times and maintained a log of the principal's and family advocate's recordings because of their extended lengths. I documented the speaker's name, date, number, time

recorded, and notes about the recording, like 12-10-07, Principal #4 (4:17): Todd talking to 3rd graders about old radio show; focus is on kids' imaginations. This time-saving resource proved beneficial when I searched for specific topics or quotations to use in the dissertation. It also allowed me to link the data from my field notes by applying the same codes to the audio recordings. Portions were transcribed using Sony's Vision and Voice Editor computer software.

I video-recorded 45 minutes of school activities. Videotaped events consisted of a Math Blasters award ceremony in the third-grade classroom, recognition and award ceremony to third graders who excelled in the Walking Club, tour of the building, school-wide assembly, and student interactions with the principal. Videotaped observations were used to support the results.

Surveys

I administered a modified version of the Beliefs about School Achievement (BASA) survey (Georgiou , Stavrinides, & Panaoura , 2002) to teachers and the principal (see Appendix D for entire measure). This questionnaire was based on earlier research (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003; Tiedemann, 2000) about stereotypical thinking, such as socio-economic bias, and characteristics of student achievement (Georgiou , Stavrinides, & Panaoura , 2002). The original 20-item instrument produced five reliable factors (using Cronbach's alpha) about teacher attributions and student achievement: student ability (.72), student effort (.70), family, teachers (.79), and gender (.91). The term, gender, referred to a student's sex. Some examples of the statements on the BASA scale include: 'Children from rich families perform better at school than children from poor families'; School achievement is an

inherited talent'; and 'A child's achievement depends on the qualities of his/her teacher.' The questions on gender are related to mathematics, and I changed them to ones about literacy for the purposes of this study (Table 4). Other survey questions remained identical to the original survey. Answers included five-point Likert items: 1 = Absolutely Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Ambivalent, 4= Disagree, 5 = Absolutely Disagree.

Teachers completed the surveys anonymously in April 2008. I intended for the principal's survey to be completed anonymously, but his survey was accidentally omitted from the mailing. Therefore, he completed his survey in early May 2008 and mailed it to me. Simple statistical data analysis was performed on survey results using Excel[®] computer software (Table 5). The means and standard deviations were calculated for teachers' responses about each statement in order to make comparisons and contrasts with the principal's responses. Standard deviations are noted in parentheses. Factor means on student ability, student effort, family, teachers, and gender were calculated using the teachers' and principal's responses.

Artifacts

I analyzed multiple information published by the school and/or school district (e.g., assessment data, newsletters, school website), any reading and writing artifacts present in the common areas, hallways, and classrooms, and documents created by students and teachers. Photographs of various school events, artifacts, and the community were taken, such as the principal assisting students sledding at recess, a teacher reading to students, and students learning on the computer. Students in grades 3-5 and the principal wrote poetry based on my direction, which was to write a poem about where they are from to include descriptions about themselves, their families, and their

communities. The purpose of the poetry was to convey a sense of place about the rural community and its citizens.

Procedures for Analysis

The analysis was based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) procedures for open coding and method of constant comparison. Case study and grounded theory approaches recognize that a researcher comes to a study with background knowledge that can influence her point of view toward the object of study. I grew up in a small town and have taught in a small community. Also, I entered the study with disciplinary knowledge in education expected to heighten my sensitivity to school, curricular, and teaching variables that might account for literacy achievement in the school. However, every general conclusion was supported by multiple pieces of data.

Data analysis began after the first observation, and data was coded as it was collected. Categories were developed until no new major conclusions emerged. Field notes were coded with the abbreviations of the following categories: Sense of Place (SP), Educational Leadership (EL), Effective Teaching (ET) as part of students' cognitive domain, Home-School Connections (HSC), Technology (T), Poverty (P), Emotional Health (EH), and Physical Health (PH). Table 6 provides definitions and examples of categories that eventually led to the overall themes and conclusions of the study (e.g., educating the whole child and meeting students' physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs). I later incorporated the code of technology into effective literacy instruction. Also, home-school connections was later changed to home-school relationships in order to better explain interactions between school personnel and families.

Discourse Analysis

I transcribed a 40-minute audio recording of a home visit with the family advocate, a grandmother, and her three year-old granddaughter (see Appendix E for complete transcript) I used Gee's (1991) linguistic approach to narrative text to explain the structure with idea units, lines, stanzas, strophes, and parts, but I also used this structure to explain how it contributes to the meaning of the text. Transcriptions are structured into the hierarchically related bits of information Gee (1991) refers to as Level 1, line and stanza structure. Syntax and cohesion make up Level 2 and mark how they work together to tie to the interpretation (p. 28). I used Gee's (1991) Level 3, main line/off main line of plot to answer the questions: 'So what?' and 'What's the point or significance of this plot?' (p. 29). Level 4, psychological subjects, or main clause subjects, represent the narrator's point of view, whereas Level 5, the focusing system, uses the focused portions of the stanzas to generate themes or images and helps "build an overall interpretation of the narrative" (Gee, 1991, p. 33).

The transcription served two purposes for my data analysis: to discover elements that contribute to literacy achievement; and to help define the school community's terms of school, literacy, and learning, by using cultural models theory (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987). Cultural models are prototypical events in a simplified world that are ideological and involve one's values and beliefs about society but often go unrecognized and appear natural (Gee, 1996). In other words, cultural models "explain why and how things happen as they do and what they mean. These 'theories' (which are embedded not just in heads, but in social practices, texts, and other media) guide action, inform judgments of self and others, and shape ways of talking and writing" (Gee, 2000,

p. 181). The models vary across cultural groups, but more interestingly relevant to this study, they also vary within cultural groups who speak the same language (Gee, 1996).

After the results were analyzed, a draft was sent to the principal, family advocate, library/computer specialist, and teachers as a member check.

PART TWO

RESULTS

We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, "It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem." Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.

-- Mr. Fred Rogers

I studied New Era Elementary, a high-achieving rural school, to answer the following questions:

- Why are the students in a rural elementary school performing so well on the state language arts assessment?
- What factors support high student achievement?
- How does the school community define the cultural models of school, literacy, and learning?

These questions can be answered by taking a closer look at the themes that emerged from this study: the school's sense of place, educating the whole child, effective literacy instruction, administrative leadership, and relationships with families. Together, these elements contributed to the cultural models of school, literacy, and learning. The principal and his staff showed how to effectively educate the whole child – cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially – in a school where some children grapple with very serious family situations.

This school maintained high student achievement in literacy, but how did this happen? The diagram in Figure 1 represents a synopsis of what I learned at New Era Elementary and how the school contributed to students' academic success in literacy, good citizenship skills, like responsibility and patience, and positive school experiences.

The first box is Positive Relationships. This appeared to be key in fostering motivation and academic achievement. As Ruby Payne (1988) wrote in *The Framework of Poverty*, “The key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them,” (p. 34). At New Era, it was important to create positive relationships with all students, and I would argue that it included creating positive relationships with their families, too. In subsequent figures and chapters, I explain how the teachers, support staff, principal and family advocate all created positive relationships with students and their families. The second box of the diagram is increased student motivation where cognitive needs were satisfied with effective literacy instruction; positive relationships were maintained. The third box is the final result that shows students’ academic achievement in literacy, good citizenship, and positive school experiences. I use the diagram in Figure 1 as a template to show how students’ needs were met within each theme.

A brief overview of the school’s sense of place provides an introduction to the detailed aspects of how school personnel educated children with a holistic perspective and created positive school experiences. The reader will notice an asymmetry in the results provided for each theme. The heavy proportion of information about the principal and family advocate is intentional. We know a great deal about effective schools, classrooms, and teachers. Contributing factors have been well documented in a variety of settings. Therefore, I am documenting key features of effective instruction in order to emphasize the unique positions of the principal and family advocate. In fact, this is the first study to illuminate the family advocate’s role and discourse analysis of a home visit.

Chapter 1: Sense of Place

When I drove up to the school, I can't say that it looked much different than other small school buildings. The one-story brick building located in town was conveniently positioned just off the main highway. A few cars were parked in front of the building. When I entered the school, I quickly saw the small front office to the left and walked in, glad I made the long trek from the other side of the state to begin my data collection.

The School Secretary

By the spring of 2007, I had already talked to the principal, Todd Kraai, on the telephone to discuss the elements of the study and he had given me an overview of the school and his beliefs about leadership. He had explained that his son, Trav, or Mr. T as the students called him, worked as his administrative assistant and school secretary. Trav called me by name and warmly welcomed me to the school. I soon learned that the school secretary greeted visitors by name with sincere friendliness and was an integral part of the school community. Trav monitored students at lunch, often helping young children open their milk cartons. He ran errands, assisted with school technology needs and projects, and worked closely with Todd to readily and happily serve staff, students, and their families. In addition to his father, Trav was another positive male role model in the building. On several occasions, I noticed an older gentleman sitting in the office chatting with Trav, usually about the most recent sports news, and later learned it was his grandfather who stopped by after morning coffee to spend a few minutes with his grandson.

Trav regularly read the mail for Susan, a local resident with cognitive disabilities, whose sons attended New Era and were currently in college. "I'm not sure what's

garbage and what to send to ...Carl. He always checks my mail,” Susan told Trav.

Susan’s father, a multi-millionaire, did not financially support her. She told me, “My dad don’t give me money. Mailing stuff out is like, no.” So Trav often gave her stamps to mail important materials to her son at college.

Trav perused her mail and opened one envelope. “This is the one you want to keep,” he said. “This is your new one right here... You have to call and register this card. Do you want to do that? Do you want to keep the same pin number?” He called the credit card company to activate her new card. At other times, he completed forms for her to get food stamps. Todd later explained:

If it wasn’t for her school, she wouldn’t function. She wouldn’t know what to do anymore. She’s at a loss because her sons are away...Her son’s grandparents on her husband’s [ex-husband] side lived in Petoskey. They knew who was helping the kids, and they would stop to see us, even though they never had kids here...every year at Christmastime, and we would talk with them, Grandma and Grandpa Purcell. They would bring us gifts. I have them at home. She was an antique plate collector... and just would always say, “You don’t know how much we appreciate the fact that you work with the kids and work with Susan to try and have a normal home for those kids.” And...it’s pretty neat.

The Principal’s School Tour

The principal was unavailable when I arrived and was down the hallway talking to a student. I discovered as time passed that that was a common practice. The principal gave his time to children whenever there was a need, whether a child needed a band-aid, breakfast to eat, or a pat on the back for finally learning his multiplication facts. If a child needed him, he stopped what he was doing, even in the middle of a conversation with an adult, and remedied a child’s problem or fulfilled a request.

On my initial tour of the building on March 16, 2007, we walked past the gym that doubled as the cafeteria during lunch. I noticed a large aquarium and a poster, Career

of the Month: Respiratory Therapist, as the principal guided me down the main hallway. We stopped to talk to a child and Todd said, "Hey, Scott, what are you working on?" The young boy explained he was conducting some research, and Todd thanked the young man for the snack he brought him at school around 6:30 the previous night.

We saw another student in the hallway who asked, "Mr. Kraai?"

Todd answered, "What Patrick?"

"Can I throw the Frisbee during recess?" the young student asked.

Todd replied, "Yes, we can do it together."

Continuing the tour, the principal explained how he conducted formal classroom observations that were required by contract every 3 years for tenured teachers. He quickly transitioned to help another student:

Principal: Yes, Alysse?

Student: I need a band-aid.

Principal: Did you cut your fingernails recently or have you been chewing your fingernails? [Laughing] Do you chew your fingernails, Alysse? Do you? I think you do, don't you?

Student: I was bored –

Principal: [Chuckled] You were bored?

Student: -- in the classroom and then when the bell rang, I saw it.

Principal: Yep, I'll be down that way. Are you in Girl Scouts right now?

Student: No.

Principal: Why not?

Student: I don't know.

Principal: Why not?

Student: Because... I don't know.

Principal: Okay, I'm going to come down that way in just a minute, and when I come down, I'll get a band-aid and I'll put some first aid cream on it, okay? I'll make it feel better. Are you eating lunch right now?

Student: Na, I'm done.

Principal: Alright, I'll be down there.

Student: We're playing basketball.

Principal: Use the life skill of patience—

Student: Okay—

Principal: -- and I'll be with you in just a couple of minutes.

Student: Okay, thank you [as she walked away, happy, with a smile on her face].

Principal: Yep, you're welcome.

He then resumed the tour and started talking about their playground, never missing a beat, until he encountered another student on the playground, "Hey, Jeff, what's 3 x 3?"

The Stories about Hardship

Stories told by the principal and teachers revealed a school community where some students faced severe hardships. At New Era Elementary, some children were living in poverty and wrestling with issues of abandonment, abuse, neglect, and hunger. Some parents neither valued education nor practiced literacy skills at home with their children. Others did not possess the skills to help their children much at all. It was difficult for

students to concentrate on school when family situations burdened them. I heard this story from a teacher:

These children ... they way they come to us. They have such painful childhoods...I had a little boy in my classroom and every morning he'd be late for class... and I'd say, "Why are you so late?" He goes, "I was in the bathroom running my hands under the water." I said, "Why? You're late." Here was my thought --you're late, you're tardy, you're not getting your work done. He's like, "Our pipes froze and that warm water just felt so good. I just left my hands under the water." You want to cry because that's where they come to me from.

And I heard another story:

This one little guy brought his toothbrush in one day. "Can I brush my teeth?" "Sure" [the teacher said] and then later [she asked], "Why did you bring your toothbrush? Are you seeing the dentist today? Do I need to have a note? Are you leaving me?" He's like, "No, our pipes froze. I didn't have any water and I really wanted to brush my teeth, so I waited until I got to school to do it." To have the wherewithal as a third grader to bring the toothbrush, I thought that was pretty cool.

I heard several stories about incarcerated parents or siblings. One teacher reported:

You get kids whose parents are in prison. And here we are making Christmas presents and one of my little girls... said, "I don't know who to make this for. I said, "Oh, why?" "My dad's in jail, and they won't let him keep it anyway." It was a beautiful little ornament she was making, and I said, "Well, you can save it for him another time."

Another teacher expressed her concern and frustration over children's situations, "Kids hear too much, when you have kids tell you... 'The prosecuting attorney won't let my dad out of jail.' One parent is in jail and another left the state to avoid jail." These stories, and ones like them, represented some of the children of New Era, not all the children, of course. Some students came from loving, nurturing, stable families where parents met their needs.

Evidence of Children's Stability and Happiness

Not all New Era students suffered from negative family situations. Some New Era students came from homes --middle- and working-class homes, single-parent and two-parent homes -- where parents read with their children and participated in their education. I observed one first grader reading a mystery story. I asked her what a mystery was and she provided a very clear and correct explanation. She said her mother read mysteries to her at home. Students' poetry revealed that children had positive experiences at home and at school. Spellings and line breaks were not altered from original work. A fourth grader wrote:

I am from a pool in the summer times
That everyone enjoys.
I am from friends all around me.
I am from animals surrounding me.
I am from tin play houses in my
Backyard.
I am from lovely trees & bushes that
Grow so tall.
I am from lovely flowers evry where
Around my backyard.
I am from movies evry where around
My house.
I am from sports equipment.
I am from a family who loves to
Watch sports.
I am from eating together evry
Night.
I am from a family who travels
Almost evry holiday to see relatives
Far away.
I am from a mom named Natile
Who works so much and so hard.
I am from a dad named Mark
Who works with seeds.
I am from a loving sister names
Brittany who's in collage.
I am from two brothers named
Christopher and Dougles who are both
Very active.
I am from four cats who eat and

Sleep all day. There names are, Jeanie,
Jimill, Tiger, and little Spoty.
I am from reading and playing on
My free time.
I am from loving computers and
Michigan History.
I am from dreaming of becoming
A teacher.
I am from a family who had our
Special blanky's.
I am from a house that looks like a
Barn.

By E.K.

A fifth grade student wrote:

I am from working hard, to having fun with my
family, I am from riding my bike in the summer,
spring, and also fall, to having snowball fights in
the winter,

I am from jokes and laughs, I am also from hard
times, I am from healthy meals, and reading
great books

By P.

Chapter 2: Educating the Whole Child

The school embraced a comprehensive approach to learning that enhanced students' physical, emotional, social, and academic development. As Figure 2 shows, the school responded to students' physical needs through food programs for children, clothing and shoes to needy families, and making sure children took their medicine. They enhanced physical development through recess, the Walking Club, and a program called "Girls on the Run." Of course, there is an overlapping of domains with these elements. For example, with the school providing breakfast and lunch, physical needs were met, but students' emotional needs (e.g., sense of safety and belonging) were also satisfied. I placed the component in the category that appeared most obvious to me, so in the case of providing meals, I placed that need in the category of Physical Needs and Development. The only exception to this pattern is Girls on the Run. I felt like this program significantly enhanced students' physical, social, and emotional development; young girls were taught lessons about self-esteem and cooperation, in addition to the physical exercise. Also, the 5k culmination of Girls on the Run enhanced the girls' self-confidence.

Physical Needs and Development

Poverty was a constant challenge and each day the school faculty and staff knew children arrived at school who may not have been fed nutritious meals at home, may not have the appropriate clothing to withstand Michigan's harsh winter climate, and may reside in deplorable living situations. In fact, when I asked the principal to identify New Era's biggest challenge, without hesitation, he replied, "Poverty." The Census Bureau (2000) estimated that just over 20% of the county's children under the age of 18 lived in

poverty in 2003. It was an issue that he wanted to remind teachers, so he distributed The New York Times article, “Poverty is Poison,” (Krugman, 2008) to faculty and staff prior to a monthly staff meeting. The article outlined the negative effects of poverty over an individual’s entire lifetime.

Providing Food

At school, they fed children breakfast and lunch everyday and provided additional food and clothing to families. The high school’s National Honor Society conducted a fund drive to make food baskets for local families near Thanksgiving. Students bought the food and organized the baskets with non-perishable items, like canned green beans and uncooked boxes of rice. They also provided families with gift certificates to a local butcher so that parents could purchase their own turkey or other meat for the holiday. The organization’s sponsor collaborated with the school’s family advocate and teachers to determine the families with the highest need in order to decide who received the baskets. Most families accepted the food baskets and none felt offended by the offering, as the family advocate explained:

We never bring a basket without asking a family first, which was kinda, felt awkward at first. I mean, how do you call someone up and say, do you need food for Thanksgiving? I mean, you have to find a way to do that in a respectful way. And I’ve never had a family who – I’ve had families who have said no, we don’t need that help, but I’ve never had anybody who acted offended by that. And I’m always careful to say, if somebody says, No, I think we’re okay. And I say, I wasn’t, I didn’t want to offend you in any way, or I wasn’t trying to be offensive by asking, and people have always been understanding about that. But we never want to take the risk of just bringing something to someone when they don’t know it’s coming.

In addition to the food baskets, all the district’s elementary schools implemented food drives to donate to local food pantries.

In another situation, Carol, the family advocate, made an emergency trip to a church's food pantry to get some essentials for a family. Todd told the story about how the little girl seemed happy the next day because she could bring a snack to school. "People don't understand what little ones are facing in some of those at-risk homes. I mean not even having money to get a snack for a child, not having milk in the refrigerator," he explained.

The principal made sure a student had breakfast before he entered his classroom for the day. "That morning, one young boy, not on free and reduced lunch, came in and said he was hungry," the principal told me. Todd asked if he had been in a hurry and the boy said no, so the principal took him to the cafeteria and got him a hot breakfast. "Well he'll have a good day today... What started as not being real good was turned around quickly just by something, by what a lot of people would say that's insignificant, but yet that's probably what got him into his classroom so he could get started with his daily routine." This was an isolated incident and the student did not qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Getting a Child's Medication

A fourth grade student forgot her seizure medicine and her class was practicing for a school performance in which she would be needed. The school secretary called the mom, who was a teacher at the middle school, and she gave her permission for Todd to take her daughter home for the medication. He stayed in the vehicle while she retrieved her medicine and then locked the house door when she left. They returned to school and were getting out of the Todd's truck. She turned to him and said, "You know what? I

forgot to tell you. I really appreciate you,” and away she went. He reflected on that experience:

But you know, all of those things will make you cry sometimes when they do that, but yet, you think, wow, what would those kids do if they didn't have someone to fill in the gaps for them? They would go without, wouldn't feel well, wouldn't have a good day, maybe would be criticized for not remembering the medication.

He added, “You just think thank goodness, you can do those things.” I asked him if he ever worried about liabilities, especially taking a child home in his vehicle. He affirmed that he was concerned at times but in that in that particular situation, the mother had given her permission. She called him later, thanked him, and explained that they had been running late that morning and forgot the child's medication. He added, “If someone criticized me, I would have to say, ‘Well, I did it for a kid. That was in their best interest at that point and time. Would you rather have them have a seizure or me drive them home to get their medication?’”

A Family Needs Heat

During one of our many conversations, the principal described his frustration with some of the parents and their use of money for their own purposes, like purchasing alcohol and cigarettes, when they could not afford heat or food for their children:

We had an incident this year where I had a...father come in and wonder if he could borrow \$50 so he could have the money for a minimum amount of propane to put in their fuel tank at home. I agreed to do that and ran to my truck and got a \$50 bill and I gave it to him. Later that evening, I was coming back from a school board meeting, and I noticed my truck needed gas, so I stopped at the Wesco gas station, and as I walked in, I noticed that parent. And when he saw me come through the door, he sort of went down and didn't want anyone else to see him. And I thought, dog-gone-it, he better be making good choices, so I walked around the aisle and there he was. And in one hand he some alcohol. In another, he had cigarettes. And I said, “Listen, I went to bat for kids. Gave you \$50 to use for heat for your home, and it looks to me like you aren't doing that.” And I thought either the guy's going to hit me or he's going to maybe make a change in his life. And he said, “You know what, you're absolutely right. I shouldn't be doing this right

now.” And I said, “No, not if it’s taking things away from your kids.” And he put the beer back. He put the cigarettes back on the counter, and then he came back over to me and he said, “I apologize for what I’ve done...I hope in the future you really would help me if I had the need...I think you started me on the path to making good financial choices.” And I said, “Well, I hope that’s true...Sometimes you have to learn from a mistake...Come and see me again if you need help.” He said, “Don’t worry. I’ll be getting your \$50 back to you...This won’t happen again.” He’s come back to me about every week to report what he’s doing with his money, and I think, Okay, that was a learning opportunity with that parent that hopefully... will benefit his children.

The school combated the ill effects of families’ poverty by connecting them with local agencies that provided basic needs, links to employment, and high quality child care or preschool opportunities for their children. In fact, the school partnered with nearly every agency in the county to help meet families’ needs. Moreover, they worked with the middle school counselor to provide children with winter coats, snow pants, and boots. Faculty and staff often gave their own money to help families. The principal estimated that he gave about \$3,000 annually of his personal financial resources to different needy families.

A Student Needs Shoes

The principal’s care and concern even extended beyond students’ elementary school years. He described how he supported one young man:

He [the counselor] had another little boy [in counseling] who didn’t have shoes to go out for the basketball team, a freshman in high school. And he was telling me that and he said, “Maybe an old pair I have will fit him.” I said, “Well, what size shoe does he wear” He said, “Well, twelve.” I said, “Wow, he’s grown a lot since he went through our building.” He said, “Yeah he has.” And I said, “Give me 20 minutes,” so I called [a local storeowner] and I said, “[Don], I have a young man who won’t be able to go out for the basketball team, even for try-outs, because he doesn’t have a pair of shoes. He said, “You know what, Todd? You do an awful lot of business for us with Girls on the Run for running shoes. Don’t worry about.” He said, “Tell Kevin to go to the store in Whitehall and the shoes will be there. I said, “What do I owe you?” He said, “Nothing.”

But that young man probably never would have tried out for basketball, and if he gets in basketball, it will be great for him, because he needs structure, he needs activity and involvement beyond just the school day, and he needs recognition from other kids in ways that he's never gotten recognition before.

And what if the young man either decided not to play basketball or he did not make the team? "Well, if it doesn't work, hey, at least he has a good pair of shoes," Todd answered.

Physical Fitness

An avid tennis player, the principal emphasized the importance of students' physical fitness. He believed that "a healthy body makes a healthy mind" and encouraged physical activity with all students. Todd not only worked with staff members to create an appealing outdoor environment on the school campus, but he participated in physical activities with them. Other activities occurred in the building after school. Students participated in extracurricular activities like karate, basketball, and dance classes. There was even an adult aerobic class that met at the school in the morning.

School Campus

The school campus, nestled on 15 acres, had a large open playground with a walking trail and was adjacent to an apple orchard. Playground equipment sprinkled near the school and a blacktop surrounding the building for playing 4-square or basketball kept the students engaged during their three daily recess periods (i.e., 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon and a 20-minute recess prior to or following lunch). Various balls and playground equipment were stored in the school's front office and I often saw students dropping by to politely retrieve or return equipment. The property's large hill provided the perfect backdrop for students to go tubing, that is, being pushed, usually by the principal, to start the rapid descent sliding down the snow-covered hill individually or

with friends on over-sized innertubes. In fact, the district's other elementary schools took winter field trips to New Era to use their hill for tubing at the New Era Ski Resort, as they jokingly called it.

Walking Club

The school constructed a ¼-mile walking path to engage students in physical activity and to develop healthy nutritional habits from subsequent conversations and mini-lessons on nutrition. The walking path was maintained by community members and students. Students used shovels to clear paths, and parents with other community members added topsoil to the track one Saturday morning.

Students walked during their recess periods. In the event of inclement weather, students walked up and down the hallways and still received credit for walking their laps. I observed first graders holding hands with their teacher walking up and down the hallway. The children seemed exuberant to reach the instructional assistant, indicating a completed lap. During the 2006-07 school year, students walked 6,700 miles.

Students set their own goals and were rewarded with prizes (e.g., a Frisbee, a puzzle, dinner with the principal and his wife at their home for walking 1,200 laps). The library/computer specialist helped facilitate the program and wrote a grant to petition local businesses for donations to purchase prizes. For instance, the nearby Wal-Mart had agreed to donate \$25 but gave \$300 instead. Pizza Hut gave students free personal pan pizza coupons. Other tangible rewards, such as posters and books, were purchased by school store revenue. Students also had the opportunity to earn ½ hour additional computer time, a real motivator since many did not own computers at home. Because students reached their school goal, they were able to take a free trip to a local indoor

water park, a business partner with the school. The admission price to the water park was usually \$24-29 per child and \$29-34 per adult, and the principal knew that many families would not be able to afford the admission fee. The park waived the admission fees for students and their families.

Social/Emotional Needs and Development

The school satisfied students' emotional needs by making them feel valued, implementing a positive approach to citizenship and discipline and having a principal who served as a positive male role model and father figure. In addition, they offered counseling services to those students and families with the greatest needs. School personnel created and implemented a cross-age mentoring program that expanded to the entire district. They also engaged all students in fundraising efforts to support St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Feeling Valued

The principal set the tone for a positive learning environment that supported students' emotional development. "The key to learning," he said, "is to make every child think that they're special and valued. Those students will go to the nth degree, achievement will rise, [and] teachers will be happy." The school's opportunity to create positive interactions with children began as soon as the students arrived in morning. Todd stood at the door greeting them with smiles, high-fives, and hugs; he told them he was glad to see them and they would have a good day at school. Later, he told me:

We have kids, you can tell, that when they get off the bus, their chins are just dragging. By the time they hit the door ... and all of a sudden they know, that you start to talk with them about things and put things in perspective, or tell them that it's okay and that we can take care of that... the smile's back, they feel like they're still okay and they're special, and away they go, ready to learn. But I've

often thought that, boy, if they didn't have that initially for some of the kids, how horrible that would be.

One of Todd's greatest attributes was the desire and ability to meet students' needs so that their focus in the classroom was on learning. He was a problem-solver who alleviated some of the students' pressures and worries throughout the day:

I often have a difficult time with people even in Lansing [state capital] where I feel like they don't understand the environmental baggage that kids have today that they bring with them to school, and how, if you don't have an accepting, warm, caring environment for kids, that I don't care what you're doing in the classroom, you're probably never going to get the academic success that they say is necessary or that you have to reach... You really have to have both parts for kids to be successful. I spend an awful lot of my day trying to make sure that all of those emotional feeling type of things don't get in the way of learning, so that teachers can teach.

I try to do my utmost to make sure that all of the concerns that a child has, that you can talk with them, talk care of those before they go into the classroom or at some point in the day, so they can focus on learning.

Life Skills and Discipline

Another way that the principal and staff supported students' emotional development was the implementation of LifeSkills (Kovalik, 2008) and Love and Logic discipline (Fay, 2008). New Era Elementary was the first building in Shelby Public Schools to implement the life skills program to support character education. This program is a component of the Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI) curriculum and focuses on 18 social and personal skills, such as patience, flexibility, and caring, that develop students' self-discipline and responsible citizenship. It also provides a common language for all staff and students to use. New Era faculty spent instructional time modeling, discussing, and implementing life skills into their daily classroom activities. Every other week, the principal conducted a fun, school-wide assembly on a particular life skill, complete with music, role playing, or demonstrations. Teachers referred to the

life skills when they explained procedures at the beginning of the year and continued to integrate them into their daily activities. For instance, during a writing lesson, a teacher asked, “Who has the life skill of courage and would like to try this one?” Also, the skills were posted in each classroom and in the principal’s office, and students were expected to use life skills at all times (e.g., on the playground, on the bus, sharpening their pencils, or in the bathroom).

School personnel have implemented some of the other ideas of brain compatible education to create optimal learning environments for students, like using lamps in the classrooms, choosing a more neutral paint color, and eliminating clutter in the building. In fact, one teacher had a small waterfall in her classroom. Also, the desks were grouped together into tables and the teacher placed a plant on each group’s table. They had an aquarium displayed in the main hallway that was maintained by the second grade teacher. The school was the first one in Michigan to use full spectrum lighting, not fluorescent, in the classrooms, to provide more natural lighting and create a calm environment.

Teachers employed Love and Logic disciplinary strategies into their classroom management. The goal of Love and Logic is to reduce behavior problems, increase motivation, and build skills that contribute to life-long responsibility and resiliency (Fay, 2008). The practical approach is grounded in five basic principles (Fay, 2008):

1. Preserve and enhance the child’s self-concept.
2. Teach children how to own and solve the problems they create.
3. Share the control and decision-making.
4. Combine consequences with high levels of empathy and warmth.
5. Build the adult-child relationship.

In the midst of instruction, I observed a teacher saying, “Chad, choose to participate. Make good choices,” instead of addressing his off-task behavior with criticism, threats, or embarrassment. Teachers did not display behavior charts on the classroom walls nor did they buy candy or other treats as incentives for good behavior. One experienced teacher explained that over the years, she had tried various classroom management strategies, like maintaining behavior charts or having students flip index cards to a certain color that represented their behavior. She found that Love and Logic strategies worked well in her classroom. In addition, she sent students’ planners home each week to communicate with parents about their children’s academic progress and behavior. In rare instances, she reported calling parents at home to discuss a behavioral incident.

Todd used life skills along with Love and Logic discipline to discuss behavior issues with the whole class before he addressed the individual student. For instance, a first grader “made a choice,” as Todd called it, at snack time to take another student’s snack. Todd visited the classroom and read aloud a book about friendship that he was given when he was four years old. Then they discussed friendship and the same first grader gave his account of taking the snack as an example of what a friend should not do.

Todd’s method to discipline was to separate the behavior from the child by saying, “You made a bad choice, but you are a good person. Tell me what happened. What life skills were not used?” He further explained that mistakes were meant for improvement. He and the student would work on a plan orally and older students would write the plan. He often hugged students at the end of the conversation and reported to have few discipline problems and few irate parents.

The principal's discipline approach worked well for another student, as Todd reported this story of a young boy who needed guidance from a positive male role model:

Trevor is a young man who happens to be in fifth grade here. He lost his dad ... two years ago. He never got to know his dad, even who he was, until a year before his death. He came to this system from Muskegon and was last year at another elementary and this year was suddenly here. He lives with his mom in a very small apartment right in New Era. And he's had his moments in terms of not being able to follow the expectations, the procedures we have at school. I've gotten him involved with counseling to help with his real anger issues and also with feelings of almost depression at times. In fact, he doesn't think he'll have much of a life, because he has a brother who attempted to commit suicide. He has another brother who is incarcerated right now, and he has a history, in terms of their family too, of real medical issues and high needs. He has a lot of ability, so I've gotten them involved in counseling, and his mom, too. I've gotten them involved in two different church programs.

And every day at the end of the school day, he will check to see if I have meetings. And if I don't have any meetings, his first question is always, Mr. Kraai, will you help me look at my homework? So we'll sit for 20 minutes to a half hour and basically, I'll tutor him. It's usually been in math or science. Then the moment he's always been waiting for, all of a sudden, he'll say, "Okay, I have my homework finished. Now can we go in the gym and play Horse?" So we'll leave for the gym. We'll actually play several games of horse.

And I think part of that, he relishes being with an adult male who is very appropriate in terms of how he reacts to things. He needs somebody just talk with and unburden himself. It's been a real good give and take for Trevor and myself. And I think if it hadn't been for that time we share, he probably wouldn't be in the home he's in right now any longer. And I've had to even go to Hart, to the prosecuting attorney with him and his mom. I've arranged for mom to be in a Love and Logic parenting class, which starts the middle of next week. And I've established goals with Trevor and his mother and actually the sheriff's department and probate court. He knows what he really has to work on to become a successful young man. I went to bat for him on Friday. He hasn't had medication for ADHD difficulty, which he has, and he's missing school today because mom, after a phone call from me, did get a doctor's appointment today. And they're reinvestigating that attention and focus difficulty that Trent has, and I'm sure he'll come back again being on medication. We also made sure that he now has his insurance card, which his mom let lapse, so we got him enrolled in the My Child program through the state of Michigan. And that paperwork we did online. In fact, Trav did on line with mom. We called her in and took care of it, so he'll now be able to get the medication that he truly needs. I don't think he feels like he needs to take that medication, and I'm sure, tomorrow morning, I'll have my allergy pills in my pocket. I won't take those at home before I come, but instead I'll wait

for Trevor and his mom. I know she'll have his medication and he'll say I don't think I need it. And then Trevor and I, from that day on, we'll probably be taking our medication together in the morning before school starts.

It's one of those things where everyday, if I come back from a meeting late, and I know last week one night I was filling my truck up at the Wesco station and all of a sudden I heard someone yell, "Mr. Kraai!" And here came Trevor, didn't have any shirt on but he put his winter jacket on, ran over in a pair of sweatpants, and he said, "I just happen to see you there and thought I'd come and talk for a minute." And he lives in an apartment that looks right toward the gas station. I know he needs time with an adult, and I try to do that as much as possible. In fact, I know this spring, I probably will have my bike. I'll ride to school, and if things work out well for him during the day, he and I will take a ride on the rail trail. I'll probably hire him at home this fall or even the spring yet and let him help me plant Christmas trees. And again, all because I think he's a neat kid, and if he has that big brother, big sister relationship with an adult male, it might be that one thing that really helps him be successful now and hopefully after he leaves this school, too.

So we go to the nth degree to try and get the kids to understand what behaviors they have to have to be successful both inside school and out, and we definitely share our time with parents and their kids. And once again, here's a kid that in some places I think people would write off and say he's never going to amount to anything...We won't give up on anyone. And I've seen some great gains with him already this year. And I know that I'll probably get a call from him after school today letting me know what happened at the doctor's office. He just got a new basket at home. His mom bought it for him, and I've already been invited to stop after school to play Horse with him in the alley behind the apartment as soon as the snow has left.

By using the life skills and Love and Logic approach to discipline, there were not a lot of rules for students to remember and the emphasis was placed on choice. Todd explained:

And we have schools who will come to us and say, how do you handle things, in terms of procedures and rules? And I'll tell them that we basically have four [Fay's principles 2 and 3 were combined] and everything fits within those guidelines. Kids know what they are. There are no questions. They admit when they've made choices that aren't good choices, but it also allows us to make a real distinction between the person and the behavior. And we always stress the fact that behavior can be changed, that the person that made the choice of the bad behavior is still a good person, and that we love you just as much as we always have. In fact, I did that this afternoon with a young man who wasn't following directions and who wasn't telling the truth. And when they leave they still feel good about themselves and also know they have a behavior choice to change and then we hold them accountable and responsible for their actions and their choices.

We have natural consequences for the kids. In fact, the one that I did today, that individual is going to spend some time after school tomorrow and also on Wednesday doing things with Mrs. Meade and myself showing that he can follow directions and he can be honest. And the point will be made and he'll know we still care about him as a great young man, but I bet it's the last time he makes those behavior choices.

A Positive Male Role Model

The principal also supported students' emotional development and sense of security as a positive male role model often acting as a father figure. Todd played the game with another young boy who needed some extra attention and was really maturing in the time he had been at the school. His father did not spend much time with him except hunting and fishing together; Todd thought the family poached for food. His father was unemployed and the mother was paid minimum wage at a medical care facility, and there was very little money coming in to the home. Todd had visited their rundown apartment. He reported that the little boy said:

"I know it's getting colder 'cause I can hear the mice overhead now in the apartment." And I said, 'Well, if they get to the point where you figure they're coming down into the house, you tell me. I'll stop and have some little traps or sticky things that we can put up in the attic.' He said, "I told dad you probably would have something like that." I said, "We'll see. If really needed, I'll come."

Once, he waited two hours after school playing games with a couple of children who were waiting to be picked up by a parent. Eventually, the kids went home with Todd to eat dinner with him and his wife; finally, the parents picked up the children later that evening.

Counseling

The district did not employ a full-time counselor in the school and the principal saw a real need for these services, after talking to the children, their families, and their teachers. A conservative organization from a nearby city wanted to fund grassroots

efforts without a lot of administrative costs or government intervention. According to the principal, the organization provided the school with a list of donors who supported programs that benefit youth to help the district's most at-risk students and families, and a local church's outreach committee funded \$6,000 to provide counseling for New Era's at-risk students.

The school partnered with a non-profit counseling center that was created by a local church over 30 years ago and whose main mission was to provide counseling services for the congregation and surrounding community. Kevin, a therapist with a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology and Community Counseling, began counseling New Era students each Tuesday morning, beginning in October 2007. He worked at the school for 4 hours per week and met with students in 20-minute interval but never counseled more than 10 students at any given time. Kevin met with the children on an individual or small group basis, and from time to time, immediate and extended family members participated in the counseling sessions. The principal explained:

I have found if you can do that in the school setting, because the people have so much trust in the school, that if we would have therapy here, too, for them and their family, they're much more willing to do it here than they would be if you said, 'We're gonna go to community mental health or we're going to go to Catholic Social Services. That they shy away from. If it's here, they know that it's okay, it's alright.

In addition, the school accepted any payments by insurance companies and partial payments from families without insurance but who could afford to pay some of the fee; the service was free to indigent families.

These young children were wrestling with some very serious issues. The principal described some of their heartbreaking situations:

- ❑ one boy lived with his mother; there was no father in the home and his two brothers were in prison.
- ❑ another young boy never saw his parents and lived with his grandparents.
- ❑ a girl was sexually abused early in life and lived with her mother and grandmother.
- ❑ one had Attention Deficit –Hyperactivity Disorder combined with Oppositional Defiant Disorder and had been treated at a mental health facility. He had two very different homes, his biological mother provided no structure and his biological father provided much structure for him.
- ❑ a first grader had supervised visits with her father due to molestation, although, as of the middle of December, 2007, she had not seen him in three months, “which is a good thing,” the principal added.
- ❑ an adopted boy from Romania who had an attachment deficit struggled forming relationships with adults.

Kevin was committed to helping these young boys and girls. He drove 1 ½ hours one-way to New Era each week and, when the first grant was depleted and the principal was making efforts to obtain a second grant, Kevin worked for three months at the school without pay.

The principal told the story about Kevin’s commitment to working with New Era students:

He was working with one of our kids and a family outside of school. Last Thursday, he was at the church and he called over, and he said, “Todd, I know you have music or dance classes after school, right?,” and I said, “Yeah.”

“Is there something I can do with Scott for a few minutes just when I’m talking with him?”

“Yeah, I said. “I have two hoops, a small basketball game, in one of the classrooms, in Betsy’s room. So I said, ‘You can just pull that down and shoot hoops with him. So he did his whole session here in the room.

Kevin explained that traditional therapy, where the client sat on the couch talking to the counselor, was not developmentally appropriate for this student, since he had tried that approach at the church. However, when Kevin began tossing the basketball back and forth with Scott, the young boy “lowered his guard,” as Kevin described, and began talking more about his personal problems.

Kevin adhered to the notion that building relationships with children would help them view themselves, others, and the world differently. Their behavior and outlooks would change. He credited the principal with building positive relationships with children. “I’ve never seen anything like it,” he said. He described Todd as masterful in building positive relationships with children and their families with encouragement like hugs and high-fives. Todd had an “unrelenting pursuit” to get counselors in the building to help the children in need and “pulls together as many resources as possible.”

In the counselor’s opinion, the school district had every reason to fail *on paper*—unemployment, a large percentage of students on free/reduced meals, the drug abuse among high school students. Kevin claimed that the isolation of the district fostered generational problems, like drug abuse and unemployment. These problems began in large families, stayed there and festered. Obviously, family systems were affected, and Kevin believed that half of the male students he counseled was affected by parental abandonment, usually by the father.

It Takes Two Program

Staff developed a mentoring program called It Takes Two that partners second and tenth graders to develop social relationships and support the second grade curriculum. This program was adopted by the entire district and shared by the Big Brothers Big Sisters program with other school districts in western Michigan.

Math-A-Thon

New Era students participated in Math-A-Thon, a fundraising program for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital (<http://mathathon.org>) that helped satisfy students' social and emotional needs, along with cognitive development. Students obtained sponsorships from families and friends to complete math problems in a fun book. For instance, a sponsor pledged a nickel per completed problem. Students raised \$1,400 for the children's hospital and felt especially connected to this cause since four area children were receiving treatment at St. Jude's. Also, their increased confidence motivated them in other subjects, like reading and writing.

Physical and Emotional Health

Some programs at the school supported students' physical and emotional development, like the Girls on the Run program and Girl Scouts. Todd discovered that many girls could not participate in Girl Scouts because it met after school and the students lacked transportation. He coordinated with troop leaders to conduct meetings at school during the day to give the highest number of girls in grades 3-5 the opportunity to participate. Lessons centered on science learning objectives, like pollution. Girls Scouts is a well-known organization to many, but less is known about Girls on the Run.

Girls on the Run[©]

Six years ago, the school piloted Girls on the Run[®], a non-profit prevention program that promotes preteen girls' physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual development. According to the organization's website (Girls on the Run, 2008), the 12-week character building program teaches social and personal skills and culminates in a non-competitive 5k run/walk that gives the girls the opportunities to celebrate their accomplishments. The curriculum encompasses three main concepts:

- ❑ All About Me: Getting to Know Who I am and What I Stand For!
- ❑ Building My Team: Understanding the Importance of Cooperation
- ❑ Community Begins with Me: Learning About Community and Designing Our Own Community Project

The young girls “complete the program with a stronger sense of identity, a greater acceptance of themselves, a healthier body image and an understanding of what it means to be part of a team” (Girls on the Run, 2008). In 2002 and 2005 at New Era Elementary, participants completed pre-tests and post-tests to measure attitudinal changes. The evaluation, implemented by an associate professor in the School of Community and Environmental Health at Old Dominion University, “showed statistically significant improvements in the girls' self-esteem, body size satisfaction, and eating attitudes/behaviors” (Girls on the Run, 2008). The research also found positive changes in attitudes towards physical activity, health behaviors, and empowerment.

Each session begins with a warm-up activity that focuses on the day's topic followed by a physical stretching routine that enables the girls to ask questions on the topic. The girls then participate in a variety of running activities focusing on cooperation. Finally, the cool-down combines stretching with another question-and-answer period.

The coach ends each session with compliments and encouragement on individual or group behaviors (Girls on the Run, 2008).

In the spring of 2005, the principal used federal and state funds from a \$10k drug-free program grant to pilot Girls on the Run at New Era Elementary, the first school to implement the program in the entire county. Six adults received the training to be coaches, including Todd, Travis (his administrative assistant/son), and Teresa, the computer/media specialist. Todd and Teresa, organizers of the school's new program, decided to offer it to fifth grade girls for only 7-8 week sessions due to the possibility of harsh weather. Girls on the Run was so successful that the program expanded to grades 3 and 4 at New Era, the district's other elementary schools, and the middle school. In May of 2007, about 100 girls participated in the program; twenty-eight were from New Era.

Participants paid a \$35 registration fee that covered the costs of a new pair of running shoes retailed at \$60 and nutritious snacks offered before each session. Todd collaborated with a local shoe store owner to sell the shoes at a discounted price. Scholarships were offered to those who could not afford the registration fee so that no one was ever refused participation. Transportation was also provided, if necessary, and the grant also paid the coach's training that was \$300 per coach.

Todd and Teresa moved the program to the fall during the 2007-08 school year, so that girls had more opportunities at school to use the life lessons they learned in the program. On a crisp and sunny October afternoon, about 125 people (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, and walkers) attended the run/walk, including 28 girls from New Era. Todd boasted:

Every one of them successfully completed the 5K. There wasn't anyone who stopped short, including a couple of girls who really did not believe yet, even after

training for 8 weeks, that they would be able to walk and run that distance, they all did.

Todd grilled hotdogs and parents donated other dishes for the potluck dinner in the school gymnasium. One girl's grandfather took photographs of each runner/walker and gave them to the girls at the end of the race. In the future, the school will pictorially display a Hall of Fame of Girls on the Run participants. The principal reminisced:

It was nice to actually see families gathered together, laughing and talking, and really congratulating each other when they had accomplished this particular goal, and I know all of them have learned some life lessons and skills that they'll take with them the rest of their lives, too.

The coaches realized for themselves that the program had a positive impact on the pre-teens. Teresa, New Era's computer/media specialist, explained how girls confided personal information to her while walking, like if their parents had been fighting at home. She retold how one overweight teacher formed a close relationship with an overweight student. Teresa discovered that another young girl, who sold her pig to participate in the program, had been withdrawn at school since her mother's death but seemed to be more talkative and happier as the program continued. The principal told me that within a couple weeks following the 5K run/walk that he had already used lessons from Girls on the Run with a couple of students. In addition, pre- and post-tests from the Office of National Drug Control Policy showed positive attitudinal change about drugs and alcohol in the girls, so the district met the grant requirements.

A couple of months after the race, a fourth grade student, Rebecca, talked to me about her first year participating in Girls on the Run (informal interview, January 15, 2008):

It's fun. We play lots of games and we run a lot. We played, like, we played a game, like this game where you run and you have to tell a healthy habit at the end.

It's like Red Light, Green Light, and you have to yell out a healthy habit when you stop, like avoid tobacco and stuff and eat healthy fruits and vegetables. You should eat three servings of fruit everyday, vegetables, or stuff like that.

She was the first to finish the 5k race, and her dad, a construction worker, ran with her in his work boots. "It's fun to have someone running with you encouraging you," she remembered. Rebecca smiled and told me that her father made her sprint the last lap. Her mother also ran a couple of laps with her. She planned to participate again because "it's fun and it gets you active and people encourage you and stuff like that." The fourth grader remembered a lesson on drug awareness and "how you shouldn't do alcohol."

Jan, a fifth grader, participated in the race for three years. When asked why she continued to participate, she answered, "It helps me not be mean to other people, and when I get mad at someone, I'll just go to my room and read a book and do something, and it calms me down." Jan's favorite part of the program was sharing her thoughts during the sessions. She explained (informal interview, January 15, 2008):

I like talking in the meeting so you get a chance to say your feelings and what the meeting is about. And you can say if that happened to you or not happened to you. And then it goes around the circle and all the girls say their feelings or if it happened to them.

She hoped to spread the word to other girls about the benefits of the program and wanted to participate in track in middle school.

It should be noted that Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts are offered after school. The boys are so enthusiastic about the girl's achievements in Girls on the Run that they want a similar school-based program for them. In the 2007-08, the principal and staff will brainstorm and make plans to implement a similar program for the young boys.

Social and Cognitive Development

In addition to providing effective literacy instruction, Todd and his staff worked hard to provide experiences for their students that they otherwise might not encounter. For example, the principal obtained local grant funding and arranged for a saxophone quartet to perform at school, an experience he described as one that most families would not provide or could not afford for their children. The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and the principal's building budget funded field trips, called study trips, for students to attend an art museum, the state capital, and an historical museum. In addition, the principal rewarded students who met their reading goals with free trips to the local water park.

Chapter 3: Effective Literacy Teachers

Teachers and support staff educated the whole child to create conditions for literacy achievement, good citizenship, and positive school experiences (as shown in Figure 3). They satisfied students' cognitive needs in literacy by providing effective instruction that included integrating technology and literacy skills practice, differentiating instruction, and scaffolding student learning. There was a school-wide emphasis on reading and students were expected to read at home each day. Also, teachers fostered emotional and social development by celebrating academic achievement and showing empathy to students experiencing family hardships. They also participated in students' physical activities, like the Walking Club and the Girls on the Run 5k run/walk.

Instruction

I observed the characteristics and strategies of effective literacy instruction supported by numerous studies. For example, I observed teachers employing a balanced literacy approach and using such strategies as explicit teaching of skills, reteaching when necessary, reading high quality literature, and practicing literacy skills across content areas. Teachers modeled skills and provided many opportunities for guided practice. They assessed students' literacy skills in a variety of ways, such as reading and writing state assessments, DIBELS, decoding skills as part of the Michigan Literacy Profile Program, and other teacher-created literacy assessments. Teachers sought and received additional training to improve their strategies. For example, state assessment data revealed students' areas of weakness in writing, so the principal and teachers brainstormed strategies and sought professional development on the new Lucy Calkins writing program. However, I want to focus on aspects of effective literacy instruction

that are context-specific and provide evidence for cultural models of literacy, learning, and school.

Reading

Staff, especially the principal, placed a high value on reading. Todd read to upper elementary students before school started (e.g., *Fearless* by Tim Lott , *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick, and *Tunnels* by R. Gordon and Brian Williams).

Occasionally, Morning Meetings for older students were cancelled because the principal was pulled away to talk to a parent or child but he found other times throughout the day to read to students in class. I frequently observed him asking children, “Hey, what are you reading?” and students even asked him for book recommendations. Todd also read stories during school-wide assemblies. In fact, when the school was awarded the banner for high achievement from the MBLER, Todd began the assembly by reading a story about perseverance. He read poetry to a group of students to reward them for walking laps, and he also visited classrooms to hear students read, whether it was in Reader’s Theatre or stories they had written. Furthermore, he challenged students with an ambitious school reading goal for the month (or months) during the year that staff and students celebrated reading and their achievements. Also, he and other staff planned school events, like a family fun night, in conjunction with book fairs to encourage parents to purchase books for home.

Reading was emphasized from the time the students arrived at school and extended throughout the entire day. They began their school days, after breakfast was served to some, with the principal and other staff members reading to them for 10-15 minutes in an empty classroom. Adults modeled fluency and asked comprehension

questions. Also, students were given opportunities throughout the day to read silently, with a partner, or to the class. All the teachers, including the computer/media specialist, read to students every day, unless students were away on a study trip. Students across grade levels had daily silent reading time. Also, students were expected to read at home. For example, first graders took home a book and reading log every night for parents to document their time spent reading. The first grade teacher and a parent told me how excited children were to return their books and get new ones to read at home. The teacher posted reading logs in the class to celebrate students' achievement. And these students read high quality literature. For instance, fifth graders read *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, and *Call It Courage* by Armstrong Sperry. Basal readers were used to reinforce certain skills, like author's purpose. Overall, students seemed excited about reading. I overheard one student talking to a friend in the hallway, "You know what I got for Christmas? From Santa? The whole first set of Magic Treehouse! And I bet he made them, too!"

Technology

Technology supported students' acquisition of literacy skills, particularly in reading. Teachers worked with the media/computer specialist to tailor computer activities to support grade-level curriculum objectives. As a result, teachers used students' performances in the lab as formative practice to modify and differentiate instruction. In addition, students, especially first- and second-graders, practiced basic keyboarding skills. Students typed and illustrated stories, reports, and poetry. Older students conducted research using the Internet and reference software.

The school instituted the Reading Counts program, similar to Accelerated Reader, in which a student read a book and took a computer-based comprehension quiz on the story. The media/computer specialist ordered quizzes from the company but teachers had the flexibility of creating their own quizzes if the company did not have a quiz for a particular story. Before purchasing Reading Counts, the media/computer specialist evaluated different programs and felt as though Reading Counts provided higher-level comprehension questions compared to similar programs. Students earned points based on the reading level of the book and number of correct test items from the quiz. The teacher set reading goals based on Reading Counts points but this was fashioned in a non-competitive approach; no one displayed class charts with students' point values. First grade students were able to review their books when they took the quizzes which encouraged rereading for understanding. The computer specialist reported that the school's library housed about 7,000 books and they had over 3,800 Reading Counts comprehension quizzes.

The school implemented the Classworks program (Curriculum Advantage, 2008) to reinforce what students learned in the classroom and to tailor instruction to students' needs. According to the web, Classworks helps schools individualize standards based instruction:

Classworks by Curriculum Advantage, Inc. is an innovative K-12 solution that truly inspires students. The award-winning Classworks solution is comprehensive, standards-based, managed instruction, all aligned to local, state, and national standards. Based on your results, it individualizes each lesson, according to each students' unique needs. Classworks is used for on-grade level instruction, remediation, acceleration, or as a Response to Intervention. This research-based solution is proven to increase student achievement (<http://www.curriculumadvantage.com/>).

About ten years ago, the principal flew to a “Blue Ribbon” school in Pittsburgh that had used the Classworks program. He was so impressed with it that he returned and convinced the Board of Education to purchase the math and language arts components of Classworks. They planned to add the science component at a cost of \$8,000 when funds were available. The computer specialist customized the program to align with the curriculum.

A student would access the Classworks program and select the unit that was decided in advance by the teacher (e.g., subject-verb agreement, using quotation marks, inferencing, learning how to predict outcomes). The student would complete the unit assessment and receive a benchmark score. If she received a 75-100% benchmark score on a unit, the student was considered proficient and did not complete the unit activities. Otherwise, she would use a portion of her computer lab time to practice unit activities; each unit was scored. Once she completed unit activities, she would be reassessed on the unit at a later date. Teachers reported reviewing the program’s student progress reports every couple of weeks to modify whole class instruction and to differentiate individual and small group instruction. For example, if the teacher assigned units for comprehension of short stories, such as drawing conclusions and understanding plot, she would review the report showing students’ benchmark and/or unit scores. This would enable her to choose students who needed extra practice with these specific skills. She would spend time with individuals or small groups during the class’s silent reading time, literacy stations, recess, and before or after school.

New Era was the first building in the district to utilize the Classroom Performance System (CPS). The system consisted of a main unit and remote devices, often called clickers, for each student that enabled the teacher to display teacher-generated questions on any topic on a large screen or white board. Students then used the remotes to click on the right answers. Student names were not publicly displayed but teachers received immediate feedback. The CPS units were available in the fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms, in addition to the computer lab.

Teresa, the school's computer/media specialist was an invaluable resource for students, teachers, and the principal. She was the only one in the district with a combined position of media specialist and technology coordinator. She served students by first reading a story to them in the library and then having them transition to the lab to take a Reading Counts quiz on that story and on any other stories they read individually or as a class. Also, she and the classroom teacher monitored and assisted students who checked out books from the library, took assessments and practiced skills with Classworks, practiced keyboarding skills, typed and illustrated final copies, and conducted research.

Teresa trained not only the New Era staff how to effectively use Classworks but also the entire district. She conducted professional development workshops and faculty meetings to show teachers how to use various technologies, she helped organize and served as coach for the Girls on the Run program, and assisted the principal with the positive incentive programs. She arranged for student volunteers to help her run the

school store; added quizzes on Reading Counts, and ordered books for the library based on teacher and student recommendations. Also, she collaborated with teachers to schedule 2 ½ hours of computer lab time and ½ hour in the library weekly for each class.

Differentiated Instruction

The staff supported literacy skills by providing differentiated instruction. In first grade, the school implemented the Early Intervention Program in which instructional assistants worked with small groups of students in first and second grades for 45 minutes to an hour each day to improve reading skills. Students were grouped based on specific reading skills in need of improvement rather than reading abilities. According to the principal, the school's reading scores had increased and the number of special education placements had decreased since instituting the intervention program. In addition, the Reading Counts program allowed for differentiation since students chose their own books to read and took related quizzes. Also, the Classworks program allowed students to practice skills at their own proficiency levels. It also provided teachers detailed information on students' specific skills, enabling them to work with small groups and individuals as needed. Finally, teachers spent time working individually with students to improve skills, in addition to working in small. For example, the second grade teacher worked with a student for 20 minutes while the rest of the class read silently. Teachers worked with individuals during students' morning and afternoon recesses.

Scaffolding

One of the most impressive techniques that teachers employed across grade levels was scaffolding. Instead of giving students a lot of information to process at once, they divided the skills and knowledge into smaller, developmentally appropriate increments for easier understanding. For example, the third grade teacher conducted a lesson on fluency and began by telling a personal story to interest the students:

When I was your age, I have to tell you. I was a very poor reader... I went

to a Catholic school, and the nun, she was teacher that I had, would make us stand up by our seat and read out loud like a page or a paragraph. I was always scared to read when it came my turn. I had friends in my class who could read really fast. I had friends in my class who could read really well, but when I got up to read, I was very nervous, and I stumbled a lot, and I didn't have fluent reading. And I learned from my friends that if I stop at the periods just a little bit and I pause at the commas just a little bit, my reading started to make sense to me. And I cared less and less how I sounded, and I focused more and more on what my reading was trying to tell me.

Students sat completely engaged as she proceeded with the lesson. The class practiced “reading” the alphabet with different punctuation marks (e.g., abcd? fghi! jk.). Students took turns reading sections, then the teacher had students pretend they were talking on the telephone, so that the listener could only hear their side of the conversation. She modeled this first and then students participated in a choral reading of the passage as guided practice, stopping and repeating when necessary. The teacher purposely did not use words at this point of the lesson, because she wanted students to focus on the punctuation, chunking the words or phrases together. Next, they read short sentences with different punctuation:

Dogs bark!

Dogs bark?

Dogs bark.

Then, she wrote a short sentence with stress on different words to point out to students that stressing different words in the sentence may change the meaning:

I am tired.

I *am* tired.

I am *tired*.

She linked the activities to a similar lesson in the computer lab from the previous day. Then the teacher distributed a one-page passage about Christopher Columbus that related to their social studies curriculum and provided guided practice of students reading aloud and chunking together words into phrases by drawing slash marks at pauses. She explained how good readers reread, if necessary, and the class did a choral reading of the passage. The teacher encouraged students throughout different phases of the lesson, “Very good. I could hear you were trying to yell but you were so good about not disturbing anybody that you didn’t shout really loud... I could tell you were paying attention to that sign,” she said to a student who frequently misbehaved in class. This example showed that she did not begin the lesson with the longer Christopher Columbus passage, instead she started with something familiar to students that everyone, regardless of reading ability, could read. The teacher transitioned to something somewhat harder with the short sentences and finally to longer text.

Celebrated Achievement

Teachers supported students’ emotional and social development by celebrating achievement. I observed celebrations across grade levels and in various ways that fostered intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. For instance, fifth graders honored each other as writers by reading their personal narratives in the classroom’s Author’s Chair. All the students appeared engaged and clapped after each reading. In the first grade classroom, student reading logs were posted to celebrate the young readers’ accomplishments. Students were also honored for achievements in other academic subject areas and physical education, like reaching Walking Club goals. Tangible rewards, like books, were sometimes awarded to students.

Showed Empathy to Students

Teachers understood that some students experienced family hardships that interfered with their school performances and abilities to concentrate on academic tasks.

For example, a teacher explained:

I had a little girl in my class last year who had been molested as a very young child by the mother's boyfriend. And she used to just raise her hand say, "I need, just need to go out in the hall and talk to you." And she would talk about things, and she wouldn't be very specific. And she goes, "I'm thinking about those things again and it's very scary. Help me take my mind of it. What should I think about?" And so I'd be chatting with her. She can't do math right now. She's got something in her mind that we talked about that triggered something.

Some students were allowed to take time out of the classroom to talk to other staff members or take brief walks in the hallway. Teachers arranged for students to act as assistants in the office or other classrooms. Their compassion for these young children did not cause them to make excuses for students' misbehaviors, lack of effort, or poor performance. Instead, it created more positive relationships between the teachers and students by enhancing students' sense of security.

Survey Results

Analysis from the modified Beliefs about School Achievement (BASA) survey revealed similarities and differences between the belief factors contributing to child achievement (student ability, teacher, family socio-economic status, student effort, and gender) between the teachers and principal (see Table 5 for survey results). I found that the teachers believed more than the principal that biologically determined characteristics, like intelligence, play important roles in student achievement, are uncontrollable by the student, and remain stable over time (\bar{X} of teachers = 3.53, \bar{X} of principal = 5). Also, the teachers were more ambivalent than the principal that family socio-economic status is a

determining factor in school achievement (\bar{X} of teachers = 2.95, \bar{X} of principal = 5).

Teachers placed an emphasis on themselves, and agreed, to some extent, that a child's achievement depended on the qualities of his/her teacher.

Chapter 4: The Principal's Leadership

New Era's principal helped educate the whole child. As Figure 4 shows, he supported children's social, emotional, and physical needs. Socially, he modeled life skills, celebrated student achievement in front of their peers and adults, and implemented programs like Girl Scouts and It Takes Two during the school day and Girls on the Run and Family Fun Nights after school to provide positive social interactions between students, faculty, staff, and families. He supported students' emotional needs by such actions as calling each student by name, celebrating achievement to raise self-esteem, using Love and Logic discipline, giving extra attention to struggling students, and being a child advocate in custody cases. Also, the principal helped satisfy students' physical needs and development by providing meals and clothing, playing with students during their 3 recess periods, initiating the Walking Club on the school's walking trail and the Girls on the Run program, and providing his own personal finances to support families. In addition, the principal fostered students' cognitive needs by teaching and participating in lessons, frequently reading to children, purchasing computer software to differentiate students' learning in language arts and mathematics, and using his office as an extended classroom.

Unquestionably, the principal was the ever-present teacher and patriarch of a school where he called students and staff his family. Todd said, "I look at every one of the kids in this building as my kids when they're here, as I would hope that a parent would, as a dad would." I did not quiz him on it, but he proudly claimed that he knew every child's name in the building, all 120 students. I discovered that he knew more than their names, because he told me about specific students' academic struggles and

achievements, family situations, and behavioral issues. He knew who was on medication and its related diagnosis, who liked to play 4-square at recess, who ate breakfast at school in the morning, and who was a proficient reader. It reminded me of the way an effective teacher could describe her students at the end of the school year after she had spent nine months getting to know them or the way a proud father bragged about his children.

The Principal's Background

Todd revealed events from his childhood that helped shape his disposition and eventual leadership qualities as principal:

When I grew up, I was small. I didn't grow until I got in college. And I'll never forget as I went through school, sometimes people saying, "Well, you can't do that. You're too small to do that." And instead of having that "Defeat me", I decided early on, "Okay, I'll show you. I can do that." I can remember in basketball, I was short, and people would say, "Oh, you'll never play very well. It just won't happen." And it made me more determined than ever that quickness and agility and shooting ability – it didn't matter if you were 6'8" or 5'4"... you could play well. The same with tennis, the same thing with reading, with writing, with math. It just made me decide, "Okay, I'm going to be as good as, if not better than anybody else." Part of that was my dad who was an educator but he always, always encouraged you. He always made sure you had a very good work ethic. I can remember being told early on, "Todd, there is no free lunch. You get out of things what you put into it. Never run short on effort." And I can still see him saying those things even though he died two years ago. I still vowed to when I saw people mistreating people, that if I ever got into a position where I was involved with young people or adults... I would always encourage and find the positive before I would stress the negative. If I think there's something we have to do, I'll never accept someone saying to me, "Well, we can't do that." Instead we turn it around and it's always been, "How are we going to do it? How will we accomplish that?"

His childhood experiences created resilience and steadfast optimism that he modeled for students.

Todd had been the principal for 27 years and clearly remembered what New Era was like when he began his tenure there, a school with too many negatively worded rules:

But I can remember when I came in the first day and they had a building secretary who -- I walked into the office and she said, "Oh, hello." "Here, this is probably the first thing I should give you. This is our list of rules." And it was three pages long, and it was, You may not, you may not, you may not... and I said, "Let me see that," and I took it from her and I ripped it into about 7 pieces and I threw it in the wastebasket. And there was just shock on her face when I did that and she said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you right now that we won't have that many rules." I said, "We'll basically have probably four rules outside," and I said..."the biggest rule is that everyone is going to treat everyone with caring and concern and respect." And I condensed all of the rules into four basic procedures for the playground and they have been that way ever since.

It was a school with all of these rules and people seemed to think they were only responsible for their classroom and it wasn't an environment where you came in the building and you felt like, Wow! It's okay to be there. And I indicated to the staff on day one that if there was one expectation I had for all of them, it was that they would give their time to all children, that they would show by their actions and their comments every day that every child they came in contact with was unique, was special, and that they cared about them. And they all followed suit... I vowed in education that I would make every child feel that they were worthwhile and of value, because I know there's a real connection between how you feel about yourself and the ability to do things people ask you to do, either behaviorally or academically. And I really believe that the high expectations in terms of behavior and academics and that caring part are what leads to success, both in terms of social success and academic success.

The Principal's Job Description

In March of 2008, I asked Todd to describe his position as principal, and he replied:

There isn't a job description for a principal in my mind. That's something that evolves every day. The bottom line is still anything that involves kids, you do... If someone vomits on the floor and I'm the first one there, I clean it up. If a book is torn and I can't find Mrs. Meade, I'll fix the binding. If we're unloading food stuff for the kitchen and I see it come in, I'll be the first one to help unload the truck. If someone needed word lists cut up in a classroom or needed to have another additional person there for whatever reason, I'd be the first one there... If someone doesn't have breakfast and it's 10:00 in the morning when they come and our cook isn't here anymore, I'll get them breakfast...I hope I can make people smile everyday... I have very few irate people.

He modeled this work ethic for this staff to emphasize that “you’re not limited by what a teacher’s supposed to do, or what an instructional assistant is supposed to do.” In fact, I observed the custodian in the office making a copy of a paper for a student. I concluded that the principal was also a teacher, a child advocate, and a fundraiser, and as the study unfolds, the reader will discover that he was the patriarch, a counselor, instructional leader, and encourager.

Survey Results

The results of modified Beliefs about School Achievement (BASA) survey show that the principal and teachers adhered to slightly different beliefs about what causes student achievement. The principal’s results do not exhibit a socio-economic bias and perhaps form his ideology. In fact, the principal absolutely disagreed that uncontrollable factors, like a child’s inherited ability and family socio-economic status, were major influences in child achievement. He believed that a child from a poor family with less educated parents will be successful in school if the student has an effective teacher and puts forth sufficient effort in school. Interestingly, the principal believed that gender played a more important role in student achievement, especially in language arts. The mean scores of the principal and teachers were 2 and 3.55, respectively. Specifically, the principal believed that girls are better at language arts skills, like writing, and boys are better at mathematics. Many studies about gender bias in schools, especially gender differences in mathematics, report teachers’ beliefs, strategies, behaviors, and emotional cues (Li, 1999; Garrahy, 2001; Graham, 1990; Lightbody, Siann, Stocks, & Walsh, 1996; Fang, 1996). Less is known about the principal’s gender bias.

The Principal as a Teacher

Todd was an involved and engaging teacher and frequently visited classrooms to conduct mini-lessons, read to the children, celebrate achievement with students, and participate in curriculum activities, like being a science lab partner. I observed a lesson he taught in a third grade class about the power of your imagination. He played a 1930s radio program about a Martian invasion and explained how families would gather around the radio after dinner to listen to the latest episode. Todd remembered listening to the Lone Ranger with his grandfather when he was young. He and his brother drew pictures of what they thought the characters looked like; the boys reached their own conclusions. Similarly, when the radio show had concluded, he challenged students to imagine what the setting and characters looked like. The principal engaged them in a discussion about using their imaginations, like the radio listeners, and not relying on a television or movie screen to provide those images. I noticed that students appeared relaxed around him and a couple of boys even sat on the floor close to his chair. Several students asked questions and the classroom teacher interjected additional comments into the conversation.

The principal supported students' academic achievement, especially in math and language arts. Third grade students participated in Math Blasters, a fun motivating strategy used by the teacher to encourage students to learn their multiplication facts. When the teacher felt confident that the student knew the math facts, the principal inducted the student into the Math Blasters Club where membership was honored and appeared to me to be better than a trophy. Once inducted to the club, members then became peer tutors in math. Students did not compete against one another for membership; it was open to all students who successfully learned their multiplication facts, and all but a couple third graders reached the goal by the end of academic year. On

the morning of my visit, the principal inducted Samantha into the Math Blasters Club. Todd provided a brief testimony of how she recited her multiplication facts to him at lunch before her induction to the club. He fastened a Math Blasters Club pin onto the student's shirt as she beamed with pride. Samantha said she learned her facts by practicing with her father and grandfather. Another inductee explained that he practiced in the car and even at dinner – exactly what Todd wanted the other students to hear. The short ceremony concluded with the principal leading all third graders in a chant and parade around the classroom and across the hall into the media center and computer lab, “Multiplication means adding over and over and over...” Although this is an example relating to math achievement, it shows how the principal participated in students' learning and academic achievement. Students, teachers, and the principal celebrated literacy achievement, too.

The principal's office was an extended classroom where he may be found proctoring a state assessment for a child who had been absent during the scheduled testing period or playing a game with a student who needed some extra attention from a positive male role model. I overheard this conversation (September 20, 2007):

Student: Mr. Kraai?

Principal: Yes, Richard.

Student: I was looking for someone to get permission to get the ball. I didn't find anybody. I looked in your office and saw it was filled with a bunch of Lincoln Logs.

those programs. Dad was very beside himself because his children don't want to move 9 hours away which would mean they then would never see dad once a week and every other weekend but only on significant vacations from school. No one was willing to listen to those little girls, and I talked with both of them last week, Wednesday. They both indicated to me that they... didn't want to move with mother's new boyfriend. They still wanted to see their dad. They've been through a lot with their dad being in jail for an extended period of time last year. Dad is sincere in terms of trying to make some change, so I went to bat for them, because sometimes kids don't get advocacy in the courts. And I actually have friend [wealthy community member] who, if I call, will allow me to arrange for an attorney and pay the legal fees. And I called on Thursday, had the attorney appointment on Friday with the kids. The check was in my hand already Thursday evening from a friend, and the attorney then went with that friend and was with a friend of the court with the dad and the mother. And the end result was that in court this past Monday, the judge asked the friend of the court if Mr. Kraai had talked with the girls at school. Our friend of the court indicated, yes, that I had, and he wondered what my recommendation was, and the recommendation was that the girls would not have a change in their custodial parenting arrangement right now because they've gone through a lot of trauma and change in the last year and I didn't think...they were at a point where they should have additional stress placed upon them. And, as soon as the judge heard that, he said that I agree with Mr. Kraai's recommendation [and the father retained shared custody].

And the reason it happens here is because we've made a lifetime of pushing decisions and making choices that are just what's in the best interests of children and that is respected in the county and by our parents as well. And here was a situation where kids finally had their own voice, someone listened to them in the courts, and they actually made a decision that at this point and time is really the best one for the kids who are involved.

And I have their father coming in for an early morning meeting Wednesday and I have some things to share with him about how he better be sincere in the changes he's making and follow through with some choices. And he's even going to be, uh, told by myself that he better stop smoking, too, because he's doing that in the presence of his kids and I want that stopped, and I think I can get him on the road to doing that, as well.

I noticed in different situations that he reported confronting parents about their choices and subsequent negative impacts on their children.

The Principal as a Fundraiser

Since Todd had been the principal for 27 years, he had become very well connected to resources in the county and, over time, had gained the trust of parents and

Principal: Yes, you did. You saw them on the floor? You wondered why I was building with Lincoln Logs, didn't you? Yep, Robert and I built with those yesterday. They were pretty neat.

I found out that Robert needed some extra attention because he was struggling in class. Another student had recently spent 10 minutes in Todd's office playing marbles with him. Todd indicated that these children -- and their teachers -- would reap the rewards in the classroom when these children returned feeling happier and ready to learn. In addition to the Lincoln logs, marbles, and other games, blocks, and toys, the principal had a collection of children's books he read aloud to students in the morning in an extra classroom before students went to their own classrooms. Mini-posters of LifeSkills were displayed on the wall. His office door was always open when I visited the school unless he needed to talk to a parent or child about a private, more serious matter. Todd spent his time with children and completed paperwork after the students went home, sometimes staying a few hours after school. On occasion, he took the work home with him to complete.

The Principal as a Child Advocate

Todd served as a child advocate to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of students. He related one story about a hostile and painful custody battle between two parents:

Just last week, we had another situation with two little girls. One was a third grader and one was a first grader, and they were going through a really pretty bitter custody battle between their mother and their dad. Their mom wanted to change their custodial parenting agreement so that it would allow her to move to the Upper Peninsula with a boyfriend and dad was very frustrated. He's been in jail for drinking under the influence of alcohol. I have helped that individual by getting him involved in AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] classes and also by getting him involved with the First Reformed Church and getting his kids involved in

community members. He admitted to being “a real salesman” for the school and found ways to generate additional revenue to purchase various school materials, like books and computer software. He also worked closely with community churches and businesses that donated items for children, like shoes and counseling services.

At the time of this study, the state of Michigan was experiencing financial hardships and per-pupil aid and other programs were being reduced by the state government. Many school districts were forced to eliminate programs and services for children, reduce the number of school faculty by offering early retirement incentives, and even close their doors. Todd remained focused on his students, and less on state politics; he stayed confident that he would find additional funds to help meet their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs (Table 7). Students also participated in fundraising efforts by selling candy and flowers in the community.

Every other year for the last 14 years, the school has sponsored a community auction, complete with a professional auctioneer, to raise money for the school. Todd worried that many people would not attend the 2007 auction because of the state’s declining economy and other auctions being held by local churches. He explained:

I really wondered if we wouldn’t have many people attend just because the economy is really down. I hear a lot of people not having work, or not having a job, and people moving, and I thought that we may not even have people come. So we get all of these items from businesses and had it all set up, and we did our publicity, and there are certain individuals that I always invite every year who are retired people who come just because they’re always looking for certain things for grandchildren for Christmas. And up until, well, 6:00 that Saturday... I just was very anxious and we had ordered doughnuts and cider and these sheet cakes, really sheet pies from the bakery in Pentwater, because it’s a grandpa of one of our kids...and we had all this stuff there. And then all of a sudden, the people started coming and by 6:30, we probably had 100 in seats in the gym. We auctioned off, I think, 98 different items just in a regular auction procedure and then another 60 were just silent auction on tables. And when the dust cleared

about 9:00 and all the people had paid for their items, we made \$5,800. So it was really good.

Local business donated items or services (e.g., free oil changes, a \$25 gift card to a local grocery store, a reciprocating saw, 2 boxes of apples, 18 holes of golf) and each class created a theme basket (e.g., chocolate, gardening, movie). Todd and his son created five baskets with a sports theme that included different kinds of balls, a bat, and bean bags in a large duffle bag. Todd and his staff wanted to purchase the science software for their Classworks program with a total cost of about \$8,800. The district may or may not support the remainder, but local grants were a possibility.

Support for the Principal

The principal was well-respected by staff, students, and parents, who recognized his commitment to children's education and happiness. One faculty member who had worked with Todd for over 10 years said:

He may not make meetings on time .. but he is a principal who is always there for kids and he's always there for parents. He puts a high value and priority on being available to parents and to kids. And he personally will go the extra mile to do what needs to be done, or he'll go beyond in either giving sometimes of his money and sometimes of his time to families. He's just a real approachable guy. And that doesn't mean that he doesn't know how to say, "You need to do this. You're the parent, you need to" – he knows how to have those kinds of conversations but he also knows how to be supportive and understanding of parents who are in different situations than the middle class.

Another teacher concurred:

I like how he encourages and challenges students and his staff to do things without making us feel like we're forced to do things. That's why we like volunteering. We like to do things for him because the way he respects us. People like to be around him because he is pleasant, and respectful, and honest and wholesome. He sets a good example and is very visible in the building. These kids need a male leader.

He analyzed state assessment data and problem-solved with teachers on how to improve in areas of weakness, but he also helped teachers solve more practical kinds of problems. One teacher reported how he allowed her to print extra copies of spelling words so students could practice words at home:

If it doesn't work, we bring it to Todd's attention, and he will say, "If it's not working best for kids, we need to think of a way that works best." I mean, little changes, tiny little subtle things that I've gone to him, and I've said, "This isn't working for me"... When I had these children, for instance, with their Word Sorts. I had them take these Word Sorts home and they have to bring them back the next day because we use them in class. They were losing them. They were forgetting them at home. And I said, "Do you mind if I just run extra paper and give them a Word Sorts sheet for home and a Word Sorts to keep here? Is that alright?" I mean, it's extra paper and everybody is looking at the budget. He's like, "If you know what works, that's what we need to do." So now the children have their Sorts at home, and they don't even have to worry about bringing them and leaving them – they've got other things to worry about –it just makes life easier for them, but I don't think they notice these little things... We go through our spelling for two weeks. To me, two pieces of paper for a spelling series every two weeks is not excessive. Other principals, I know because I've worked for them, would say, "We have a paper shortage... We have issues with the copier. We're saving, we are cutting corners everywhere. My sons go to a different district ... and they get worksheets to take home but they cannot write on them."

In the first few months of my school observations, a fifth grader asked me why I was there frequently, "Are you studying us because New Era's been doing so good?" I told him yes, he was absolutely correct. He responded, "I think it's because of Mr. Kraai. He's not fast to punish you. He keeps working with you. He's a good person, and he's the nicest man. He encourages you" (informal conversation, November 15, 2007).

New Era's principal believed it was his purpose in life to help children and their families. After 27 years as principal, he remarked, "I still enjoy everything I do. I still feel like there's a purpose for what I do. And above all, I love kids. And they keep me feeling pretty young, even though I'm now 150." We both laughed.

The following transcription from an interview I conducted with a parent revealed her confidence in Todd as a principal, and she also contributed to the school's sense of place in creating a positive learning environment. The interview was conducted on January 24, 2008, in a small room adjacent to the front office where she was organizing materials for the upcoming science Family Fun Night. Carla was a former New Era student whose son attended the school. She said, "Todd always has time for the parents, for any concerns that we may have. He can be running back and forth, up and down the halls, and if the parents need to just a moment with Todd, he has it... He's never too busy for the parents, ever." We continued our conversation:

Researcher: Have you had a situation like that that needed to make an appointment to talk to him?

Parent: Oh, of course.

Researcher: How did he come across to you?

Parent: Very caring, very helpful. He's been very helpful. We had some family situations last year. Chris was in kindergarten and just had some behavioral issues with Chris. And Todd was nice enough, along with Carol, to sit down and have a meeting and discuss some different options with us to do with Chris as to bedtime issues and stuff. Not just involving school, you know, involving home life as well. To help us out with home.

Researcher: Did something happen right away?

Parent: Oh, yes! Right away. He actually, between him and Carol [the family advocate], helped me find an outside therapist/counselor, for Chris to see, just to get a little bit of help maybe on some behavioral issues. Found me a great book to read on some parenting issues from home, being a new mom so young, it was kind of hard for me. The teachers have all been wonderful, as well. Anything that you need—anything-- if you have any questions at all, they're always available. Call them at home. They're always available to call at home, which a lot...of teachers... school time is school time, home time is home time. All of them always put their

home number on every letter that goes home, their home number if you need help. “If you have any questions, feel free to call me at home. I’m awake until 9:30 at night.”

Carla appreciated the purple folder with weekly newsletter, completed papers, homework sheets for the weekend, and book order forms that were sent with her first-grade son.

Every night, he also brought home a plastic bag with a book and reading log that motivated him to read with his parents. The interview continued:

Researcher: What do you expect for your son to learn here?

Parent: [Pause] To be honest, to be trustworthy. Of course, all the democratic core values, but just, here – not that I want to put all the other schools down – but this is a smaller school and it’s more close-knit. It’s not just a class that he comes to everyday. It’s more of a family. He has a lot of great friends... We’re real close with Todd. Anytime we need anything at all, we can go to him and I really think that him learning here... he’s going to take a lot more out of here than anywhere else.

The parents moved to a nearby school district but still drive their son to and from New Era. “It’s worth it, it’s well worth it. We want to keep him here as long as we can.”

She was amazed with the math skills he was learning, although at times the expectations seemed overwhelming. I continued my conversation with the mother:

Researcher: What would you say to someone who didn’t know anything about New Era Elementary and they thought of transferring here, moving here and having their child go here...? What would you say to that parent?

Parent: It’s wonderful. It’s a good school... It’s a good learning place. It’s not just a school environment, it’s like a family. It’s like a second family. They treat your children very, very well. They treat them like their own. And that’s what you want. You don’t want your child to go to school everyday, and “Here you go, this is what you need to learn.” You want your child treated well. You want your child treated fairly. If there’s ever a problem on the playground, it’s nothing. You go to Todd. You say, “Hey, Todd. Chris said there was an issue today.” Todd says, “Okay, I’ll have a talk tomorrow,” and it’s taken care of. It’s a small school, it’s not a

city school, but it's a wonderful school. It's a very wonderful school. I will send my kids here, both of them, and I would recommend it to anybody.

Researcher: And your son is happy?

Parent: He's happy. He loves it here.

Researcher: He comes home happy?

Parent: He does.

Researcher: He wakes up ready to go?

Parent: He does. Well, first year in kindergarten, of course, he didn't. "I don't like school. I don't want to go." But now he gets mad if he can't come. Like if he's sick, he's like "I want to go to school."

Chapter 5: Home-School Relationships

School personnel worked hard to create positive relationships with families of current and former students. Home-school connections is another phrase often used in education that varies in meaning and is context-specific. Effective schools maintaining positive home-school connections may mean teachers sending home newsletters, participating in parent-teacher conferences, and fostering parent volunteer programs in the school. At New Era, I found that school personnel created meaningful *relationships* with families, ones that reached beyond superficial greetings and polite exchanges at award ceremonies or on Field Day. One of those staff members was the family advocate (Figure 5).

Family Advocate

The district employed three family advocates to serve primarily preschool and kindergarten students from at-risk families. The advocate conducted monthly home visits to teach or reinforce emergent literacy skills, beginning math skills, and other developmentally appropriate skills, like learning to use scissors. She helped families in crisis who needed assistance from local agencies or organizations, acted as a positive liaison between the family and school, and provided parenting resources. Carol was the family advocate for New Era Elementary and had been an advocate since the inception of the program 15 years ago.

History of the Program

The program, Together We Can, was created by one of the district's former elementary principals, Ms. Tobin. According to Ms. Tobin, she had been a building principal of Thomas Reade Elementary for 12 years when she initiated this program,

based on the needs of at-risk children and their families, established research about parents' critical roles in their children's academic development, and a strong belief system to help children. The concept began with the realization that the school's at-risk students had parents who weren't supportive of their child's education, either because the parents had prior negative school experiences, a lack of education, or both. Ms. Tobin saw smart students who weren't achieving their potential, and she thought that the missing factor was home. She thought that if staff worked with children before they entered school and offered a parental support system, they could make positive, long-lasting impacts on the children's education and their families' perceptions about school. But it needed to be more than just getting parents involved with school activities. Ms. Tobin had experienced parents who were antagonistic and defensive about working with school faculty and staff. She remarked, "School wasn't a good place for them and they let you know it." Instead, school represented an adversarial place and parents' negative perceptions influenced their children's ideas about school, so that it became a generational problem. Simply put, Ms. Tobin and the staff needed to change the parents' beliefs about school. "You're working with parents to see the school as a partner rather than that oppositional institution that treated them so badly maybe when they were in school," Carol explained. Ms. Tobin believed that these parents valued their children, but they just didn't value education, as shown by their behaviors, such as failing to talk to teachers about their child's school performance.

How did she implement the program? As building principal, Ms. Tobin originally allocated Title I funds and later added funds for at-risk students to support the program, such as paying salaries, buying materials, travel expenses, and conference registration

fees. She consulted a reading teacher who was in charge of a school-wide reading intervention program for at-risk students. They discussed home visits, family events, and behavior management procedures to share with parents, like getting on the child's eye level and making eye contact when the parent disciplined the youngster. Ms. Tobin hired Carol to direct and initiate the program under her guidance. An instructional assistant, Brenda, was transferred to the program to work side by side with Carol.

Initially, they targeted a small caseload of 18-20 families with the highest needs from Ms. Tobin's building, the largest elementary school in the district. They consulted district preschool and kindergarten teachers on student recommendations, lessons, and home visit packets of student materials. They created language arts, math, and science packets but discovered, under Ms. Tobin's guidance, they needed to stress literacy skills with ESL students. They began giving each child a book on every home visit and emphasizing emergent reading skills.

Early on, the family advocates began home visits with Carol talking to parents about how to work with their children and Brenda working with children on skills. The women planned gatherings for the at-risk families, like Christmas parties and a workshop about self-esteem. They discovered that they both were interested in planning lessons, working with parents, and teaching children, so they divided their caseload to be more efficient. However, if an advocate became concerned about a safety issue on a home visit, they agreed that they would go together. To create a sense of equity between the women, Carol took a pay cut and was no longer paid a director's salary.

"Support grew as the program was implemented and other principals called Ms. Tobin to request Together We Can advocates for their at-risk students and families. The

following year, advocates were present in each elementary school, although two of the smaller buildings shared an advocate. The advocates then worked with each building principal to select families. Years later when an independent K-8 school annexed into the district, another advocate was hired.

Ms. Tobin provided much leadership in the beginning stages of the program. She and the advocates met most Friday mornings for about an hour to discuss families' progress and challenges. According to Carol, the meetings were a priority for the principal. Ms. Tobin also sent the advocates to conferences related to their responsibilities and kept the caseload to a manageable number for each advocate.

Ms. Tobin explained how they invented the program as they went along. For example, the principal and advocates wanted to plan a gathering for families to model positive interaction. They knew to plan it at the end of the month and provide a meal, since most families received food stamps and would not have many, if any, left at that time. On the other hand, Ms. Tobin frequently repeated their goal and role to keep them focused; they were not in the school to relieve the principal of responsibilities to families.

"They needed to believe in the program," Ms. Tobin emphasized. She encouraged the advocates to withhold judgment based on numbers (e.g., student pre- and post-tests, parent surveys about the program's impact on attitudes and values on education, number of families served) and short-term goals; they had to learn to take great satisfaction in families' small improvements.

The job of family advocate has evolved over time. At one point, Carol worked with local hospitals to get child development information into parents' hands, but now that is routinely handled by other organizations. The job expanded to include other

responsibilities, like facilitating volunteer programs and family nights, and helping organize the new counseling program at the school. A couple of years ago, Carol and the principal planned a family health fair night with various individuals, groups, and agencies, like hospital staff and a dentist, who set up informational booths. A local dairy distributed milk samples. Since the school had just added their walking path on the playground, they invited families to walk and help support school fundraising. The success of this event prompted future family nights with different themes.

Family Advocate Qualifications

I was curious to discover more about the qualifications of a family advocate for this district. Ms. Tobin described an advocate as someone who had passion and a sense of mission in helping people, especially children. She looked at the potential advocate's character traits, not just educational background. In fact, only 1 out of 3 advocates has a Bachelor's degree and it's in an unrelated field. Ms. Tobin explained that the advocate needed to be at ease in what may be considered an uncomfortable home, one that was filthy or one where the advocate got cigarette smoke blown in her face. She needed to be able to build rapport with children and parents and be creative. The family advocate needed to be able to withhold judgment against families, for example, when a family had no crayons or paper but had a large collection of videos, or when the children had no winter boots but parents smoked 3 packs of cigarettes per day. Advocates needed to appear less "professional" like teachers and dress more casually, wearing jeans, sweatshirts, and sneakers. Dressing like a professional teacher may intimidate parents and threaten the positive relationship between the advocate and parents.

Family Advocate Training

Family advocates received no formal training but consulted classroom teachers and attended conferences related to their field. Carol remembered:

Earlier on in our job, we would be sent to different conferences that might have pieces of information that would be helpful to us. Inevitably, when they're talking about, you know, introduce yourself and what is your job. We are the only people there who do what we do in a school district.

One of the most influential conferences was Parents as Teachers (Parents as Teachers National Center, 2005) training, a concept developed in the 1970s when Missouri educators noticed that beginning kindergarteners had various levels of school readiness. Early childhood professionals initiated a research-based program that helped parents understand their critical role in their child's development beginning from birth that could better prepare students for school and life success. They (Parents as Teachers National Center, 2005) contend, "Such a program, available to all families, would help level the playing field for all children," and their mission is

to provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life by: increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices, provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, prevent child abuse and neglect, and increase children's school readiness and school success.

The Parents as Teachers National Center has been awarded numerous national and international distinctions, including recognition from the National Mental Health Association, Center for Disease Control, the Teachers College of Columbia University, the Better Business Bureau, and other agencies and magazines. Family advocates incorporated their own materials and ideas with those from Parents as Teachers; the programs are not identical.

Family advocates were also trained on the issues of poverty using Ruby Payne's (1998) book, *The Framework of Poverty*. In this practitioner's guide, the author defines poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p. 16). Resources are not just financial ones but also encompass financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources, in addition to support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of the hidden rules. Payne (1998) differentiates the behaviors and values of the different economic classes to illuminate the hidden rules, or unspoken cues and habits, of the poverty class that may go unnoticed by those in the middle class. So ask yourself, could you survive in poverty? Do you know how to keep your clothes from being stolen at a Laundromat? Do you know how to get a gun even if you have a police record? Do you know how to manage without a car, electricity, or a phone? On the other hand, middle class tasks include getting a library card, setting the table, and decorating the house for the holidays.

The advocates, who were not college-educated teachers or counselors, received on-the-job training in order to assist families. One of the advocate's duties was to act as a liaison between parents and other school personnel. For instance, a child qualified to receive special education services and school personnel (i.e., special education teacher, regular classroom teacher, counselor, speech pathologist, and administrator) requested an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) meeting with parents to review the students' assessment results and recommendations for service. Carol would ask the parent, "Are you comfortable going to this meeting alone or would you rather me go with you?" If the parent preferred to go alone, Carol would call the parent to remind her of the meeting and offer to provide transportation to the school. Based on parental consent, the advocate may

attend the meeting in place of or with the parent, but Carol always strongly encouraged parent participation. If the parent chose not to attend the official meeting, school personnel would conduct the meeting and “walk through” the student results and recommendations with the advocate. Staff discovered that parents didn’t always return documents that were mailed or sent home with students; the parents may not understand the IEP’s terminology or be able to read it. Instead, the advocate and parent would meet at the family’s home to sign official documents in accordance with federal guidelines.

Carol met at least once per month with the other family advocates for emotional support to share the triumphs, frustrations, and worries associated with her role. These meetings were very informal and occurred on an as needed basis, too. They also telephoned each other with questions and concerns about families.

Job Description

“How do you define your job?” I asked the family advocate, and Carol replied:

It’s like a gap-filling position. It’s like there’s a gap between what the kids should be coming into school with and what they are coming into school with. There’s a gap in being able to communicate with the family because there’s no phone out there and the teacher can never contact them, and they don’t send back notes and they don’t read the newsletter, so you’re that gap for communication.

What they were looking for were people who...had some pretty basic skills and values, and just basic knowledge of just life and living, and raising kids and that kind of thing. And they were looking for people who were not the professionals, who were not the teachers, to “coming in to tell me what to do.” They were looking for #1 someone who could relate and gain the trust of parents and then build on that with them... The joke has been, they’ve got three social workers for the price of about one -- for what we do, but we all just have a heart for kids.

I asked her to categorize her responsibilities and frequencies of her responsibilities as

Often, Sometimes, and Rarely. Carol found this task problematic since duties and

frequencies varied with different families. The following list is a *partial* job description,

as Carol called it, of the Together We Can family advocate. Once I received the job description from her, I asked her to be more specific about her responsibilities, so the paragraphs following the descriptors summarize my conversation with Carol.

- ❑ **Makes monthly home visits with families on her caseload (share book, activities, input from classroom teacher)**

A risk checklist aided her in determining if the family needed her support. Teacher and principal input, in addition to the family's prior situations, greatly impacted her decision to pursue service. A student's permanent record may help, although there usually wasn't much information. After approximately one month into the school year, she met with the principal to discuss her potential caseload for the school year. There was fluidity in her caseload. She explained that transiency was a problem with at-risk students, especially due to the failing state economy.

- ❑ **Contacts other families as needed (facilitates communication between home and school, address areas of concern, etc.)**

For example, if the teacher cannot reach parents by telephone, Carol would make a home visit. She approximated that 90% of contacts were positive, although some parents felt suspicious of her involvement in the early stages of their relationship. Carol admitted to feeling hesitant about initiating contact at the beginning of her career. She sent parents welcoming letters to introduce herself and notes about donated food baskets.

- ❑ **Connects families to community resources as needed**

The family advocate helped families obtain services by local, state, and federal agencies or groups, such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) federal grant program that supplies nutritious food, nutrition education and counseling, and various referrals to other agencies (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/aboutwic/wicataglace.htm>). She provided transportation to these agencies, such as to the Department of Human Services, as needed.

- **Extends modified services to families beyond child's kindergarten year as needed.**

Carol attended parent-teacher conferences and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and acted as a liaison between the parents and the school officials. She offered additional mini-lessons at the student's home. Carol offered assistance to middle and high school students and their families, but this was rare.

- **Facilitates two playgroups a week for children 0-5 and parent(s).**

The family advocate planned and implemented group activities with another family advocate. The same activities were planned for both locations with minor exceptions. The schedule was as follows: free play (crafts, floor activities to build fine and gross motor skills), snack, clean-up time, and a story, song, or fingerplay at the end of the session. At the other location, young children had time to ride bikes and trikes at the end of the session. Carol monitored children and parents and implemented activities that were similar to those conducted during home visits.

- ❑ **Conducts Parents as Teacher Visits with some children 0 – 3 years of age.**

She provided developmental information to families who were interested.

The family advocate provided instruction and a positive connection to the school.

- ❑ **Offers to complete Ages and Stages Questionnaire (developmental screening tool) with children before they enter school.**

- ❑ **Visits classrooms of students on her caseload and consults with teachers.**

Topics of discussion included student progress, areas of concern, student improvements, and suggestions for materials to provide to parents.

- ❑ **Helps plan and staff Family Fun Nights for Early Childhood Center and New Era Elementary**

Typically, there were 3 per year at the Early Childhood Center and 2 at New Era Elementary. Staff support was needed.

- ❑ **Attends staff meetings at the Early Childhood Center and New Era Elementary, as applicable to her duties.**

- ❑ **Contributes articles to the school's monthly newsletter**

She and the principal wrote articles on parenting, such as the Love and Logic® approach to discipline.

- ❑ **Oversees volunteer program at New Era Elementary**

Recruited and facilitated community members to volunteer (listen to kids read)

- ❑ **Attends some of the parent meetings at New Era Elementary and Early Childhood Center, including PTO meetings and parent-teacher conferences.**

Carol explained:

We often will sit in on parent-teacher conferences with our families. I have families who still want me to do that when their child is in fourth grade...which there is a plus and minus to that. You want them to get to the point where – many of them we don't do, but occasionally, there's a family for whom that comfort level of having a person there on their side, so to speak, if they're insecure about then we do that, too.

❑ **Assists with student registrations for preschool and kindergarten**

This included 5 days of registration from March to May. Parents set appointments and the family advocate was assigned a session, for example 3-7 p.m. She sent notices to parents who had older children receiving services by the family advocate.

❑ **Assists high school National Honor Society with Thanksgiving Basket service project by identifying families in need and delivering food baskets.**

High school students raised the money, bought the food, and created food baskets, and then family advocates delivered or parents picked up food baskets. Food baskets included turkey in tin containers or meat certificates, stuffing, canned food, Jell-o, pie crust, and juice. Carol admitted that asking permission could be a delicate situation.

Carol described wondering about parents' view of her role in their children's education. She related how she would often ask herself, "What are they interpreting from what I'm saying? Who do they think that I really am?" Parents often called her their child's teacher, and she was careful to define her job by saying to them, "Well, you know I'm not in the classroom. I'm not teaching him." She thought that parents had difficulty describing her job.

Caseloads

Ms. Tobin and Carol both stressed to me that one of the main criteria in family selection was to choose a family with children just entering school or younger with whom they could be effective. Carol explained:

We're looking for children coming into school, whether it's preschool or kindergarten, who come in and there are some red flags there. And it's not like a red flag that this child might need special ed services... We're trying to find those kids who if they got a boost, they won't be tempted to be placed in that category for one thing. So you're looking for families that your kids are low skilled, parents may or may not be alienated from school, and they're families that you're hoping you can get in there and make a difference.

Typically, families were selected based on teacher recommendations and the advocate's prior experience with a family. Sometimes the principal specified certain families in need of assistance. At other times, the advocate used a risk checklist that included criteria such as low parental education, value of education, and family problems. Carol explained that when using the risk checklist, she did not just count the number of checkmarks to determine eligibility. It was much more intangible than that since she often relied on prior family situations, too. She consulted students' permanent records, but usually they did not provide her much familial information. Once the list was made, she discussed the family selections with the principal.

During the 2007-08 school year, Carol reported to have a low caseload of 7 families, 9-10 children. As of December 2007, two families had moved and Carol was in the process of adding two more new families to her caseload. Also during that year, the three family advocates divided their caseloads differently due to the changed school structure and the inequity in size of school populations. Even though Carol only worked with a small number of families per year, it was important to the school that the families' cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs were addressed.

The advocates considered their official caseloads to be those families with preschoolers and kindergarteners. However, they had families who had been serviced in the past whose children were beyond that range who still provided assistance, such as a parent with a financial crisis or a teacher who needed a facilitator in a meeting. Another family advocate recently received a call from middle school personnel to help with a child who was serviced while the child was in elementary school.

The advocates did not work with just any troubled family. Early in the program, Ms Tobin suggested which families to discontinue family advocate services, but later, family advocates teamed up with building principals to make those decisions. According to Carol:

[Ms. Tobin] said, “You know what, you need to drop that family,” ...or “Don’t pick up that family. I know enough about that family and the history there that it is not an efficient use of your time.” And, that’s been a hard call for us to make without somebody making that call for us. We have that mentality that, you know, there’s got to be something, some way we can impact this family. It was almost easier when somebody would say, “No, you’re not picking that one up,” [Ms. Tobin] would say, “You’re not picking them up. Better off that you pick up this person.” We, because we kind of viewed it as a, it was like a ‘giving up before you even tried’ kind of thing. But she was always correct when she made those kind of calls.

How did she decide to discontinue services, “drop a family,” as she called it? Carol reported that there was no set of criteria, instead it was a judgment call based on her experience with the family. “It’s unusual for us to give up on a family and to drop a family,” she stated. The most common reason she dropped a family, which was rare, was because she was consistently blocked from having meaningful contact with the family, such as scheduling an appointment and the family would not be home when she arrived. “That’s a pretty clear message there,” she realized. Over the course of 15 years, the district’s family advocates had only dropped 2 or 3 families. That is a small number given

the fact that they have worked with over 125 families over the 15 years. On occasion,

Carol was forced to realize that she was not making progress with the family:

That's not an easy thing to admit, because you want to be able to feel like you can make a difference for kids. It's a hard call to make, and I'd say that we go the extra miles before we're willing to say it's not going to work. I mean, I've kept people on my caseload before where I look back at the end of the year, and I thought, You know... I really don't think I made much of an impact here, but on the other hand, you say... I tried." So you know for the following year, if they're still in that age group that maybe you're not going to pick them up the following year or something. But usually there's that feeling that you want to, to try. You want to try if you can make some sort of impact.

She admitted that the family selection process was not 100% accurate, not an exact science. Ms. Tobin explained that although family selection was one of their greatest obstacles, since many families did not want to forfeit the advocate's assistance once their children got older, it was also one of their greatest successes.

Working with Parents

Carol worked with a variety of parents. She explained that some parents valued her assistance:

Probably one of the neatest experiences I had, there was a family that we visited for many years because they had 4 daughters and several of them had learning – ended up being in special education but we were very involved with that family, nonetheless. And she could pull out from the drawer, when we did a visit with the second child, that we had brought that similar activity with the older child. I mean, she saved all the stuff in the drawer. She said, "Yeah, we can pull it out and use it." You know, that was really, that was really unique to me that somebody saved it. As different children came through, she would pull out such and such, and say, "Oh I've still got that such and such that you brought to Christie when you visited her." And it was like "Wow. That was pretty unusual."

Carol perceived that other parents did not value her assistance, "Then you have the other ones that by the time you go the next month, 'Oh, they ripped that up. We don't have that anymore.'"

Carol had an ethical and professional obligation to report any abuse to protective services. She and Todd worked together and maintained positive working relationships with family services. Carol reported that the agency actually welcomed calls to check if a formal report should be made.

When she began the job 15 years ago, she had been a stay-at-home mom and admitted to living a “fairly sheltered life,” as she called it. She thought that the idea of someone losing parental rights and children being taken away from parents was abhorrent. At that time, all the parents she saw and knew seemed like good, caring parents. Her job, unfortunately, made her realize, “Why isn’t somebody doing something about this situation? Why can’t we give these children something better?”

Carol also worked with parents who developed a dependence on her for help. For instance, one mother sent her daughter to school and told her to go directly to the principal’s office to see if he thought she had pink eye. The little girl awoke that morning with a crusted eye but the mother was unsure it was pink eye. She had been previously reprimanded for truancy from social services and wanted her daughter to attend school, if possible. The mother was at home with no transportation because her husband left for Iowa for work in their only car. Eventually, the principal did think the student had pink eye, so Carol returned her home, advising the mother that the daughter could return to school the following day if she began using eye drops specifically for the ailment. The mother explained to Carol that she could have the doctor phone in a prescription for eye drops to the local pharmacy, but she had no transportation to pick up the prescription. Carol detailed the plan:

If push comes to shove, Todd [the principal] or I will go to Shelby and pick up the prescription and bring it there. Because this is one of those unusual cases where

it's so important that we do as much as we can to get that child in school. She's missed way too much already. There are enough legitimate barriers there that we feel like, and that's a Todd call. Maybe another principal wouldn't say that, you know. I don't know, people will have, fall in different places in what they're going to call, bending over too far backwards, or whatever. But he and I are pretty close on the same page with how we feel about some of that stuff.

Another time, Carol went to her church's food pantry when it was closed to get food for this family.

I went to see Tina and I said, "How ya doing?" Her husband went out of state again for a week and a half to work. She said she had \$30 in food stamps. It bought food but no diapers. She didn't have diapers for the baby. I said, "I will find you diapers." I'm not going to get to the point of where I'm going to buy her diapers, because she's also someone who, once I started to do some stuff, she was coming to me first seeking. And I had to start to draw some lines there a little bit so she wouldn't just call to me up and say she needed dish soap... She was moving in that direction that's why I moved it back to the food pantry and said, "Okay. Who do you have who has a vehicle that can take you?" We had to problem-solve how she was going to be doing that kind of stuff... What I said was, "You know, Tina, I just had to buy these. You know I can't do this on a regular basis. I bought these for you, but you need to be thinking about how you can get --"

This mother refused help from the Women, Infants, and Child (WIC) program because she had a prior incident. They wanted to know too much information, she claimed. Carol was not able to make any progress with her and found out that Tina found a way to get what she needed for herself and her children. Tina said, "I'm almost out of laundry soap," and Carol replied, "Aw man, so where do you think you could get some of that? Do you have a friend?" She was trying to find the boundaries and limitations of Carol's generosity.

Carol had even given her home number to parents on occasion if she needed to hear from a family, especially about scheduling an appointment. She only remembered one mother abusing the privilege by calling her at 5:30 a.m. one morning. After a firm conversation, the problem never resurfaced.

Teachers and Family Advocate

Teachers, especially kindergarten teachers, occasionally accompanied Carol on home visits. “There’s a potential for the teacher and the advocate to be coming at this student problem if you want to call it that, or situation, from such different perspectives, and I think both perspectives have to be respected,” she explained. Carol empathized and realized the curriculum pressures that teachers felt from the impacts of current legislation, while, at the same time, she saw value in helping a teacher understand a child’s current home situation that may help explain the child’s classroom performance. She expressed great respect for classroom teachers and said, “They still need to see on behalf of *that child* that this is what’s going on at home, or this is what’s happening with mom, or this is what mom cares about and doesn’t care about. Because that emotion that sometimes goes along with some of that frustration can sometimes be directed at the child, and a lot of times we know that it’s not the child’s — they don’t have the power to do anything about it.”

The family advocate provided teachers information that may impact a child’s performance or teacher’s expectations:

Especially when they’re first coming in to school and sometimes the temptation for a teacher might be,...to throw up your hands with, ‘Holy cow, this kid doesn’t know this and this and this and this!’ And then you’ve done a couple of home visits and this is what is going on and this is what...the living situation is. These are some of the parent dynamics. And then that’s when they [teachers] may say, “Holy cow, how do they know what they know?” Given...now what little bit you can share about what’s going on at home...they have a different viewpoint of that and I think that’s valuable, not that it changes what that expectation is from the state and what those kids need to be doing. Somebody needs to know. If it’s not going to be the state, somebody needs to know that there’s a whole lot more to the story of what makes up this child’s person and capabilities other than, I’m six and I need to be able to read this many red words, or whatever the case may be.

A teacher described Carol as intervening for her by talking to the parents when school papers weren't being returned and talking to protective services about a truant student. The teacher had another student who may need to be retained, so Carol mentioned this possibility to the parents during a home visit and later participated in their parent-teacher conference. "I'm not sure who would take that role if she wasn't here," the teacher said. Carol sent emergency food baskets twice to a family. The first grade teacher never heard any negative comments. "I don't think they know they're a special needs family. They may think she does that with everybody," one teacher said.

Typical Home Visit

I wanted to know what the family advocate did on the first home visit. I found out that maybe there was no such thing as a typical, initial home visit, because it varied with the individual family based on the family's needs and the child's academic needs. If the advocate did not know a family and felt some uncertainty about initially contacting them, she would talk to the teacher about attending the first parent teacher conference in October. "We err on the side of caution with some of our families," she said. The teacher would introduce the family advocate thus allowing Carol time to explain her role. Often, when the teacher described the child's academic challenges (i.e., not knowing colors or recognizing numbers), Carol had the opportunity to informally explain that she would gather some materials together for the parents and child to practice and at home. "In a sense, you're putting the parents on the spot," she explained, "because not too many of them are going to say, 'No, I don't want to do that,' in front of the teacher. It's kind of a win situation for you, and then you're feeling your way as you go as to how much they will do. No one has ever, ever said no to that." During the initial parent-teacher

conference, she wouldn't mention to the parent whether it would be a home visit or a meeting at school. Later, she would make a call to the parents, and say something like, "You know that stuff that we talked about at parent-teacher conferences. I've put some things together I think might be able to help Eric with the skills so you could do some practicing at home. Would it be easier for me to drop them off to you at the house or would you rather pick them up at the school?" She reported that most people don't object to the advocate visiting the house. She hoped to use her interpersonal skills and experience to make families feel the advocate is non-threatening and was willing to help their child. Once, a parent didn't want to meet at school because she was embarrassed about the condition of her home. Later, Carol gained the mother's trust and was able to visit the family at home. "You know, I don't come to see your house. I come to see you and Eric," she would say. Another mother felt uncomfortable with Carol's home visits, but the advocate maintained contact with her:

There's a family that I have this year... I'm not sure I'll be welcomed as a home visitor, but it's a family that we still want contact with. So far, I've met the mom at school and now Mom has started a job, so I'm reverting to sending materials home with a note of my own... just to keep the relationship going, even though I don't think she wants me to come at night. She works 7-5. And she wasn't that open to my involvement initially. I went with the kindergarten teacher on a parent-teacher conference at the beginning of the year. And I actually was asked to go initially because there was a concern whether or not there was a safety issue and they didn't want the teacher going alone...and it turned out not [to be] an issue we could tell at all. When the teacher was the one who brought up me doing home visits, there was reluctance there. And I said..."I can at least begin to provide you with some materials," and there wasn't much of a response one way or the other. I just went ahead on my own, I took the next step. I hung around the classroom door when she was going to be picking up her child from school and then I just said you, "I've got this packet for Joey. I just want to show it to you minute." That's what you call a 5- to 10- minute visit, standing up in the hallway at school. It's tailored to make that contact and maintain a contact with a family you think that's important to do that with.

Rarely, an uncooperative family may be unsure of the advocate and would not be at home when she visited. “More often than not, if I can meet a parent at school once, then we’re okay.”

Typically, regular monthly visits begin with her packets, consisting of plastic Ziplock bags with lesson materials and additional books. Home visit packets were adapted and tailored depending on the child’s capabilities and needs. For example, a three year-old preschooler in Head Start is different than a kindergartener or a child who is repeating kindergarten.

Some visits lasted only 20 minutes and some continued for 45-50 minutes and occasionally longer if they discussed some other family crisis, or parents had questions or concerns. She tried to keep visits between 30-45 minutes, “but a lot of times I don’t know what I’m walking into necessarily either.” She usually doesn’t feel threatened and explained:

There have been times where there might be a particular person in the family, and unfortunately it’s often a male figure that sometimes just feels threatening. Several years ago, many years ago, when we first started this program, there was a family that we just felt uneasy about. There were two of them, actually. And, as it turned out, unfortunately later on down the road, we found out that those dads were molesting those daughters or stepdaughters in the family. So sometimes you just kind of pick up on some of that.

Initially, advocates maintained narrative documentation and another sheet for notes on the “regular” monthly home visits. That turned out to be too labor intensive so the other advocate created more concise documentation. A personal visit record was an open-ended form that provided the advocate space to write information about the upcoming visit (e.g., Do I need to get teacher input before the visit? Do I want to preview the previous visit? Are there comments I need to make?). She wrote down

activities, handouts, and other materials provided in the home visit bag. Some comments were made after the visit, such as the participants' names and parent comments, questions and concerns. She included family strengths and admitted to struggling with this. She said that she continually wrote the same strength because "sometimes I have a hard time in seeing a multitude of strengths."

For the particular home visit that I went on with the family advocate, Carol noted that Grandma interacted really positively with Sarah, the child, but she said, "That's not always the case, since sometimes the mother's reaction had been a bit hostile." Finally, advocates kept communication logs that included items such as phone calls to and from parents, phone calls to agencies on behalf of families, additional home visits other than the monthly visits, and conversations with family members at school. The other advocate referred to these for court situations with families. The advocates kept short and concise notes on the communication logs, such as, Delivered food baskets or Visited house because kids were absent from school.

A Different Role Than the Head Start Advocate

The local Head Start program began a few years ago and employed two family advocates with slightly different roles. Every Head Start classroom had an advocate who served each student in the class. Carol explained that Head Start advocates connected with families, did some troubleshooting, and helped the teacher reach the required number of visits. However, they did not conduct home visits with students and their families to practice developmental skills, partly due to their large caseloads. "Although we've sometimes felt pressed into the same mold, we don't really feel like we are, and

we've kinda fought and worked to maintain that sort of separate identities of what we do with families," Carol said.

If the New Era advocate were already servicing a family and a younger child was placed into Head Start, Carol shared relevant information with the Head Start teachers. For example, Carol shared information from a monthly home visit and the activities she completed with the child. Carol believed that the school district's advocates had much less documentation than the Head Start advocates, since Head Start advocates had to submit extensive paperwork to federal agencies for accountability purposes.

Before Head Start's presence in the area, Carol and her colleagues did not refer to their job titles as family advocates; they didn't give themselves job titles and just called their program Together We Can. Since the local Head Start program was initiated, the administrator began referring to the Together We Can staff as family advocates, an identical title in Head Start. Carol and her colleagues still referred to themselves as Together We Can.

The Head Start administrator gave Carol a pamphlet describing the role of the family advocate, and the family advocates, including the ones from Head Start, were encouraged to give them to families. Carol had never given anybody a pamphlet because he felt like it did not adequately describe her position. Also, it seemed too formal and may intimidate some families, creating social distance between the parents and the school. She had business cards, too, although she used them infrequently. Although her business card was colorful with a school theme and included important contact information, she often would write her telephone number on a sticky note for parents. The formality of a business card may intimidate families and "it makes you seem more

like a professional, and that's not the image we're trying to go with." Most parents had an interest in keeping the school number within easy reach so the sticky note sufficed or parents used the phonebook.

Researcher on a Home Visit

Carol told me, "I can tell you about my home visits, but until you go to one, it's like anything else. ... You can talk about how they have a tough home life, but, you know, you're sitting in the middle of it, and you're coming out with smoke all over your clothes... Experiencing it is totally different." And so I went with her.

On a cold and cloudy day in December 2007, I accompanied Carol on a home visit of a single mother with three daughters, two children in New Era Elementary and one three year-old daughter, Sarah. One daughter received special education services. The mother worked full-time at a family-owned food processing facility, a large local employer that had many minimum-wage jobs. Carol had been working with this family for 2 years with initial visits conducted at school. It had taken some time for her to gain the mother's trust and meet at the family's home. The family advocate reported that the child's grandmother babysat Sarah during the week at the mother's home, so Carol's scheduled visits were often with the grandmother and Sarah.

On the last visit two weeks prior, Carol worked with Sarah on patterning and color recognition. She wanted to revisit the topics and materials to see if they had practiced the skills in Carol's absence. She drew on her Parents as Teachers training and used their information, hand-outs, and home-visit activities in combination with what the advocates created. "A lot of the key", Carol later described:

is developmental information for parents and having them realize that they not only need to observe what their children are doing, once they know what

developmentally is appropriate... You want them to be looking at those markers. Are they doing those things on time and that sort of thing. It's getting them involved in their child's development.

The day's topic was fine motor development. Carol planned to complete a few activities at the home and leave other activities Sarah could practice later with her mother, grandmother, or older sisters.

On the morning of the visit, the grandmother was at home with Sarah since the mother had taken off a day of work to register for Toys for Tots. She wanted her children to wake up to presents on Christmas morning. The grandmother greeted us warmly at the front door. Once inside the small yet warm 2-bedroom home, I met Sarah, who appeared very excited to see Carol. She called her by name and ran up to her the way a young child may greet a visiting relative she's happy to see. Carol related the story to Grandma about the mother dropping off the girls late to school. She told me:

They arrived late to school this morning, the two girls. I was worried that they weren't going to make it. It was 8:30 and they weren't at school. And so I called the house and the grandma said, "They just left. They overslept. They're on their way." So I met them when they got here and I walked the first grader down. She's taking off her winter stuff. She's got three coats on. I said, "You're wearing three jackets." She said, "Yep, I'm wearing three jackets today and I've got two hats."

Carol assumed that her mother was concerned that one thin jacket would not be warm enough. "How much do you help and how much do you wait and see how much the family is going to do?" Carol later told me. The grandmother, who stayed there during the week to babysit Sarah, said she wanted to buy all three girls winter coats for Christmas.

I noticed that Carol used her first name with the child, and the child referred to her as her teacher. Carol later explained, "The flip side of that is that I may see a child at school and the child will say, 'Hi, Carol!'" The parents set the precedent for that by

saying, ‘Oh Carol’s coming over today.’” It did not bother Carol to be called by her first name and seemed to help parents relax by viewing her in a less authoritative position.

Discourse Analysis of Home Visit

What follows is an analysis of the home visit. There are a number of important points I want to make about the conversation between the family advocate, the grandmother, and the child during the home visit that contribute to the cultural models of school, literacy, and learning. The transcript includes just over 40 minutes of conversation between the three participants (with a few researcher comments) and encompasses a majority of the visit (see Appendix F for entire transcript). The initial welcome with introductions and concluding remarks were not audio-recorded. My hope is to analyze discourse patterns, or Discourse, and Carol’s bi-Discoursal role, someone who has or is mastering two conflicting or contesting Discourses (Gee, 1996), to see how Carol used school-based literacy to reinforce emergent literacy, counting, and fine motor skills, in addition to providing parenting advice. Also, the entire transcript can serve as a model for those schools interested in employing a family advocate. I employed Gee’s (1991) linguistic approach to narrative text to explain the structure with idea units, lines, and stanzas, but I also used this structure to explain how it contributes to the meaning of the text. Each line in the transcript is numbered, and idea units are separated from each other within the same line by a slash. Words that are focused (i.e., said with prominent pitch) are capitalized and main line parts that contribute to the overall plot are underlined that contributes to the overall theme of the text.

The home visit transcript is structured into the hierarchically related bits of information Gee (1991) refers to as Level 1, line and stanza structure. Syntax and

cohesion make up Level 2 and mark how they work together to tie to the interpretation (p. 28). For example, Carol used school vernacular, much like a teacher would, with words like *color recognition* (line 1), *pattern practicing* (line 4), and *fine motor development* (line 43) when talking to the grandmother. Also, she discussed a preschooler's progression of cutting skills and color recognition:

- 13 Because we talked about the fact that **THE FIRST STEP** in learning
 colors is being able to say/ you know/ if you say **WHAT'S THE SAME**
 COLOR AS THIS?/
14 she would be able to find it
15 G: Yeah/she can **DO THAT**
16 C: And then **THE SECOND STEP** would be **YOU NAMING** the color
17 and her being **ABLE TO PICK IT OUT**
18 And then **THE THIRD STEP** would be/you pointing and saying/**WHAT**
 COLOR IS THIS?/and her being able to tell you WHAT IT IS

Carol emphasized the word, *school*, when talking to young Sarah:

- 102 Here/let me **SHOW YOU** how we do it **AT SCHOOL**
103 We keep **THIS FINGER OUT** and we put **THESE FINGERS IN**
104 and that helps us kind of **STEER** the scissors

In Stanza 24, the family advocate said:

- 632 C: **IT WOULD BE FUN**
633 I would come and **VISIT YOU AT YOUR SCHOOL** sometimes/ and
 SEE YOU AND YOUR TEACHER

and again in line 589, "*I have to take mine [books] back to school but these are to leave here.*" At the conclusion of the home visit, Carol remarked to Sarah, *I have to go **back to school**, but thank you for letting me come and play* (line 774). Carol also emphasized school when speaking to the grandmother:

- 536 That's often why parents say/I don't understand why everybody at school
 says my child behaves and they **WON'T BEHAVE AT HOME**
537 And a lot of times when you start to pick everything apart/it's because **AT**
 SCHOOL THERE'S A ROUTINE/There ARE RULES and the teachers
 are pretty **STRAIGHTFORWARD AND BASIC AND CONSISTENT**
 with what they expect the **KIDS TO DO AND NOT DO**

In these examples, Carol implied that students and teachers have specific processes to learn essential skills, school is an enjoyable place to attend, and it represents authority and high behavioral expectations.

Carol consistently called the grandmother, Grandma, throughout the visit to maintain positive and respectful relationships with Sarah and her grandmother. She could have referred to the grandmother as “your grandmother” or by her first or last name when talking to the granddaughter. There are 23 examples of the family advocate referring to the grandmother as Grandma. In stanza 8, Carol said to Sarah:

134 You know what?/ We’re goin to have **GRANDMA MAKE** a puzzle too
135 Here **GRANDMA**/can you **MAKE A PUZZLE**, like 4 or 6 **PIECES**?
136 Oh **MY GOODNESS**/look at that/**GRANDMA CAN DO IT TOO**

She even asked permission or approval from the grandmother to do certain activities, such as in stanza 15 (lines 351-352), Carol said, *We’re gonna look at this. We’re gonna look at this and then after we’re all done you’ll have to wait until Grandma says it’s okay to play with it/okay?* and again in line 499, *Did Grandma say it was okay if we took a little play dough out?* Near the end of the visit, she said to Sarah, *Let’s ask Grandma if she knows what it is* (line 701). Even when Sarah wanted Carol, and not the grandmother, to read the book aloud, Carol still wanted to recognize the grandmother’s participation:

665 C: I ALWAYS BRING A BOOK/don’t I?/Should WE READ THIS BOOK
 before I go?
666 S: Yeah
667 C: Would you like to?/Do we WANT GRANDMA TO READ it or do you
 want me to read it?
668 S: You read it
669 C: I’ll read it/Okay
670 GRANDMA GETS TO READ you books during the day/doesn’t she?

This type of interaction validated the grandmother's participation and encouraged her to engage with the child during the lesson.

The family advocate wanted to teach and encourage parents to practice developmentally appropriate skills at home with their children. Even though the mother wasn't present for the home visit, she referred to the mother, and even a sibling, and how they could work together at home. In the following lines, Carol encouraged the child to show her mother the completed activities and invite the mother's participation:

- 151 C: You have to SHOW YOUR MOM what we did
when she comes home--
152 G: – Your momma's goin to be home pretty soon
153 C: ---and she can do some practicing too

Here, again, she wanted Sarah to show her mother the puzzle pieces and help her put the pieces together, *I think you should keep these and show Mom and see if Mom can do a puzzle. You think she can?*(line 189). In these last examples, Carol included the grandmother and sibling in the activity, *You could read it with Grandma or with your mom* (line 302), and then in line 417, *You know what I did is I put two clothespins in here in case you and your mom want to do this together or you and Grandma or you and Anne*. Carol reinforced the notion of practicing skills at home by leaving the materials with the family and referring to the mother's participation, in hopes that the child would be enthusiastic about showing her mother the materials and explaining the activities.

Carol frequently used questioning techniques to seek information, give directions, clarify her thinking, and remain engaged in the conversation without passing judgment on the family, especially when the grandmother initiated off-topic discourse. In fact, Carol asked Sarah 175 questions during the visit with approximately 85 questions seeking

information, such as in line 419, *What do you think that is for?* and then again in stanza 15:

336 C: You want to look at it?
337 WHAT COLOR do you think it might be?
338 Here/let ME HELP you
339 Can you tell me WHAT COLOR THE LID is?

Other questions were clarifying information, usually with Carol making a statement and affirming it with a question. For instance, in line 164, she asked, *This looks like Santa needs to go this way/ right?* When Sarah was cutting the cards, Carol asked her, *Oh, you took your fingers right out of the holes, didn't you?* (line 127).

Over one third of Carol's questions to Sarah involved Carol giving the child directions but phrasing them in questions. She used the politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) of positive politeness in order to save her "positive face" (Goffman, 1967) – the desire to be seen as a good person, liked, and appreciated -- and maintain her self-esteem in the situation. Carol wanted to avoid making Sarah feel uncomfortable and confirm that the relationship was friendly. In this example, she asked some clarifying questions with some directives phrased as questions:

68 S: You CAN'T yell
69 C: You can't yell?
70 It doesn't make us FEEL VERY GOOD does it/when we get yelled out?
71 S: 'Cause/you know what?
72 When I got yelled/my mom [incomprehensible] my books
73 C: Yeah/so she told you that you shouldn't yell?
74 Was she trying to tell you not to yell?
75 S: Yeah/yeah
76 C: So the GROWN-UPS shouldn't yell and the KIDS shouldn't yell/right?
77 SAME RULES for everybody?
78 THAT would be NICE/ wouldn't it?

In another example, Carol used the same compliance strategy:

118 Can you MAKE LITTLE CUTS all along the edge?

119 You can do BIG CUTS
 120 Okay/why don't we do this then? Why don't you cut this into like FOUR
 BIG PIECES?
 121 Can you DO THAT?

In line 118, she really didn't want to know if Sarah could indeed make the cuts, but she was indirectly telling her to cut the card along the edge. Similarly, when Carol asked if the child could cut the card into four big pieces, she was indirectly telling her to cut the card in four big pieces. I observed that Sarah recognized these social cues and proceeded with the cutting as Carol directed. Any difficulties Sarah had resulted from her lack of experience in using the tools, like the scissors or hole punch.

There were a couple of instances in which Carol used the positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to prevent Sarah from feeling embarrassed by a situation. Here in stanza 12, the grandmother reprimanded Sarah for lacing in what she termed as "the wrong hole." Carol quickly saved face for Sarah to prevent embarrassment and to create a sense of security, so that Sarah would feel comfortable in taking risks and trying new skills.

255 Oops/WHICH SIDE is the lace on/honey?/Which SIDE is the LACE ON?
 256 S: It's on this side
 257 C: It's on this side so you'll have to go this way
 258 Actually/you could probably go the other way/We'll see
 259 If you DO THAT AGAIN/we'll see what it looks like
 260 Are you DONE for now?
 261 Do you see how you can lace it ALL THE WAY AROUND?/And it puts
 white ALL THE WAY AROUND your picture
 262 That is REALL GOOD PRACTICE for –
 263 G: You're goin in the WRONG HOLE
 264 C: Gonna EXPERIMENT?
 265 S: [Inaudible]
 266 C: Okay/The MOST IMPORTANT SKILL is pulling it IN THROUGH the
 hole and pulling it through/so--
 277 G: --Yeah
 278 C: --if she doesn't do it in order/she's still GETTING THE PRACTICE that
 she needs

In another instance, the grandmother retold the story of Sarah cutting her pajamas and Carol used the positive politeness strategy to quickly aid Sarah in saving face in a potentially negative situation:

- 719 I'm glad that YOU WERE EXCITED about cutting today/Look at you go to town
720 Should YOU EVER CUT something that GRANDMA SAYS/"DON'T CUT THAT?"
721 G: [Laughs] Tell her ABOUT THE PAJAMAS/Sarah
722 C: DID YOU CUT PAJAMAS?/ Oh no
723 G: BRAND NEW PAIR of pajamas
724 C: You know what?/If YOU WANT GRANDMA AND MOM to let you practice with scissors/you have to BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT ONLY CUTTING what they say is okay
725 G: Tell Carol you MADE SOME PRETTY CIRCLES
726 C: Ohh/NOT IN PAJAMAS THOUGH/You WON'T DO THAT again/will you?/Okay/good
727 G: My mother bought them some,/uh/PRINCESS PAJAMAS/those SILKY SHIRTS/and she cut em
728 C: You GOT TO BE REALLY CAREFUL about scissors
729 It's okay to CUT MY CHRISTMAS CARDS
730 and then you have to ask Mom and Grandma WHAT YOU CAN CUT/"What can I cut today?"/Okay?

Carol asked the grandmother fewer questions but they were the same types of questions (i.e., giving directions, seeking clarification or information, and engagement). Interestingly, Carol used the positive politeness strategy to remain engaged in the conversation, show concern for the grandmother, and to save the grandmother's "face." When the visit began, Carol reviewed the previous lesson and inquired about the family practicing patterning and color recognition with Sarah:

- 4 Did you do ANY PATTERN PRACTICING or do you know if Kim did?
5 G: We were/what we do was/ I AND HER mainly/ WHEN WE SEE SOMETHING/we point out the color
6 and she tells me what it is
7 C: Okay
8 G: And she--
9 C: Okay/okay/So she's doing more of THE MATCHING the colors THAT

- ARE THE SAME rather than saying/YOU SAYING/where's THE RED ONE or where's THE GREEN ONE?
- 10 She's not to that point yet really/where you can say/like which one is the RED LEAF or which one is the GREEN LEAF?
- 11 G: Some of it
- 12 C: SOME OF IT?/okay

The grandmother's initial hesitation probably indicated to Carol that they had not practiced the skills as much as she had hoped, but she remained respectful toward the grandmother and prevented a negative situation. Carol did not reprimand the grandmother, but smoothly transitioned to the steps of learning color recognition, *Because we talked about the fact that the first step in learning colors is being able to say, you know, if you say what's the same color as this?, she would be able to find it* (lines 13 and 14).

The family advocate used the positive politeness strategy when the grandmother initiated off-topic discussions. For example, in stanza 5, Carol explained child development to the grandmother, she quickly switched topics:

- 49 C: and they GOTTA have THOSE EXPERIENCES/you know to make those connections
- 50 just like WE ALL needed that/every/ EVERYBODY DOES/when they're-
- 51 G: --I got 'em to STOP FIGHTIN the other day/the other night
- 52 C: You're right/in the brain
- 53 C: You did? [Chuckles]
- 54 G: They were ARGUING
- 55 C: You weren't FIGHTING with your sisters?

In lines 53 and 55, Carol affirmed the grandmother's statements to maintain the flow of conversation. She did not reprimand the grandmother for interrupting nor did she criticize her for not embracing the information on child development.

In stanza 17, Sarah was practicing fine motor skills by stringing letters on a pipe cleaner, but in stanza 18, the grandmother interrupted with a different discussion topic:

439 G: --You know Kim GOT ME YELLED AT Friday/THE BRAT
 440 C: KIM GOT YOU yelled at?
 441 G: YES/she never told me WHERE I HAD TO PARK for the kids AT THE BUS
 442 C: Oh/AT THE SCHOOL/WHO YELLED at you?
 443 G: No/ THE BUS DRIVER
 444 C: Oh/we're you PULLED UP –
 445 G: --'Cause I was pulled up ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD instead of ON 88/I didn't know
 446 C: Oh/you meant up at THE BUS STOP?/I thought you meant at the school
 447 G: And I DIDN'T KNOW and the bus driver told me to park over on the other side
 448 S: [simultaneous talk] I'm just done with this/I'm DONE with this/I'm JUST DONE with this/I'm done with this
 449 C: That's just the kind of thing nobody's told you/You wouldn't know

Carol asked affirming questions (e.g., *Kim got you yelled at?* and *Oh, you meant at the bus stop?*) that enabled her to withhold judgment on the grandmother while still maintaining the flow of conversation. Again, Carol made the grandmother feel more comfortable when she said, *That's just the kind of thing nobody's told you. You wouldn't know* (line 449).

Later in the conversation, Carol was trying to keep the grandmother focused on Sarah's cutting skills, but the grandmother interjected an irrelevant story:

748 Now I'm going to have another grandbaby
 749 C: Oh/YOU ARE?
 750 S: IT'S ME
 751 C: That's NOT GOOD?/You're NOT HAPPY?/You don't think that's a GOOD THING?
 752 G: No/they're BOTH BIPOLAR
 753 S: IT'S ME
 754 C: With how many /do they HAVE KIDS ALREADY?
 755 G: No/THIS IS THE FIRST
 756 He JUST MARRIED last summer and he just RUSHED INTO THIS marriage
 757 C: Okay/so YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THAT BABY.
 758 G: Yeah/ because of the bipolar/HE'S BIPOLAR/SHE'S BIPOLAR and—

Again, using positive politeness strategies, she asked the grandmother affirming questions in lines 749 and 751. She followed up by affirming, *Okay, so you're worried about that baby* (line 758) to comfort the grandmother and show empathy.

I used Gee's (1991) Level 3: Main Line/Off Main Line of Plot to answer the questions: '*So what?*' and '*What's the point or significance of this plot?*' (p. 29).

Underlined portions of the transcript represent the main line plot. Again, using politeness theory, some the main line plot material are expressed in questions, like in line 4, *Did you do any pattern practicing or do you know if Kim did?* Clearly, Carol used this technique to initiate topics and sustain the conversation, thus contributing to the plot. The organized stanzas show the intended activities that Carol planned, labeled as Main Lot Plot Material, and the additional unplanned events that transpired during the visit, categorized as Off Main Line Plot material (Table 8).

I realize that entire stanzas are usually not labeled as Main Line/Off Main Line of Plot material, however, this pattern clearly shows how the family advocate used these unplanned events to benefit the family and advise the grandmother on parenting issues. They are highlighted in light gray for emphasis in the entire transcript (see Appendix E). I argue that for the family, the off main line of plot material, while it may be extraneous in other narratives, became very important in the relational dynamics of the family and the advocate. They provided opportunities for the advocate to offer parenting advice that was less intrusive to the conversation, since topics were initiated by the grandmother. The only exception to this pattern was stanza 24 in which the grandmother mentioned a brief conversation about snow; Carol redirected the conversation to stay on topic and complete the home visit within her designated time frame.

For Level 4: Psychological Subjects (Gee, 1991), the family advocate used the pronoun, *we*, to represent her point of view in the stanza and align herself with the family. In an earlier conversation I had with Carol, she explained the program's philosophy of rejecting the "professional teacher" persona and their adoption of a liaison's role that could easily and comfortably interact with families without making them feel intimidated. In line 32, she assured the grandmother that as a team, they would continue practicing color recognition,

- 32 C: So **we're** going to work on that and keep practicing --
33 G: --Yeah/work on the colors with her

One of the most revealing portions of the transcript occurred shortly after the previous comments. Carol wanted to inform the grandmother about expert advice on a child's brain development:

- 43 With the fine motor development/A CHILD'S BRAIN HAS the BASIC
STUFF that it needs/those basic connections
44 I don't know if you have ever heard **people** talk about that there's brain/
there's CONNECTIONS IN THE BRAIN/that HAVE TO BE MADE in
order for children/or people/to learn to do **things** and to **have it stick**
45 So there's a A BASIC LEVEL of that ABILITY in a child's BRAIN
46 but they REALLY NEED to have a chances to PRACTICE IT/ in order
for those connections like to develop and grow and STAY STRONG
46 so that they HAVE THE ABILITY to do those **things**
47 That's why DOING STUFF with your kids/he kids AT HOME/it's so
IMPORTANT
48 'cause this is the time of their life when their BRAIN is REALLY
DEVELOPING
49 and they GOTTA HAVE THOSE EXPERIENCES/you know to make
those connections
50 just like **WE ALL** needed that/every/ **EVERYBODY DOES**/when
they're-

In line 44, she referred to the experts as *people*, outsiders, and then in line 50, she again used the pronoun *we* to emphasize the solidarity between the family and herself, even between the family and others outside their social group. I briefly part from Gee's (1991)

notion of psychological subjects to emphasize an important point about this selected material. Carol's informal word choice, like *stuff* in lines 43 and 47, *things* in lines 44 and 46, *have it stick* in line 44, *'cause* instead of because in line 48, and *gotta* in line 49 signifies a more casual style and marks her membership and solidarity with the family's working-class social group.

The focused text for Level 5 is the information that the speaker wants the hearer to focus on and represent the key images and themes that help create an overall interpretation of the narrative (Gee, 1991). Again, I use stanza 4 as a typical example of what was emphasized throughout the visit. The family advocate's focus words are as follows with material from different lines marked by the space mark, # (Gee, 1991, p. 33):

a child's brain has, basic stuff, those basic connections # connections in the brain
have to be made # a basic level, ability, brain # really need # practice it # stay
strong # have the ability # doing stuff, at home, important # brain, really
developing # gotta have those experiences # we all, everybody does

The focused text of this selection affirms what Carol wanted the at-risk family to know; that is, Sarah's brain is developing and she must practice developmentally appropriate skills at home to make her smarter. On that day in December, Carol practiced some of these skills with Sarah, such as learning to use her fingers to cut with scissors, weave a string in and out of holes in a card, string letters on a pipe cleaner, and squeeze a clothespin to pick up a cotton ball. Carol also reviewed primary colors and helped Sarah count items. She modeled fluency by reading aloud and asked the three year-old comprehension questions.

The focused information from stanza 10 shows how Carol worked with the child to use a paper punch and involved the grandmother as an active participant in her granddaughter's education:

done a paper punch # you have? some holes # gotta squeeze # need help, help you
squeeze down here # turn it around # squeeze # there's one! # squeeze # wow!
strong fingers, whole idea # strong fingers # squeeze, okay # squeeze # you're
good, squeezing my hands # all the way # what we're making? what this is

Carol began by assessing Sarah's background knowledge and skills on using a paper punch. She provided guided practice and offered her help, if needed. She encouraged Sarah and complimented her on her effort. Finally, Carol cheered on Sarah to persevere, even though it was difficult for her at times to squeeze the paper punch. By modeling these strategies and behaviors for the grandmother, Carol hoped she would replicate them at home in her absence.

In another example, the focused text of stanza 13 highlights Carol giving a book to Sarah to:

what else I brought # pack up the stuff, all of those # what else, practice fine
motor # bag for you to keep, see what that is # let's see #so many different
compartments # never remember # messed up, confused # oh my goodness #
come without bringing, some kind of book, I made a book, look # alphabet book,
got all the letters # read it, Grandma or with your mom # myself # be fun too,
sometimes it's fun # that's for you

This selection is pivotal in fostering Sarah's motivation to enjoy books and eventually learn to read. The text doesn't accurately demonstrate the excitement that Carol exhibited when she presented this book to Sarah. It was as though Carol had saved the best for last and her words filled the small kitchen with infectious joy. The book was a gift that Carol made at school and that Sarah could look at alone or read with her family. Making the book a gift elevated its status; school was a place her sisters went and she

was eager to know more about what happened there. Finally, the moment when Carol couldn't find the book in her bag showed her human, imperfect nature – a relief to Grandma that those members of another social group struggled too.

Each level makes its own donation to the meaning of the text by amalgamating its contribution and those of all levels below it (Gee, 1991, p. 27). My interpretation uses all five levels to emphasize the cultural model of school, literacy, and learning. Gee (1996) describes cultural models as prototypical events in a simplified world -- an idealized, normal reality. They involve hidden, subtle exclusions, which are ideological and involve one's values and beliefs about society but often go unrecognized and appear natural. Cultural models vary across cultural groups and even within different cultural groups speaking the same language (pgs. 78-79).

The family advocate helped define New Era's cultural model of school, literacy, and learning. First, she extended the boundaries of the school. Instead of school only being a place where children attended and learned knowledge and skills, Carol did the opposite. She left the campus with her school-based discourse and participated in alternate discourse patterns with members from a different social group with potentially diverse values and beliefs about education. Next, she promoted literacy, specifically reading, as an enjoyable event alone or with family members. By giving Sarah a book on every visit, she put books in this child's hands. It may be the only, or one of the few times, that this young girl had that experience. Finally, she made explicit that learning involved the child and the family member. Carol found that she not only taught the children, but she taught the parents and other caregivers how to teach the children at home. She satisfied some of Sarah's cognitive needs, like cutting and counting, along

with the family's other social and emotional needs (e.g. listening to the grandmother discuss her bi-polar son, assisting the mother with registering Sarah for preschool). Also, she learned about the family's living situations and could subsequently provide school personnel with additional insights into contributing factors about the child's school performance and progress.

This interpretation may give a deceptively simple picture of Carol as the "model person" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) who strategically used her language choices to positively interact and save "face" for both of the family members. Creating and maintaining positive relationships, teaching preschoolers from high-needs families, and meeting families' physical, social, and emotional needs is anything but simple. I offer one reading of this transcript and realize that several other readings and interpretations are possible.

Debriefing after the home visit

Driving back to the school, I asked Carol, How do you walk out of there and not cry? She said sometimes she did cry or wanted to:

I think that part of it is – gosh, this makes me sound hardened-- part of is having to constantly struggle with, what's my job – really – and what can I really effectively do? And Todd and I have had many conversations about what you need to do when... you don't really feel like there's a way for you effectively to make a lot of changes at home, then what you need to do, what we as a school need to do the best that we can for those kids when they're in our care and he's a great one for chicken soup stories and he has many stories of his own where kids will come back 10 to 15 years after they've left New Era school.

I noticed that Carol discussed parenting skills with the grandmother, such as behavior management, in addition to the lessons on motor skills. She explained how she offered parenting advice "when there's an opening for that and somebody is receptive. I felt the longer I talked about that, I was losing her. She was like, looking away. She was

like fiddling with something else... You have to dole that out in doses..."She stressed the need for consistency of behavioral expectations between the mother and grandmother, since the grandmother is with the child all day at home. "I've had parents tell me, 'I've tried time out. I've tried' -- whatever, and when you pick it apart, they've tried it once and when they feel like it didn't work, they said it didn't work. And like anything, it takes consistency." The grandmother distracted the girls' attention in the car when they were arguing by telling them to look at the Christmas lights. She said it only worked once.

Carol had seen small cognitive improvements in the three girls, but it was not always easy for her to detect how much of that was from their school contacts:

There's more going on at home than when I started. Let's say that. I don't know that there's always as much as I would have liked, or that you or I would probably do with our own kids... but I do think that taking stuff into the home does help....I think that [Kim] or her mom is using some of the stuff. I don't know that they keep it very long... like lacing cards. Those lacing cards aren't probably going to last. But I don't bring them in to last. I bring them in to show them, you know what, this is a really easy thing to do. You could do it with stuff you have around your house. In other words... you can do things simply and inexpensively at home that will really benefit your kids.

In other situations, parents threw away crayons because children wrote on the walls or scissors because they cut their sister's hair. Carol repeated the directions that she gave parents and I quickly got the feeling she had repeated them many times:

That's when you have the conversation about, "You know what, stick them back in that upper cabinet. When you're ready to do them, pull them down and just sit with her for just ten minutes...Just sit with her for ten minutes and help her do some cutting, and when you're all done, just stick them back in that cabinet and pull them out occasionally. So the idea is that you just don't get rid of it because they used it inappropriately. They have to be taught, you know like anything else. You have to teach them how to do things appropriately, and you do that by sitting with them."

She described how parents were tempted to give the materials to their children and then they walk away from the table. "It's that trying to instill in the parents that this is

something that you do with your child – together,” Carol said. “This is fun and it’s bonding, and it develops that relationship between you and your child.”

Family Challenges

Carol perceived families to have a variety of challenges that often interfered with their children’s school attendance. For example:

If a parent has to run an errand, that errand might take priority over school. If they have to go somewhere in the afternoon and they might not be back when the bus comes, then the child just doesn’t go to school so that they can do their errand.

The district’s advocates urged parents to be consistent with attendance and see school as important. Their efforts were met with varying degrees of success, depending on the family. She would often think to herself, does your family history prepare you to prioritize education?

One of Carol’s biggest frustrations was the continuous series of barriers for some families. For instance, she described a family whose daughter had frequent absences:

Last year, their daughter missed a week of school because they didn’t have any propane. They didn’t have any heat. They got turned down from DHS...So their support person is the dad’s parents who live in Hisperia, so he took the kids and the mom to Hisperia to stay until they could get heat. And the mom has some developmental limitations of her own, so she called the school the first day and wanted to know if somebody could come pick up her kids from Hesperia,

some 20-25 minutes away. In that particular situation, the mom’s cognitive ability level proved to be an additional barrier when Carol attempted to problem solve a solution with her. With other parents, they clearly understood Carol’s lessons and parenting advice, but would pick and choose what they wanted to implement. “There’s a problem for every potential solution sometimes, and that can get really frustrating, and you just really get so concerned about the kids, you know, because that’s the priority... those children,” she

admitted. Carol told me how Ms. Tobin encouraged the advocates by often reminding them:

You have to be a person who can take great satisfaction in small gains' because she understood that that was very true with families. Families are not going to look at what you're bringing, whether that's materials and say, "Oh, my gosh, you're right. We're just going to just completely change everything around." It's going to be small things, because the life they live is what they knew, what they knew growing up. And to make changes takes time, and it takes – and sometimes we're just not patient enough. We don't want to be patient enough.

Some situations challenged Carol's patience:

One mother is an animal lover and she bought horses when she had trouble paying for [living expenses]. She's had an infestation of mice, because they have an opening in the side of their double-wide underneath so that they can get in. But her solution to catching the mice, because she doesn't want to kill them, is to put sticky paper out to catch the mice. And when I went to do a contact there, on the top of the table, the dining room table, there was a big plastic container where she was putting all these mice into so she could take them over to somewhere else and drop them off ... She didn't want to kill them. She said they have a right to live as much as we do, kind of thing.

Carol struggled with the mother's dichotomous behavior:

There's this container with all these little mice in it and then when she gets a chance or is able to, she knows, I think it was some abandoned house or trailer somewhere, she'd just take them over and let them loose, because the thought of killing them --- while I'm thinking, here's a person with this much empathy and caring for animals, and yet, you know, I can't put that together with -- I don't think she's an abusive parent. She's not, but the fact that she, the things she does rely on with the yelling, and she's, she's a very coarse person with a lot of what I consider swearing – maybe people don't consider some of those things swearing anymore. I don't know. But I mean it's peppered all through her language and it's in front of the kids, and she's -- and I just have a hard time putting all that together.

Employment was not always consistent with this family, like other at-risk families. The mother had a child attending the Head Start program and they required a family action plan, setting a goal to move toward independence. Carol helped her complete the form and she said one of her goals was to work with animals. Perhaps she

could work as a guide at a local horse ranch or veterinarian's office. The mother's goal sounded great but when Carol analyzed it, she asked herself, how was she doing to do that? Her husband worked out of town, they had one vehicle, she had a mental disability, and she had four young children. If she got the job, how would she keep it? Who would care for her children? Carol feared for the children with the mother's suggested babysitters. Carol said, "They need money, but I just don't know a solution... Sometimes, you don't know what to hope for. I don't necessarily hope she gets a job. I don't know if that would be the best thing for the kids."

In this rural area, as in other rural areas, employment options were limited. In the Shelby area, the kinds of jobs, if one were not qualified to work in hospitals or schools, were farm labor jobs, employment at the packing plant, or clerical and retail positions at some smaller stores and offices in town. The lack of higher-paying jobs made it especially difficult for single mothers, like little Sarah's mom who received little or no child support, to obtain higher-paying jobs.

Impact on Literacy Achievement

Carol worked with young preschoolers on literacy skills that would hopefully lead to school readiness. I asked her, "What is your impact on literacy?" She described leaving books with families but admitted that she could not measure her impact. She could quantitatively measure the number of visits and the number of books read aloud to children and given to families, but that did not provide a direct causal relationship between her duties and the child's emergent literacy skills.

From my perspective, she provided emergent literacy skills practice for preschool-aged children who may or may not be enrolled in an established preschool

program. For example, she modeled fluency for the children and those parents who may not be proficient readers. She modeled and taught parents questioning techniques to improve the child's reading comprehension. Also, she taught parents what was developmentally appropriate for the child to learn, such as using picture cues to aid comprehension. Carol boosted children's motivation to read by giving each child a book at every monthly home visit. This was particularly important since some of the families could not afford to purchase books or did not visit the library often to check out books. Finally, she emphasized to the child and parents that reading with family members was fun and an important preparation for elementary school.

Job Security

With budget cuts in school funding, the advocates worried that their positions would be eliminated. Carol lamented:

Logic would tell you, this is a program most schools don't even have. Wouldn't you think that you would be considered maybe one of the first things that could go? That hasn't happened so far, but the last two years in particular, we've kind of wondered at the end of the year, will we be back next year and what will that look like?

The principal felt confident their positions were secure.

Family Fun Night

The principal and family advocate also organized family fun nights as another way to engage parents in positive school experiences and to involve them in their children's education. These events were usually theme-based (e.g., health fair, math, science). Items were usually donated or purchased at a discount by the school. I attended the 1½ -hour Science Family Night in which a dozen high school students accompanied their science teacher, wearing his tie-dyed lab coat, to demonstrate a series of science

experiments in the gymnasium for parents and children. The event began with the principal leading the audience in singing “Happy Birthday” to the high school teacher and the teacher followed with demonstrations on gravity, sound, color, states of matter, and force that connected to the fifth grade curriculum. A couple of experiments involved fire so the lights were turned off; parents and children gasped with excitement but only a few young children screamed with fear. Attendees were very engaged throughout the entire demonstration.

Participants then ventured to individual classrooms to participate in three 20-minute activities lead by high school students. Todd reminded everyone, especially the children, “Make sure these are activities you go to as a family.” Parents and children studied sound by making a bumblebee that swirled in the air. In the Mystery Architecture activity, they used various supplies to build the tallest structure possible and in another classroom, they concocted slime to learn about matter.

At the conclusion of the evening, families reassembled into the gymnasium for prizes for those top families who built the tallest structures in the Mystery Architecture activity. The family advocate distributed booklets to parents as they walked out the door. She created the booklets that had 10 different at-home science activities with recipes for things like bubbles and play dough.

I asked Carol, “What do you hope to get out of this?” She answered, “In general, when we do family events, we want to show parents and families that they can have fun doing things together and sometimes they’ll be educationally based. And also to get parents into the school and see the building and see the staff and see that school is a good place to be.” The principal agreed with Carol and added:

It's all about making the parents a part of what's going on at school and feeling like they're part of it and they're valued and it's important for them to be a part of it. What's goes on at school is not just about the teachers. It's a family thing. You're child's education is a family thing. It's not just sending them to school and not being anymore involved than that.

Teachers were not required by contract to attend family fun nights but were invited. Many attended to show support to students and families, and on other occasions, they lead the classroom activities. Todd explained, "Parents get to see them in a different way. They're not talking about assessments or achievement or concerns, but they're watching them have fun." I saw three of the teachers there and one teacher even had her young son participating in the science activities. Usually, about 150 people participated in the event but on that particular night, it coincided with two high school activities, so attendance dropped to approximately 100 people.

The school connected the family fun night to reading by opening the book fair, so parents would be encouraged to purchase books for their children to read at home. Reading was an entire family event. If the event were scheduled at the end of the school's reading month, it was a celebration for students' reaching the school's reading goal that the principal set. He performed events like riding an elephant, milking a cow, kissing a pig, and working on the roof all day to motivate students to read.

Before I left the school that evening, I stopped by Carol's office to find out about her perceptions of the night's event. Carol allowed a child to use her phone to call home for a ride, because it was raining and the student had walked to school. Carol offered to take her home since she only lived 2 blocks away. Carol knew the girl's mother who had volunteered in the library a few times. Principals had set policies for staff allowing children to ride with them in their cars, among other issues. In fact, Todd had taken

children home and usually took another adult with him as a safety precaution. Carol planned to ask Todd about it and maybe the two of them together would take the child home. I was surprised that the mother had allowed her to attend the family night without her parents. Carol wanted to address the situation by talking to the mother, but at the same time, she knew that the principal would not refuse a child from attending just because she did not have parents there. Carol made clear that the school wanted to be more inclusive than exclusive. She remarked, “Todd wouldn’t say, ‘You didn’t come with your mom. You can’t stay.’ Instead, he would probably say, ‘Come on, I’ll be your dad tonight.’”

DISCUSSION

I identified New Era Elementary as a high-achieving rural school, specifically in literacy. I did not consider socio-economic status in the site selection process. However, I discovered how a high-achieving, yet high-needs, school not only reached academic achievement in literacy but also fostered good citizenship and created positive, educative school experiences for students and their families. In this section, I summarize major points of this study, draw conclusions, identify implications for teacher education and leadership, analyze my role as the researcher, and provide limitations and directions for future research.

Summary

The results of this study provide an understanding of the complexities involved in educating the whole child in a high-needs rural elementary school. School personnel met students' physical, social, and emotional needs, as supported by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, but as other research indicates, these needs may not be structured hierarchically. Faculty and staff, especially the principal and family advocate, met students' physical needs by providing nutritious lunches and breakfast, connecting families with local food pantries, and assisting parents with forms to receive food from government agencies. School personnel supported students' physical development by instituting Girls on the Run, the Walking Club, and providing three different recess periods throughout the day. In addition, students' social needs were satisfied with programs like Love and Logic discipline, LifeSkills, and family fun nights. Girls on the Run and Girl Scouts also contributed to students' social development. School personnel met students' emotional needs by creating a positive learning environment with praise

and encouragement; this school celebrated achievement that motivated students to work even harder. Also, the school provided counseling services for those students with the highest needs and fostered a desire to help others.

Positive relationships created conditions for students' increased motivation, self-esteem, and resiliency. From here, school personnel supported students' cognitive needs with effective instruction, including differentiated instruction and scaffolding. The principal and staff emphasized reading and technology was seamlessly integrated into the curriculum. Literacy, specifically reading, became a natural part of learning.

Overall, by educating the whole child, school personnel helped students achieve academic success and learn and use good citizenship skills that fostered positive school experiences. This notion supports the claim that school has a dual responsibility to satisfy students' academic needs and support character education (Benninga et al., 2006).

The principal and teachers expected their students to behave well and put forth a great deal of effort to learn. The principal did not accept the notion that the district's financial hardships would prevent his students from receiving an excellent education so he collaborated with local businesses, churches, and civic groups to fund school needs, like books and computer software. Likewise, the principal's survey results, indicating a lack of socio-economic bias, also supported the ideas that students from low-income homes with unsupportive parents could be academically and behaviorally successful in school.

Conclusions

Documenting what this school accomplished makes educating the whole child sound so simple. It is obvious that children need physical needs met. They need a nutritious breakfast to eat, a warm coat in the winter, and loving encouragement from

their parents and other caregivers, including teachers and principals. Children need a principal, teachers, and other positive role models – male and female – who help them set goals, enable them to reach their goals with a great deal of effort and effective instruction, and then celebrate their accomplishments. Students need moral leadership that models and practices the values they want students to use. It is very complex and involves many participants.

Broffebrenner's (1986) ecological model of human development identifies the family, school, and local community, including peers, as the most immediate influences on a child, including a child's literacy development. It answers questions such as, is someone reading to and with the child? Is an adult talking with the child to build vocabulary? What learning materials are being provided to the child? Is someone modeling for the child how to appropriately behave? At New Era, some parents did not provide optimal learning experiences to boost their children's literacy development. School faculty and staff understood this reality; thus, the need to address student's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs became more pronounced.

I am not advocating a direct causal relationship between the school's participation and students' academic achievement. That is too narrow, of course, just as trying to define a school by cognitive achievement or deficiencies. On the other hand, I have identified school conditions that fostered students' cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Parents' and community members' participation varied widely between children and was not the focus of this study.

Findings from this analysis support the numerous studies on effective schools, especially those in areas of poverty (Hoffman, 1991; Reynolds et al., 2002; Shavelson &

Berliner, 1988; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Pressley et al., 2004). The body of research identified effective schools characteristics that focus on strong administrative leadership, high expectations, safe and orderly learning environments, frequent assessment, and excellent school and classroom management. Effective schools also provide supportive environments with positive home-school relationships. In my previous study (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007), positive home-school relationships meant that teachers provided immediate feedback on graded papers, sent newsletters and other notes home to parents, and interacted with families at special events, like PTO meetings. These were home-school connections, acquaintances, and associations -- not relationships. On the other hand, this study of New Era Elementary helps broaden the definition of positive home-school *relationships* with the family advocate's involvement with at-risk preschoolers and their families and the principal's altruistic behavior toward current and former students and their families. Relationships mean more than a one-way communication or connection. These relationships were interactive and personal.

In addition, faculty and staff created positive relationships with students, an implied, not explicit, relationship in effective schools research. One reason why school employees were able to create positive relationships with families and children was the number of years that faculty and staff worked at the school. There was little mobility on the part of the principal, teachers, and support staff. Todd had been the principal for 27 years at the time of this study and had previously worked in another capacity in the district. Carol had been the family advocate for 15 years, and most of the teachers had worked at New Era for many years. Two experienced teachers joined the faculty in 2007 after two other teachers retired. Support staff were hired and stayed at New Era, and

many, including the principal and family advocate, lived in the community. However, experience alone did not create positive relationships with children and their families. It was the holistic approach to learning, coupled with years of experience, that enabled school faculty and staff to create positive relationships with families.

Strong administrative leadership with a focus on curriculum is another component of effective schools. This is one of the missing characteristics from my previous study (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007) that lead me to studying New Era Elementary. New Era's principal had many roles, such as fundraiser, teacher, counselor, and instructional leader. There is no lack of research to show how effective principals act as teacher, but this study provides a new perspective on effective leadership. Todd tried to meet students' needs before they walked into the classrooms so children could focus on learning. In addition, he aided families and hired a family advocate to support disadvantaged families by helping alleviate their hardships and educating their preschoolers before those children entered New Era Elementary.

I have identified teacher-level characteristics supporting literacy achievement, like scaffolding and differentiation of instruction that aligns with similar research (Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2000; Pressley et al., 2005; Duffy, 2003; Knapp, 1995). What stood out at New Era was the way teachers used technology to assess students but more importantly to inform their practice. The Classworks program was chosen because it enabled teachers to differentiate instruction. Time spent in the computer lab was not totally devoted to drill and practice or computer games. Granted, students did have opportunities to practice literacy skills and take multiple-choice comprehension quizzes that also improved their test-taking skills. They also had

opportunities to practice keyboarding skills, type and illustrate stories, and conduct research. The more salient use of technology was how teachers used the assessment data in language arts to inform them of students' literacy strengths and weaknesses. It initiated changes in their daily lesson plans, students groupings, and reteaching to small groups or individuals.

Other teacher- and school-level characteristics of effective instruction do not include seamless integration of technology that transforms instruction. For example, effective schools tend to have frequent assessment of student progress and effective teachers reteach, when necessary, but technology use is not mentioned as key features in effective schools research. Even in my previous study in Manistique (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007), we discovered that teachers frequently monitored student progress in reading comprehension through Accelerated Reader and the accompanying assessment called STAR, but technology was not used to inform teacher practice. Also, Accelerated Reader and STAR only tested students' in reading comprehension, whereas the Classworks program assessed and provided student practice in multiple areas of reading and writing. Teacher reports documented specific literacy skills.

A growing body of research claims that a high quality character education program can promote academic achievement (Benninga et al., 2006; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Chang & Munoz, 2006). Researchers must be cautious in making a direct causal relationship between these two components without considering other influences, such as effective instruction or meeting students' physical needs like food. By examining the different domains of educating the whole child (e.g., physical, cognitive, social,

emotional), this study shows that character education impacted all domains but that it did not exist alone to propel students to academic success in literacy.

Finally, the cultural model of school for New Era Elementary was based on a family metaphor. The small size allowed for everyone to know each other. Teachers taught siblings over time and became closely acquainted with families. The principal's dedication to service in providing for, protecting, and educating his students can be equated with a nurturing patriarch of a large family. Even when I entered the school one day, he smiled and called, "Welcome home." In Jimerson's (2006) review of literature on small schools, she discovered elements that are associated with small schools and academic, social, and emotional benefits for children (e.g., higher percentage of students participating in extra-curricular activities, sense of belonging and resiliency, greater academic success). I contend that it is not just the size that helped create this metaphor and benefit students but it was also because the school housed grades 1-5 and previously housed kindergarten through fifth grade before the kindergarten class was moved to a different building. The range of grades in one building allowed school personnel more time to build relationships with families and provided teachers more opportunities for curriculum planning and group decision-making. In addition, children attended school in the same building for several years so they had a certain comfort level, a real sense of belonging to a school community. However, in my previous work (Reffitt & Pressley, 2007), the school structure had been redesigned so that each building housed one or two grade levels. Instead of grades 1-5 being together in one building, schools were arranged by grade levels; kindergarten and first graders were housed in one building, second and third graders were in another building, and fourth and fifth graders were located in a

separate wing of the middle/high school. Many teachers expressed disappointment and frustration over the loss of their family metaphor of school, a metaphor that they felt was optimal for student growth and teacher collaboration.

Implications for Teacher Education and Educational Leadership

This study provides implications for teacher education and educational leadership. Teacher educators need to examine how they are preparing future teachers to educate students with a holistic approach to learning. The aim has been to equip interns with the best pedagogical tools in literacy instruction, but students, especially at-risk students, wrestle with serious issues that impact their learning. How are pre-service teachers learning how to work with these students and their families? By failing to discover or empathize with students' harsh family situations, novice teachers may not recognize barriers that limit a child's potential.

Also, we need to show pre-service teachers how to use technology to guide and transform instruction. I have noticed in different teacher preparation programs and professional development workshops that beginning and experienced teachers are shown how to integrate technology into the classroom. They learn how to use equipment and programs that enhance what they are doing in the classroom, which has merit, but it seems to be more of an add-on component to their daily practices instead using technology to frequently modify and differentiate instruction.

In addition, teacher preparation programs need to work with social workers to create more positions like New Era's family advocate. She aided families and taught preschoolers emergent literacy and math skills without the burdensome paperwork sometimes associated with governmental agencies. The family advocate worked with

children and families in their homes giving her valuable insights about their family dynamics and living situations. If teachers across grade levels conducted home visits, they would gain important information that would transform their perceptions about students and impact their instruction. This study is the first to examine the discourse between the family advocate (as defined in this study), family member, and child during a home visit that will hopefully provide guidance on home visit protocols.

Researcher in the Middle

Even though a researcher enters a study with contextual background knowledge, it is her moral and ethical obligation to report the findings and draw conclusions based on collected data, qualitative or quantitative. When I walked through the front door of New Era Elementary and began talking to Trav, the school secretary, and then Todd, the principal, I felt very welcomed into the school. I could sense Todd's appreciation and enthusiasm about having a Michigan State University doctoral student study his school as he introduced me to faculty and students. I began to hear his stories about students and their relatives, and we shared information about our career paths and families. We shed a few tears sometimes when he retold a heartbreaking family situation that a child was enduring. We laughed at those unexpected events, the funny ones that could only happen in the school context. And as I heard more of these stories, and as I talked to people there – teachers, children, a parent – I was enveloped with this sense of quiet peace. I was content to visit the school and collect my data and I was happy to witness the nurturing care of the children. The faculty and staff were what we as educators strive to be, change agents who make positive differences in the lives of children. Even though I have been positively affected by this study, I remained as objective as possible. My feelings about

the school are not limitations of the study. I realized the school faced challenges and had areas of weakness in need of improvement. What I have documented in this study reflects the complexities of their strengths and abilities to combat serious challenges and to do what is best for the children.

Study Limitations

I want to recognize the methodological and theoretical choices I made in order to inform other researchers. The major limitation of this study was the self-reporting of information. The principal, advocate, and teachers shared detailed accounts of students' personal situations that I did not have firsthand knowledge of at the time of this study. Also, the principal and teachers completed questionnaires about their beliefs on school achievement. I realize that self-reporting does not always correspond to actual behaviors. In addition, there may be various interpretations of the home visit narrative. Finally, causal relationships cannot be established since the variables cannot be isolated (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993) and parents' and community members' participation was unknown.

Future Research

Based on this study of a high-achieving rural elementary school, I propose five directions for future research. First, we need to further investigate principals' training and how a counseling component could effectively be integrated into their preparation, so that principals explicitly learn how to support students' affective development and needs. Second, we need to educate and employ more family advocates like Carol in high-needs schools -- urban, suburban, and rural. We need to see if and how that role adapts in various settings in order to help meet children's and their families' needs. She brought

books into the home and modeled literacy skills, like prediction and fluency, to build the child's literacy knowledge and skills and to educate the parent on developmentally appropriate strategies and activities to practice at home. A longitudinal study would help identify her impact on students' literacy skills acquisition for beginning kindergarteners. Also, the district's family advocates were all Caucasian females and in their 50s. We need to investigate if and how their race, sex and age influenced their positions.

Third, we need to study effective ways to implement home visits made by all teachers. Oftentimes, the kindergarten teacher may be the only one who conducts home visits. We need to investigate ways to accommodate teachers' schedules and not compromise their contractual agreements or financially overburden them with additional expenses, like child care and fuel costs. New Era's family advocate has shown that insights gained from home visits greatly contribute to an educator's perception of a student that could change the way teachers teach. Fourth, we need to study the various counseling services that are provided to students, especially at-risk students. Some children are overwhelmed with family crisis situations and need short-term and long-term counseling interventions that are currently under-funded or completely absent. Federal, state, and local accountability requirements burden districts because the focus is on academic achievement, not a holistic perspective on learning.

Finally, we need to research effective ways that pre-service teachers can be instructed to educate the whole child with an emphasis on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The Holistic Child Program of Mercer University is one school that is preparing their candidates to teach from a holistic perspective, but we need more

colleges and universities to embrace this philosophy and educate interns with that goal in mind.

Table 1

Student Population by Grade Level

Grade Levels	2006-2007	2007-2008
K	25	----
1 st	21	24
2 nd	17	20
3 rd	28	18
4 th	29	30
5 th	27	28
Total:	147	120

Table 2

Demographic Summary of School Faculty and Staff

Grade/ Assignment	Teaching/Administrative Experience	Highest Degree Earned
1 st	21 years	BA
2 nd	22 years	BA
3 rd	23 years	BA
4 th	20 years	BA + 38 hrs toward Masters degree
5 th	14 years	BA
Special Education	27 years	BA
Instructional Assistant	17 years	AA + 20 hrs. in reading
Instructional Assistant	17 years	AA
Migrant/Bilingual Assistant	7 years	AA
Computer/Media Specialist	9 years	AA - Technology
Family Advocate	15 years	AA
Administrative Assistant	12 years	BA - Technology
Principal	36 years	MA-Counseling & Educational Leadership

Table 3

Audio Recordings

Person(s)	Length of Audio Recording	Event(s)
Principal	3 hours, 47 mins.	Informal conversations and formal interviews about his perceptions of school and role; classroom lesson with students
Family Advocate	4 hours, 9 mins.	Home visit; informal conversations and formal interviews about her role
Teachers	3 hours, 20 mins.	Observations, conversations, and formal interviews
2 Girls on the Run Participants	8 minutes	Interviews
3 rd and 4 th Grade Students	17 minutes	Reading poetry (for researcher's presentation purposes) and conversations at lunch on their perceptions of the school
Parent	14 minutes	Informal interview on her perceptions of the school and principal
TOTAL		

Table 4

Original and Modified BASA Survey Questions on Gender

Original BASA Survey Questions on Gender	Modified BASA Survey Questions on Gender
Boys are better in mathematics than girls.	Girls are better in language arts than boys.
Girls are better than boys in language subjects.	Boys are better in mathematics than girls.
Unlike girls, boys are good with numbers.	Unlike boys, girls are good writers.
Solving mathematics problems is something boys do well.	Comprehending narrative and expository text is something girls do well.

Table 5

Results of the Modified Beliefs about School Achievement Survey

BELIEF FACTORS	FACTOR COMPONENTS	Principal Factor Components	X Teachers Only Factor Components	X Teachers and Principal	X of Factors Principal Only	X of Factors Teachers Only
Factor 1: Ability	ABL1: School achievement is an inherited talent.	5	3.8 (.84)	4	5	3.53
	ABL2: A child's school achievement is caused by biologically determined characteristics.	5	3 (.82)	3.4		
	ABL3: School achievement is a matter of intelligence.	5	3.2 (1.1)	3.50		
	ABL4: A weak student at first grade will be a weak student at twelfth grade.	5	4 (1)	4.17		
Factor 2: Teacher	TEA1: A good teacher can improve the achievement level of all students, even those who are very weak.	1	1.4 (.55)	1.33	1	1.75
	TEA2: Teachers can make the difference with difficult students.	1	1.6 (.55)	1.50		
	TEA3: Teachers are effective in helping students learn.	1	1.4 (.55)	1.33		
	TEA4: A child's achievement depends on the qualities of his/her teacher.	1	2.6 (.89)	2.33		
Factor 3: Family Socio-economic Status	SES1: Children of well-educated parents do better at school than children of less educated parents.	5	2.4 (.89)	2.83	5	2.95
	SES2: Children from rich families perform better at school than children from poor families.	5	3.2 (1.1)	3.50		
	SES3: Parents' own education is responsible for their child's success or failure at school.	5	3.4 (1.14)	3.67		
	SES4: Family social status affects child school performance.	5	2.8 (1.1)	3.17		
Factor 4: Effort	EFF1: Even students who are not very smart can have high achievement, if they try.	1	2.2 (1.1)	2.00	2	2.75
	EFF2: When a child performs badly at school, this is because of inadequate effort.	5	3.4 (.55)	3.67		
	EFF3: High grades at school are due to hard work.	1	2.4 (.8)	2.17		
	EFF4: Any child can do well at school if he or she tries hard enough.	1	3 (1)	2.67		

Table 5 Cont.

Factor 5: Gender	GEN1	Girls are better in language arts than boys.	2	3.6 (.55)	3.33	2	3.55
	GEN2	Boys are better in mathematics than girls.	2	3.6 (.55)	3.33		
	GEN3	Unlike boys, girls are good writers.	2	3.6 (.55)	3.33		
	GEN4	Comprehending narrative and expository text is something girls do well.	2	3.4 (.55)	3.17		

Table 6

Coding of Field Notes/Themes with Definitions and Examples

Coding of Field Notes/Themes	Definition	Examples
Sense of Place	Descriptions and anecdotal evidence that provide the reader with the setting and emotional tone of the school.	Student poetry; researcher's school tour; school secretary's interaction with mentally disabled community member
Administrative Leadership	Principal's leadership and personality traits that support students' physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs.	Taught mini-lesson in third grade classroom; generated additional funds to support student programs and activities; spending time after school with a young man who needs guidance from a positive male role model
Effective teaching	Characteristics supported by well-established research on effective literacy instruction and effective schools/classrooms.	Scaffolding during a third grade lesson on fluency; differentiated instruction in the Early Intervention Program
Home-School Connections	Interactions between parents and school personnel that lead to positive working relationships to support the children's education.	Family advocate's home visits; family fun nights
Technology	Use of computers and other electronic devices to practice and improve literacy skills.	Use of Classworks and Reading Counts programs to support literacy achievement; amount of instructional time spent in the computer lab
Poverty	Living in harsh conditions where basic needs, like food, clothing, and shelter, are not being met.	Large percentages of students on free and reduced lunch programs; food baskets delivered to families at Thanksgiving; winter coats provided for those in need
Emotional Health	A state of psychological well-being in which a student is able to use his or her capabilities to	Counseling services from an outside agency; implementation of LifeSkills

Table 6 Cont.

Emotional Health	A state of psychological well-being in which a student is able to use his or her capabilities to express emotions appropriately and adapt to the demands of everyday life.	Counseling services from an outside agency; implementation of LifeSkills and discipline with Love and Logic
Physical Health and Development	Meeting students' physical needs, such as food and clothing, and supporting physical fitness for a healthy body.	Walking Club; Girls on the Run; 3 recess periods throughout the day

Table 7

School's Additional Funding Sources for 2007-08

Source	Generated Revenue	Purpose
School Auction	\$5,800	Classworks computer software to support individualized science education and library books
Local church	\$6,000	Counseling and parenting classes
Store purchases	Target - \$45/year Meijer - \$185/year	Library books
Empty ink cartridges and cell phones	Issued credit to order school items from catalog	Computer software (keyboarding tutorial, math, reading, Pilgrim's Quest)
General Mills box tops & Tyson's food labels	\$400	Library books
Campbell's Soup Labels	Redeemed for classroom materials ordered from catalog	Overhead projector, playground equipment, library books, art supplies
Flower Sales	\$1,500	Classworks computer software and positive recognition programs for students
Candy sales	\$2,500	School assemblies and positive recognition programs
PTO funds	\$1,500	Assemblies, books, and classroom materials
School store	Approximately \$300-\$435	Walking club program and books
TOTAL:	\$18,230 - \$18,665 plus credit to order from catalogs	

Table 8

Main Line/Off Main Line of Plot Material from the Home Visit

Stanza	Main Line Plot Material	Off Main Line Plot Material
1	Review of previous lesson on color recognition	
2	Color recognition (extended review)	
3	Fine motor skills	
4	Fine motor development	
5		Sisters arguing
6	Selecting a favorite Christmas card (for cutting and practicing fine motor skills)	
7	Sarah using the scissors	
8	Making a puzzle	
9	Counting the puzzle pieces	
10	Using a paper punch	
11	Cutting the shoelace	
12	Lacing	
13	A book for Sarah	
14	More lacing cards	
15	Play dough	
16	Picking up the cotton balls	
17	Stringing letters on the pipe cleaner	
18		Grandma's story

Table 8 Cont.

20	Poem	
21	Cutting sheets	
22		About Kim, Sarah's mother
23		Dina (Sarah's sister) and discipline
24		Snow
25	More information on child development (including brain development and social emotional development)	
26	Carol reads to Sarah	
27		Sarah likes to cut
28		Expecting a new grandchild
29	Conclusion of home visit	

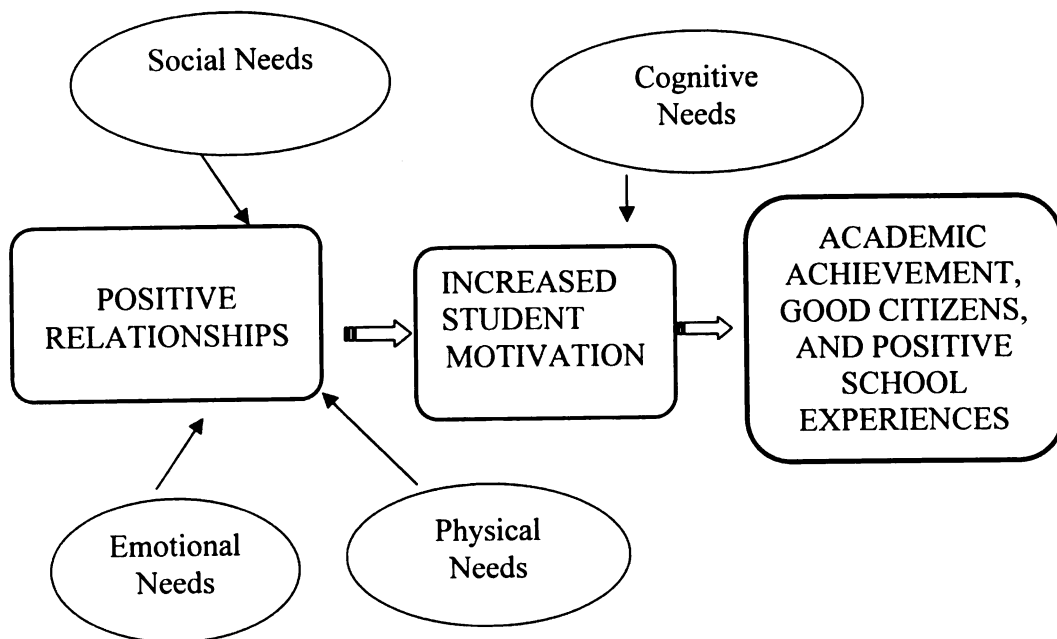


Figure 1. *How the School Contributed to Students' Academic Success in Literacy*

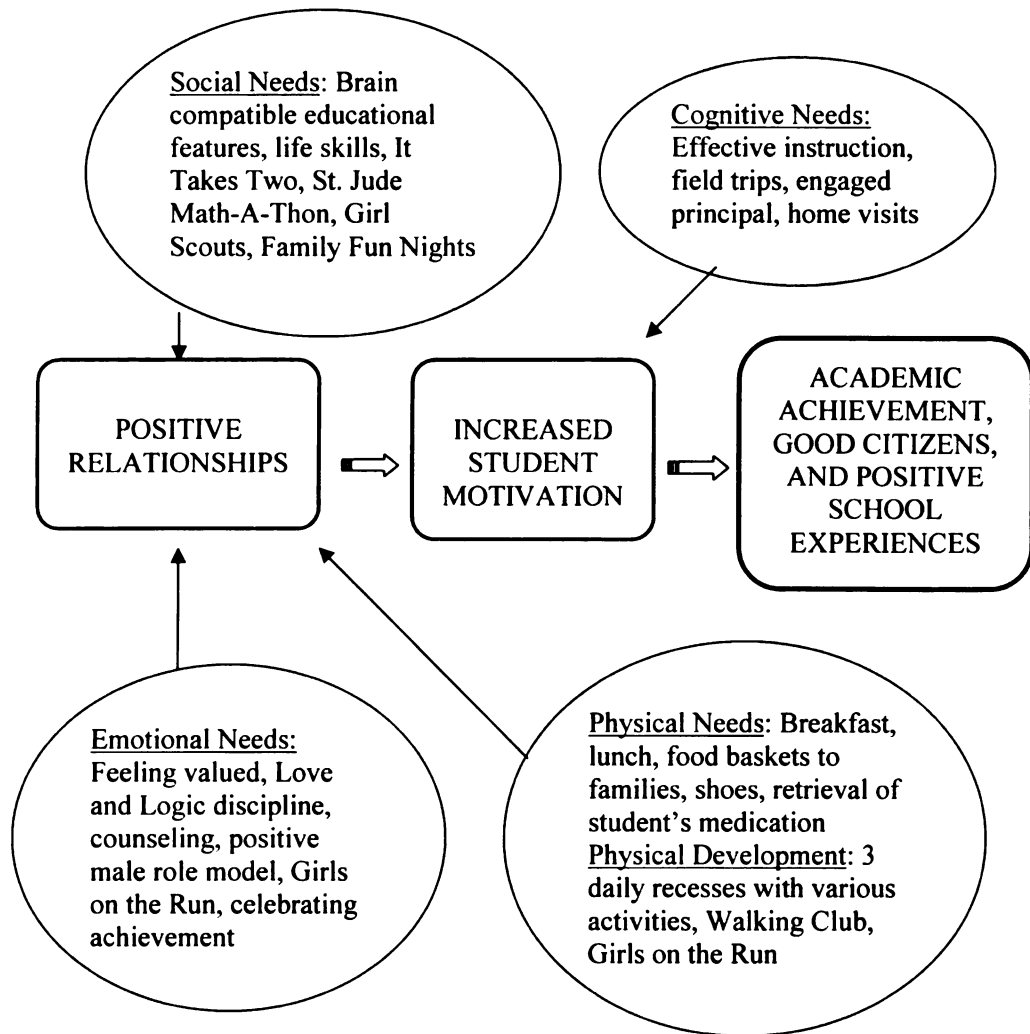


Figure 2. *How the School Educated the Whole Child That Contributed to Students' Academic Success in Literacy*

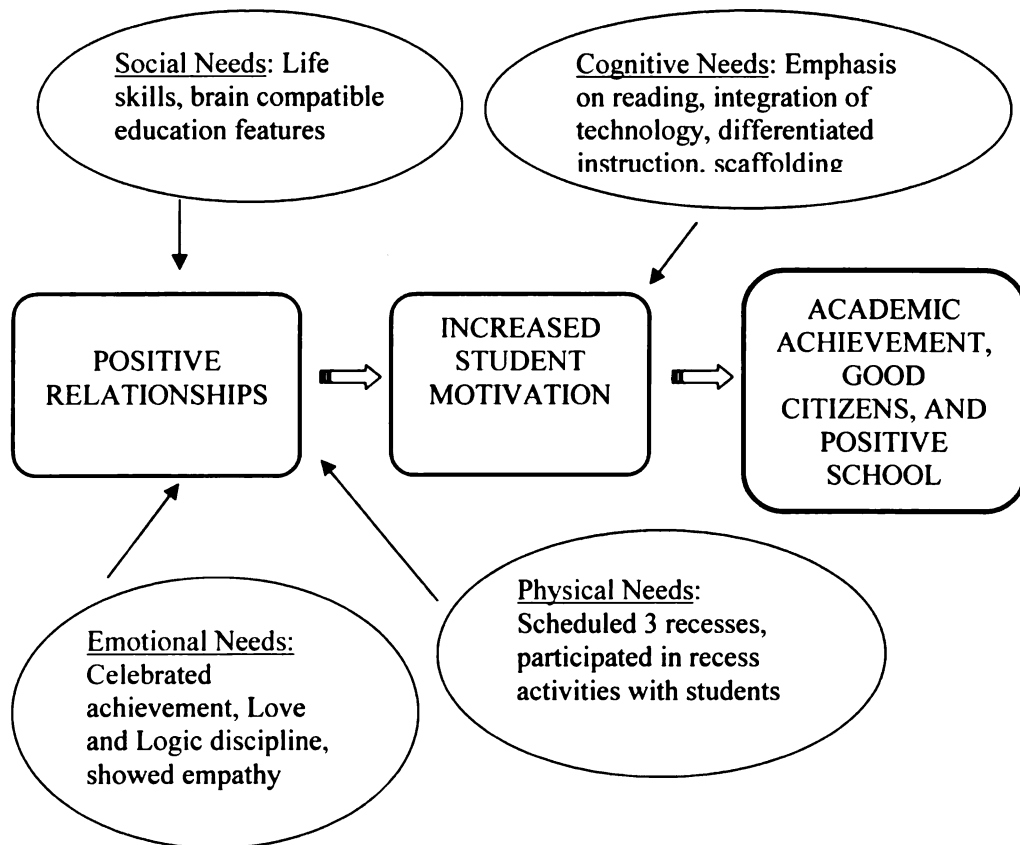


Figure 3. *How the Teachers and Support Staff Contributed to Students' Academic Success in Literacy*

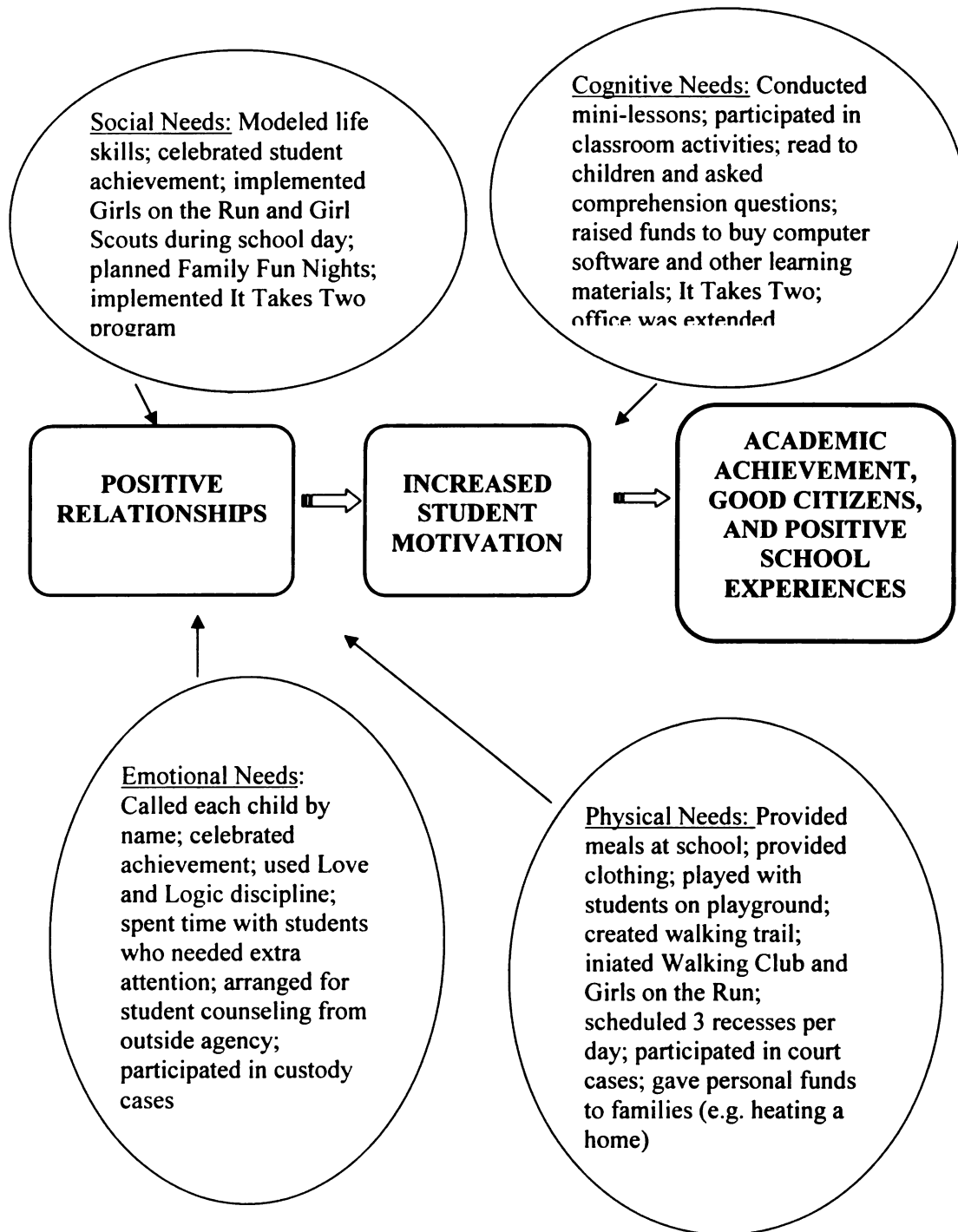


Figure 4. *How the Principal Contributed to Students' Academic Success in Literacy*

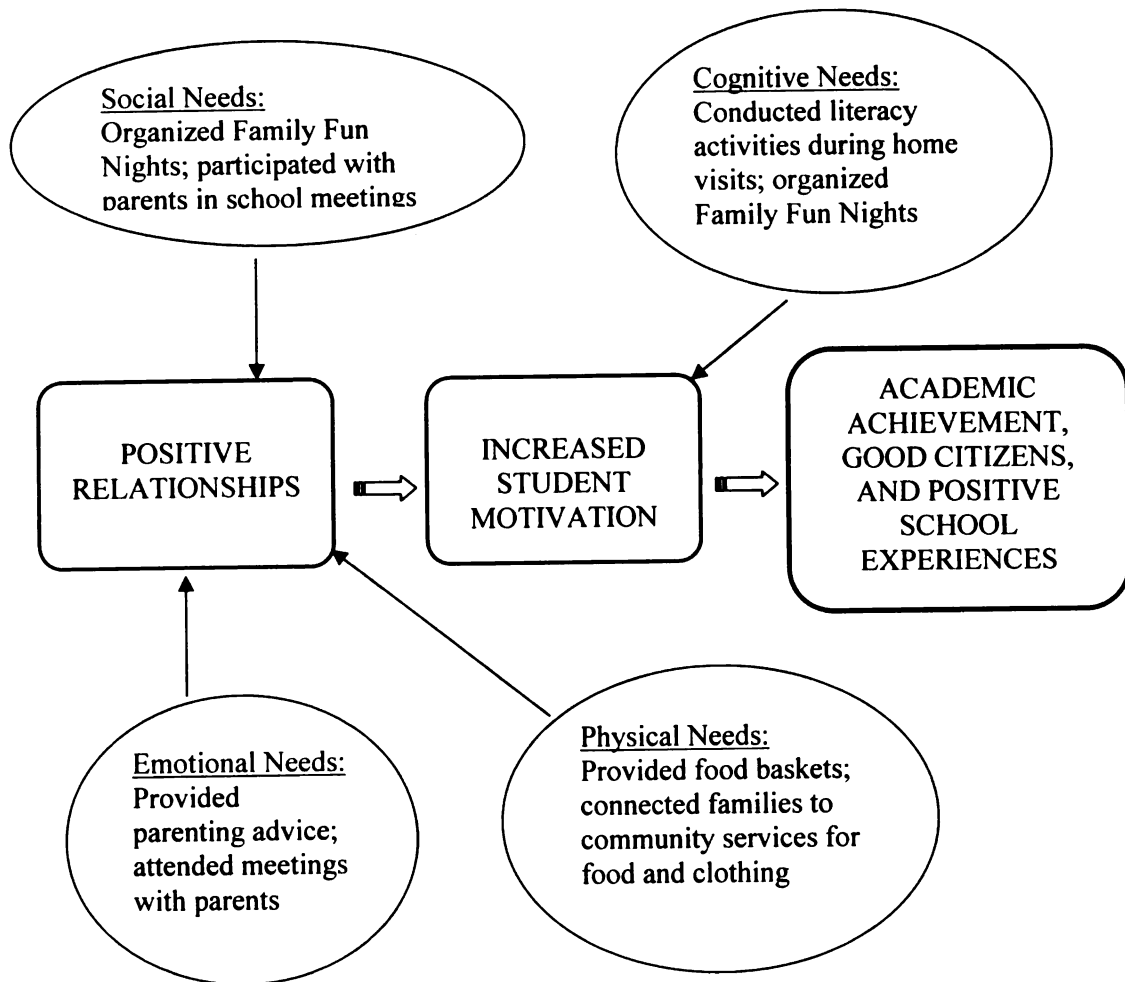


Figure 5. *How the Family Advocate Contributed to Students' Academic Success in Literacy*

Appendix A

MEAP Test Results from English Language Arts State Assessments 2004-07 New Era Elementary²

Fall 2007:

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>	<u>Grade 5</u>
Exceeded Standards	75 (22)	23 (16)	30 (22)
Met Standards (Proficient)	25 (59)	73 (60)	52 (56)
Basic Performance	0 (16)	4 (21)	19 (17)
Apprentice (Not Proficient)	0 (3)	0 (3)	0 (5)

Fall 2006:

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>	<u>Grade 5</u>
Exceeded Standards	29 (20)	7 (13)	58 (15)
Met Standards (Proficient)	54 (59)	83 (65)	42 (62)
Basic Performance	17 (16)	10 (20)	0 (18)
Apprentice (Not Proficient)	0 (4)	0 (2)	0 (4)

Fall 2005:

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>	<u>Grade 5</u>
Exceeded Standards	26 (13)	40 (8)	42 (10)
Met Standards (Proficient)	74 (65)	60 (68)	54 (65)
Basic Performance	0 (19)	0 (22)	4 (21)
Apprentice (Not Proficient)	0 (3)	0 (3)	0 (4)

Winter 2005:

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>
Exceeded Standards	12 (6)
Met Standards (Proficient)	80 (63)
Basic Performance	8 (28)
Apprentice (Not Proficient)	0 (3)

² All numbers are percentages that have been rounded to whole numbers. State averages are in parentheses.

Winter 2004:

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>
Exceeded Standards	0 (3)
Met Standards (Proficient)	77 (61)
Basic Performance	23 (32)
Apprentice (Not Proficient)	0 (5)

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do you define literacy? learning? school?
 2. If you were on an elevator with someone you didn't know and were going up a few floors, how would you describe your school to that person?
 3. What do you think about Todd as a leader?
 4. What are his strengths?
 5. What are his weaknesses?
 6. How does Todd support literacy instruction and student achievement?
 7. How do you use the data from Classworks?
 8. The fifth grade teacher had training in Lucy Calkins' new writing program. Has she shared this program with you? If so, how? When? Are you implementing these ideas into your writing instruction? If so, when did that begin?
- To the 5th grade teacher: Are you sharing Lucy Calkins' new writing program with other teachers? If so, how? When?
9. What challenges do you face at New Era? How do you combat them?
 10. What is your perception of your students' parents?
 11. What is your perception of the school community?
 12. What else would you like to add about your school?

Appendix C

Principal Interview Questions

1. What was New Era like when you became the principal? Prior to?
2. What was the turning point in student achievement on the MEAP?
3. Describe the school to a new teacher.
4. Explain your job description as principal.
5. How do you define literacy? Learning? School?
6. How do you see yourself supporting literacy instruction and school achievement?
7. What challenges do you face at New Era? What do you do to combat these challenges?
8. What changes do you want to make at New Era Elementary in the next few years?

Appendix D

Beliefs About School Achievement Survey (Modified)³

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements by circling the corresponding number:

	Absolutely agree	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree	Absolutely disagree
School achievement is an inherited talent.	1	2	3	4	5
A child's school achievement is caused by biologically determined characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
School achievement is a matter of intelligence.	1	2	3	4	5
A weak student at first grade will be a weak student at twelfth grade.	1	2	3	4	5
A good teacher can improve the achievement level of all students, even those who are very weak.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers can make the difference with difficult students.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are effective in helping students learn.	1	2	3	4	5
A child's achievement depends on the qualities of his/her teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
Children of well-educated parents do better at school than children of less educated parents.	1	2	3	4	5

³ This is a modified version of the BASA scale produced by Georgiou, S., Stavrinos, P., & Panaoura, G. (2002). School failure: Teacher attributions and behavior. *Educational Review*, 33, 115-136.

	Absolutely agree	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree	Absolutely disagree
Children from rich families perform better at school than children from poor families.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' own education is responsible for their child's success or failure at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Family social status affects child school performance.	1	2	3	4	5
Even students who are not very smart can have high achievement, if they try.	1	2	3	4	5
When a child performs badly at school, this is because of inadequate effort.	1	2	3	4	5
High grades at school are due to hard work.	1	2	3	4	5
Any child can do well at school if he or she tries hard enough.	1	2	3	4	5
Girls are better in language arts than boys.	1	2	3	4	5
Boys are better in mathematics than girls.	1	2	3	4	5
Unlike boys, girls are good writers.	1	2	3	4	5
Comprehending narrative and expository text is something girls do well.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix E
Transcript of Home Visit

Participants:

C: Carol, family advocate
G: Grandmother
S: Sarah, 3 year-old child
R: Researcher

Stanza 1 (Review of Previous Lesson on Color Recognition)

1 C: I mean we talked again about like COLOR RECOGNITION
2 and I think I LEFT A RING with the little color things on it for you
3 How how did that go?
4 Did you do ANY PATTERN PRACTICING or do you know if Kim did?
5 G: We were/what we do was/ I AND HER mainly/ WHEN WE SEE
6 SOMETHING/we point out the color
7 and she tells me what it is
7 C: Okay
8 G: And she--
9 C: Okay/okay/So she's doing more of THE MATCHING the colors THAT
10 ARE THE SAME rather than saying/YOU SAYING/where's THE RED
11 ONE or where's THE GREEN ONE?
12 She's not to that point yet really/where you can say/like which one is the
13 RED LEAF or which one is the GREEN LEAF?
14 G: Some of it
15 C: SOME OF IT?/okay
16 Because we talked about the fact that THE FIRST STEP in learning colors
17 is being able to say/ you know/ if you say what's the same color as this?/
18 she would be able to find it
19 G: Yeah/she can do that
20 C: And then THE SECOND STEP would be YOU NAMING the color
21 and her being ABLE TO PICK IT OUT
22 And then THE THIRD STEP would be/you pointing and saying/what
23 color is this?/and her being able to tell you what it is
24 So she's just/you just/you're going to have to keep doing --
25 S: LIKE THAT
26 C: Which one?
27 S: Umm

Stanza 2 (Color Recognition)

23 C: Do you know what color THE BANANA is? [Pause]
24 Do you know?
25 S: It's/ um
26 C: YOU SHOW ME
27 What would you like to tell me?
28 IT'S THE SAME as that/ They're both YELLOW
29 G: Watch YOUR FINGERS

30 C: They're both yellow
31 You knew they were the SAME COLOR/right/ But they're both
YELLOW
32 So we're going to work on that and keep practicing --
33 G: --Yeah/work on the colors with her

Stanza 3 (Fine Motor Skills)

34 C: So today what we're going to do is focus a little more on like FINE
MOTOR SKILLS
35 Now/I was TRYING TO REMEMBER when I was here last time/did you
DO SOME CUTTING?
36 S: Yeah
37 C: I think/that maybe she had a pair of scissors?
38 Did we have a pair of scissors or something?
39 I can't remember
40 G: You were making snowflakes
41 C: Did we have a pair of scissors?
42 OH THAT'S RIGHT/You were MAKING SNOWFLAKES
because I was working WITH BETHANY THAT DAY on all that
homework she missed/right?/Okay

Stanza 4 (Fine Motor Development)

43 With the fine motor development/A CHILD'S BRAIN HAS the BASIC
STUFF that it needs/those basic connections
44 I don't know if you have ever heard people talk about that there's brain/
there's CONNECTIONS IN THE BRAIN/that HAVE TO BE MADE in
order for children/or people/to learn to do things and to have it stick
45 So there's a A BASIC LEVEL of that ABILITY in a child's BRAIN
46 but they REALLY NEED to have a chances to PRACTICE IT/ in order
for those connections like to develop and grow and stay STRONG
46 so that they HAVE THE ABILITY to do those things
47 That's why DOING STUFF with your kids/he kids at HOME/it's so
IMPORTANT
48 'cause this is the time of their life when their brain is REALLY
DEVELOPING
49 and they GOTTA have THOSE EXPERIENCES/you know to make those
connections
50 just like WE ALL needed that/every/ EVERYBODY DOES/when they're-

Stanza 5 (Sisters arguing)

51 G: --I got 'em to STOP FIGHTIN the other day/the other night
52 C: You're right/in the brain
53 C: You did? [Chuckles]
54 G: They were ARGUING
55 C: You weren't FIGHTING with your sisters?
56 G: We were goin to HART

57 and they were ARGUING about [inaudible]
 58 OH WOW/Look at those BEAUTIFUL LIGHTS
 59 Gettin' them to the lights--
 60 C: --Distraction
 61 G: --And they started to turn around and lookin' at the lights
 62 And I said/OVER on your side/ Sarah
 63 C: And it's MUCH NICER than YELLING [whispers the word yelling]--
 64 G: --Oh, it is
 65 C: If you can DISTRACT THEM to SOMETHING ELSE
 66 G: It only worked once/ though
 67 C: Oh yeah/then you always have to be finding--
 [Everybody speaking at once]
 68 S: You CAN'T yell
 69 C: You can't yell?
 70 It doesn't make us FEEL VERY GOOD does it/when we get yelled out?
 71 S: 'Cause/you know what?
 72 When I got yelled/my mom [incomprehensible] my books
 73 C: Yeah/so she told you that you shouldn't yell?
 74 Was she trying to tell you not to yell?
 75 Yeah/yeah
 76 C: So the GROWN-UPS shouldn't yell and the KIDS shouldn't yell/right?
 77 SAME RULES for everybody?
 78 THAT would be NICE/ wouldn't it?

Stanza 6 (Picking out a favorite Christmas card)

79 Look WHAT I BROUGHT today
 80 And I want to show you THESE CARDS I BROUGHT
 81 I think I just CLOSED MY BAG instead of OPENED IT
 82 Look at these
 83 Do you want to look at THE PICTURES on there?
 84 S: Mm hm
 85 C: SEE IF you find one THAT YOU LIKE in there
 86 Aah/THERE'S A LOT of them
 87 Should we LAY EM OUT a little bit so you CAN SEE/SOME OF THE
 PICTURES?
 88 OH/do you like THAT ONE?
 89 G: Mm hm
 90 C: You like THAT ONE?
 91 Which one maybe/do you NOT LIKE as well?
 92 THAT ONE? --
 93 S: --I like
 94 C: You all like ALL OF THEM/ don't you?
 95 They are NICE
 96 Let's TAKE/we need to PICK ONE that we CAN CUT
 97 S: And I LIKE --
 98 C: --Which one do you THINK?

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1. *Journal of Management Studies*, 1997, 34, 1, 1-14.

99 THAT one?

Stanza 7 (Sarah using the scissors)

100 I wanted to give you some SCISSORS to give you a chance to do some
 cutting along the edge
101 Do you know how to put your FINGERS IN?
102 Here/let me SHOW YOU how we do it AT SCHOOL
103 We keep THIS FINGER OUT and we put THESE FINGERS IN
104 and that helps us kind of STEER the scissors
105 Can you OPEN AND CLOSE IT?
106 Let me see your HAND
107 That's TRICKY isn't it?
108 Sometimes you NEED HELP until you USED TO DOING it
109 G: Sarah/where's MOMMA'S?
110 C: Oh/ do you LIKE THESE better?
111 G: She can use these pretty good
112 C: She can use these better?
113 You want to TRY MINE?
114 S: NO
115 G: You want Momma's?
116 C: You want to TRY MINE?
117 Okay/Oh LOOK at that!
118 Can you MAKE LITTLE CUTS all along the edge?
119 You can do BIG CUTS
120 Okay/why don't we do this then? Why don't you cut this into like FOUR
 BIG PIECES?
121 Can you DO THAT?
122 Oh/ GOOD JOB
123 S: [INCOMPREHENSIBLE]
124 C: Sometimes it's IMPORTANT when they're FIRST LEARNING HOW to
 go get very good at cutting
125 YOU might need to be the one who HOLDS THE PAPER
126 G: Um hm
127 C: Oh/you took your FINGERS RIGHT OUT of the holes/didn't you?
128 That's A PROBLEM when it comes time to OPEN IT then
129 Okay/you HOLD IT YOUR WAY for now since that's what you've been
 used to doing
130 THERE'S A PIECE/Let's put THAT ONE down
131 Do you want to finish CUTTING THAT ONE?
132 Let's make some BIG PIECES

Stanza 8 (Making a puzzle)

133 Can you cut that one ALL THE WAY ACROSS?/ 'Cause we're going to
 make a PUZZLE
134 You know what?/ We're goin to have GRANDMA MAKE a puzzle too
135 Here Grandma/can you MAKE A PUZZLE, like 4 or 6 PIECES?

136 Oh my goodness/look at that/Grandma can do it too
 137 There's 2/Two go this way
 138 See if you can FIND THIS SPOT
 139 Can you CONNECT it?
 140 LOOK AT THAT/You did it
 141 Just about there/ YAY
 142 And now you want to cut ONE MORE OF THESE in half
 143 They're in TWO PIECES
 144 I shouldn't say half cause it WON'T BE HALF
 145 That LOOKS GOOD/Okay/now we're goin to take your puzzle pieces
 146 Put your SCISSORS for a minute 'cause you're goin to need TWO
 HANDS/I think
 147 Mix em all up
 148 Grandma needs to MIX HERS all up
 149 We're goin to make GRANDMA WORK today too
 150 G: Your mom should've BEEN HERE
 [All laughed]
 151 C: You have to SHOW YOUR MOM what we did
 when she comes home--
 152 G: -- Your momma's goin to be home pretty soon
 153 C: ---and she can do some practicing too
 154 C: Okay/now turn your PIECES OVER
and see if you can put YOUR PICTURE together/Oh, they're---
 155 G: Can you BEAT ME?/[Pause]/Huh?
 156 C: Hmm/you cut YOUR PIECES TRICKY didn't you?
 157 Let's SEE ALL OF EM so we can see --
 158 G: So did GRANDMA
 159 C: --how the might GO TOGETHER
 160 It's not always AS EASY as WE THINK it's going to be
 161 S: I'm goin' to BEAT YOU
 162 G: [Chuckled] No/it's not
 163 S: BEAT YOU
 164 C: This looks like Santa needs to go this way/ right?
 165 Is this the top?
 166 S: I think I'm goin' to beat you
 167 C: Oh/look at this/These two together--
 168 G: [At same time] I think you are too 'cause you know what?
 169 I was putting them UPSIDE DOWN [Laughs]
 170 C: [Laughs]Here/which way does THIS MAN NEED to go?
 171 He needs to GO THIS WAY/ right?
 172 Where does he go/I SEE the ribbon
 173 Can you ATTACH the ribbon? Put THIS RIBBON by THAT RIBBON

Stanza 9 (Counting the pieces)

174 Okay/now you have HOW MANY PIECES left? How many PIECES
 LEFT here?

175 THESE two/Can you COUNT EM?
 176 S: One [whispers]
 177 C: One/ one/What comes AFTER ONE? One/TWO/ One/ TWO
 178 Now where do THESE PIECES go?
 179 S: They go right
 180 C: Oh/YOU LIKE THEM together like this
 181 Okay/well/I'M GOIN TO SHOW you what I'm gonna do /I'm gonna
 MATCH THIS BAG together look/Look--
 182 S: --I'm goin to CUT THIS ONE too
 183 C: See how THE STARS go?
 184 You're going to CUT THAT ONE TOO?
 185 I was thinking that maybe we could do SOMETHING DIFFERENT with
 the card
 186 Would you like to see WHAT ELSE I brought?
 187 I'm gonna leave you the EXTRA CARDS okay/so you can PLAY with
 these
 188 I'll make these the extra cards that you get to keep
 189 I think you should KEEP THESE and SHOW MOM and SEE IF MOM
 can do a puzzle/You THINK SHE CAN?
 190 G: NO WAY

Stanza 10 (Using a paper punch)

191 C: Have you ever DONE A PAPER PUNCH before?
 192 S: Yeah
 193 C: YOU HAVE?/Can you put SOME HOLES around this card?
 194 S: Yeah
 195 C: You GOTTA SQUEEZE it
 196 If you NEED HELP/I can HELP YOU
 197 You gotta SQUEEZE DOWN HERE on the handles
 198 Let's TURN IT AROUND like this so we can see
 199 G: GRANDMA MESSED UP the first time
 200 C: SQUEEZE it
 201 THERE'S ONE! Where do you want to put the next one?
 202 S: Right here
 203 C: Right here? /Okay/ SQUEEZE
 204 WOW/It takes STRONG FINGERS doesn't it/which is the WHOLE
 IDEA
 205 We want to make STRONG FINGERS
 206 SQUEEZE my hand/ OKAY
 207 G: Her EYES BLINK
 208 C: SQUEEZE/Oh/ YOU'RE GOOD at SQUEEZING MY HAND/Squeeze
 again/
 209 Okay/ keep goin/We're almost ALL THE WAY around
 210 Do you know WHAT WE'RE MAKING? Do you know WHAT THIS IS/
 going to be?
 211 S: A check

212 G: A check?

Stanza 11 (Cutting the shoelace)

213 C: Let me show you what else I brought
214 You're goin to NEED SCISSORS for ONE LITTLE THING cause we're
goin to see if you can CUT MY SHOELACE in half
215 Do you think you CAN DO that?
216 S: Ah/YEAH
217 C: Okay/LET'S FIND OUT here
218 Okay/BETWEEN MY TWO FINGERS
219 G: No/no/ no/no
220 C: No/BETWEEN my two fingers
221 and CUT THIS and I'll SHOW YOU what we're going to do
222 Between my two fingers/though/Can you cut that?/Between my fingers
223 Try it again/OPEN it up
224 OH BOY/I wonder if we need GRANDMA'S SCISSORS?
225 Should we let GRANDMA TRY it?See if GRANDMA'S SCISSORS cut
it?
226 DON'T CUT that card again/DON'T CUT my FINGERS
227 G: Now I'M SHAKIN
228 C: Grandma's startin to GET NERVOUS

Stanza 12 (Lacing)

229 Okay/ look what we're going to do
230 I'm gonna TAKE YOUR CARD
231 S: Uh oh
232 G: I know what she's GONNA DO
233 C: Does GRANDMA KNOW?
234 Have you ever SEEN ONE OF THESE before?
235 G: [Participants talking at once) I've seen that in school
236 C: I'm gonna TIE THIS and we're gonna LACE
237 Have you ever DONE LACING BEFORE?/ YOU HAVE?/Do you
remember ---
238 S: --I TRIED
239 C: You TRIED?
240 S: But/I couldn't
241 G: Honey/ don't cut/DON'T CUT it
242 C: Was it hard?
243 I'm gonna leave/I'm gonna leave you my EXTRA CARDS and you can
PRACTICE CUTTING
244 AND I have ANOTHER BAG with LOTS OF SURPRISES in it
245 Okay/take the END OF THE SHOELACE down here/where the little
PLASTIC THING IS/and then you PUT IT in this hole
246 Can you go up FROM THE BOTTOM and go on the top?
247 Put it through and PULL it ALL THE WAY TIGHT/ALL THE WAY
TIGHT

248 Okay/now THIS TIME you're have to COME FROM THE BACK
 249 Can you put it in this hole?/Oh/LOOK AT THAT/And then THIS WAY
 250 It's LIKE SEWING/isn' t it?
 251 Oh/come FROM THE TOP this time if your/if your/if your STRING IS
 ON THE TOP then you have to GO BACK THROUGH the top
 252 And then this/your string is ON THIS SIDE/ so you have to GO IN THIS
 WAY
 253 Oh my goodness/LOOK AT YOU GO
 254 I think your mom is GOING TO BE SURPRISED when she sees what
 we've did today/Okay
 255 Oops/WHICH SIDE is the lace on/honey?/Which SIDE is the LACE
 ONE?
 256 S: It's on this side
 257 C: It's on this side so you'll have to go this way
 258 Actually/you could probably go the other way/We'll see
 259 If you DO THAT AGAIN/we'll see what it looks like
 260 Are you DONE for now?
 261 Do you see how you can lace it ALL THE WAY AROUND?/And it puts
 white ALL THE WAY AROUND your picture
 262 That is REALL GOOD PRACTICE for –
 263 G: You're goin in the WRONG HOLE
 264 C: Gonna EXPERIMENT?
 265 S: [Inaudible]
 266 C: Okay/The MOST IMPORTANT SKILL is pulling it IN THROUGH the
 hole and pulling it through/so--
 277 G: --Yeah
 278 C: --if she doesn't do it in order/she's still GETTING THE PRACTICE that
 she needs
 279 Oh/We RAN OUT of string
 280 If you pull it TOO HARD it will BREAK
 282 We RAN OUT of string/Do you KNOW WHY?
 282 Look/because you went ALL THE WAY DOWN here and USED ALL
 this string
 282 If you go all the way around in order/then you SHOULD HAVE
 ENOUGH string to go ALL THE WAY THROUGH
 282 Do you think you'd like/would you LIKE TO PRACTICE doing some of
 those sometimes?
 283 S: No
 284 C: NO/It's NOT FUN?
 You know what? I bet your sister/ANNE/would like to
 285 Maybe you can SHOW THOSE TO ANNE and say/Oh Anne/WOULD
 YOU like to do some stringing?
 286 I think SHE WOULD
 287 S: I think I WOULD TOO
 288 C: You think YOU WOULD TOO?

Stanza 13 (A book for Sarah)

289 Now would you like to see WHAT ELSE I BROUGHT today?
290 Let me PACK UP THE STUFF I need to take with me/'cause you get to
keep ALL OF THOSE
291 and let me show you WHAT ELSE 'cause we want you to PRACTICE
FINE MOTOR
292 I have a BAG FOR YOU TO KEEP/Do you want to SEE WHAT THAT
IS?
293 S: Um hm
294 C: LET'S SEE/where did I put it?
295 Remember my bag that has SO MANY DIFFERENT COMPARTMENTS
in it/I can NEVER REMEMBER where I put my stuff?
296 S: Yeah
297 C: Yeah/I get MESSED UP/I get CONFUSED/don't I?
298 OH MY GOODNESS/gracious/what could be in here?/Let's see
299 This isn't fine motor/but I couldn't COME WITHOUT BRINGING you
SOME KIND OF A BOOK/so I MADE A BOOK this time/LOOK at this
one
300 It's called My Christmas ALPHABET BOOK and it's GOT ALL THE
LETTERS and Christmas pictures
301 G: Wow!
302 C: You could READ IT with GRANDMA OR WITH YOUR MOM/And if
you-
303 S: --I want to read MYSELF
304 C: And read it by yourself?
305 That would BE FUN TOO/SOMETIMES IT'S FUN to just look at a book
by ourself/isn't it?/
306 So THAT'S FOR YOU to keep

Stanza 14 (More lacing cards)

307 And look/I MADE A BUNCH of these/but maybe I SHOULDN'T if you
DON'T LIKE THEM maybe I should take them back
308 S: I DO like them
309 C: Oh, YOU DO LIKE them/Okay/good
310 SEE HOW MANY I brought for you/Can you COUNT THEM?
311 S: Uh huh/One
312 C: One
313 S: Two
314 C: Two
315 S: Three
316 C: Three
317 S: Four
318 G: Four/four
319 C: Look/how many of them ARE BEARS?/I CAN'T BELIEVE that I
brought you TWO BEARS/TWO SNOWMEN—
320 S: --One

321 C: --and two birds
 322 S: One
 323 C: And do you know WHY I BROUGHT YOU FOUR of these?
 324 S: 'Cause
 325 C: What do you think I brought you FOUR OF THEM?
 326 S: I do want
 327 C: Because YOU LIKE them/and what else?
 328 Is there ANYBODY ELSE at your house that might like to DO LACING
 CARDS? Aah/ you don't THINK SO?
 329 Well/ JUST IN CASE Anne or Bethany look at you HAVING ALL THIS
 FUN/I brought you EXTRA ONES
 330 S: And you KNOW WHAT?

Stanza 15 (Play dough)

331 C: And you know WHAT ELSE I brought?
 332 We're not/we're not going to DO THIS ONE RIGHT NOW/but YOU
 KNOW WHAT this is/don't you?
 333 S: Mm hmm
 334 C: What is it?
 335 S: I want to look at it
 336 C: You want to look at it
 337 WHAT COLOR do you think it might be?
 338 Here/let ME HELP you
 339 Can you tell me WHAT COLOR THE LID is?
 340 S: It's
 341 C: I think it's SOMEBODY'S FAVORITE color/It's THE SAME as
 that/You're right--
 342 G: Isn't it—
 343 C: Do you know WHAT IT'S CALLED?/Guh/it starts with guh/gr
 344 S: Green
 345 C: Green/You're right
 346 Whose FAVORITE COLOR was green?/YOURS?/And who else?
 347 Was it your MOM'S OR GRANDMA'S?/No Grandma's WAS PURPLE/I
 think
 348 I can't do that with one hand
 349 G: Yeah/ mine was purple
 350 S: Mine and Grandma's
 351 C: We're gonna LOOK AT THIS/We're gonna look at this
 352 and then after we're all done you'll HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL
GRANDMA SAYS it's okay to PLAY WITH IT/okay?
 353 Gosh/I got you stuff THAT'S HARD TO GET OPEN
 354 Just STICK YOUR FINGER in it/Is it SOFT ENOUGH to play with?
 355 S: Yeah
 356 C: Yeah/I think IT WILL BE
 357 S: It's soft
 358 G: Is it COLD?

359 C: I think it will be/It's a LITTLE BIT CHILLY because it's been IN MY
 360 CAR and sitting IN MY ROOM
 361 My room is NOT VERY WARM
 361 Do you think you might have FUN WITH PLAY DOUGH?
 362 G: It's COLD
 363 C: --might HAVE FUN with play dough?
 364 Play dough is actually/I know sometimes parents VIEW IT AS MESSY/
 but it's ONE OF THE BEST THINGS for building those muscles in their
 little fingers/which is WHAT THEY REALLY NEED/along with
 PRACTICING SCRIBBLING AND COLORING AND DRAWING/
 365 and I brought you another thing for your—
 366 G: --Hey/Did you tell Carol WE PLAY I SPY?
 367 C: GOOD FOR YOU/That's a GREAT GAME

Stanza 16 (Picking up the cotton balls)

368 Look WHAT ELSE I brought? [Inaudible] Can you kind of/do you know
 what THESE ARE CALLED?
 369 S: Cotton
 370 C: What are they?
 371 S: Cotton
 372 C: Cotton balls/Let's take em
 373 What we want to do is FIND THE DIFFERENT little cotton balls
 374 Can you kind of SPACE EM OUT/make them so they're not stuck
 together a little bit
 375 Then I want to SHOW YOU WHAT I BROUGHT to PICK THEM UP
 with
 376 What's this?/WHAT IS THAT?/Does YOUR MOM EVER USE these?
 377 It's a CLOTHES PIN/And you use it BY PINCHING THE END
 378 Have you done these before?
 379 So you need to PINCH THE END so it OPENS
 380 PICK UP THE COTTON BALL and DROP IT in the cup
 381 You want to try?/See if you can pick that up
 383 Oooh/it takes MUSCLES/doesn't it?
 384 Uh/oh/we DROPPED IT/Where did it go?
 385 S: It went RIGHT THERE
 386 C: In the bag or on the floor?
 387 S: In the bag/IN THE BAG
 388 C: In the bag
 389 Okay/I'm CAUGHT ON THE CHAIR here
 390 Let me see IF I CAN FIND it/I need MORE HANDS
 391 Let's PICK THIS UP/Cause I DIDN'T HEAR IT hit the floor/Oh THERE
 IT IS/Can you GRAB IT?
 392 S: Yeah
 393 C: Oh/you have GOOD EYES /You knew right where it went/Okay
 394 G: You don't think SHE WATCHES? [Chuckles]
 395 C: SHE DOES

396 See if you CAN PINCH IT/That's gonna be a tricky one/Pinch it as hard
 as you can to open it
 397 I'll help/Okay/PINCH IT AGAIN so it comes out
 398 This is gonna be A GREAT THING for her practice/if she can practice
 just/Obviously/YOU DON'T WANT her--
 399 G: --Oh, yeah
 400 C: --if you can pick up the cotton balls with it
 401 I think you should LET YOUR MOM TRY
 402 That is GOOD PRACTICE FOR YOUR FINGERS
 403 S: Let/go
 404 C: [Laughing] Let go/It will let go if YOU SQUEEZE THE END
 405 So that will be A GOOD THING TO PRACTICE
 406 It will MAKE YOUR FINGERS TIRED/I think
 407 S: No
 408 C: No?/You think IT WON'T?/Good
 409 S: Oowh/[incomprehensible]
 410 C: You will have STRONG FINGER MUSCLES
 411 S: I do
 412 C: You do/And they're goin to GET STRONGER EVERY DAY if you
 practice/won't they?
 413 G: [Incomprehensible]
 414 C: Look at that
 415 S: There/I did it!
 416 C: YOU DID IT! You know what else?
 You know what I did/is I put TWO CLOTHESPINS in here in case YOU
 AND YOUR MOM want to DO THS TOGETHER/or you and
 Grandma/or you and Anne
 417 I'm goin to put it BACK IN THE BAG

Stanza 17 (The Pipe Cleaner)

418 What do you think THAT IS FOR?
 419 S: For ME
 420 C: FOR YOU?/ You're right/It's FOR YOU
 421 S: You're GOOD AT IT
 422 C: You're GOOD AT IT?/What did I DO?
 423 These are LETTERS/I just put em/I'M STRINGING onto the/This is
 called THE PIPE CLEANER and I'M STRINGING IT ON THERE
 through the little holes
 424: Can you see WHERE THE LITTLE HOLE IS in the
 letter?/Okay/YAY/You put the F ON/And --
 425: S: [Incomprehensible]
 426: C: I didn't have the RIGHT KIND OF LETTERS to spell out a word/It's just
 a COMBINATION OF DIFFERENT LETTERS for her to have more
 practice
 427: Are you okay just sitting on one of my legs or is it TOO TIPPY?
 428 S: NOT too tippy

429 C: Not too tippy?/ Okay/Which/which letter would you LIKE TO
PICK NEXT?

430 S: D

431 C: Let me see/IT'S A V/it's upside down/It's a V/MY NAME starts with A
V

432 You're going to LOOK AT ALL of them?/YOU HAVE A LOT OF Vs
in there/How DID THAT HAPPEN?
She took YOUR PICTURE?

433 All: [Laugh]

434 C: Who wouldn't want to take a picture of a CUTE GIRL LIKE YOU?

435 R: I know it/She's A DOLL

436 S: [Laughs]

437 C: So you're goin to LAY ALL THE LETTERS OUT/ and then you want to
show me how you can put one on a---

Stanza 18 (Grandma's Story)

438 G: --You know Kim GOT ME YELLED AT Friday/THE BRAT

439 C: KIM GOT YOU yelled at?

440 G: YES/she never told me WHERE I HAD TO PARK for the kids AT THE
BUS

441 C: Oh/AT THE SCHOOL/WHO YELLED at you?

442 G: No/ THE BUS DRIVER

443 C: Oh/we're you PULLED UP --

444 G: --'Cause I was pulled up ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD instead of ON
88/I didn't know

445 C: Oh/you meant up at THE BUS STOP?/I thought you meant at the school

446 G: And I DIDN'T KNOW and the bus driver told me to park over on the
other side

447 S: [simultaneous talk] I'm just done with this/I'm DONE with this/I'm JUST
DONE with this/I'm done with this

448 C: That's just the kind of thing nobody's told you/You wouldn't know

449 G: I told Kim the bus driver yelled at me and I TOLD HER WHY and she
said/Oh/ I forgot to tell you Mom--

450 C: --You DON'T HAVE TO DO this right now/

451 I've made all these things FOR YOU TO KEEP so you can use them for
later on/okay? So/boy/you're going to have so much stuff TO SHOW
YOUR MOM

[Break – photos taken]

Stanza 19 (Information for Mother)

452 C: I WANT TO SHOW YOU so you can pass this along to Kim too

453 I BROUGHT A LOT OF PAPERS this time/but A LOT OF THEM are
practice papers for her with cutting

454 First of all/this one is some INFORMATION ON JUST FINE MOTOR
DEVELOPMENT in children and DIFFERENT THINGS that can BE

DONE AT HOME that SHE PROBABLY ALREADY DOES some of these
 456 but A LOT of the things I brought/ like THE STRINGING AND THE PLAY DOUGH/so that Kim can see that AND KNOW that these are IMPORTANT things to do AND WHY and how the HELP FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT/And so there are so of them on the back
 457 And I also had a handout for the GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT/which I didn't really talk about gross motor today but they kinda GO HAND IN HAND

Stanza 20 (Poem)

458 And THEN I brought you A LITTLE POEM
 459 S: Can you open this?
 460 C: I will/Have you ever heard/Where is THUMBKIN?/Do you have two thumbs?
 461 S: Where is PUMPKIN?
 462 C: SHOW ME YOUR THUMBS like this/It goes
 463 Where is THUMBKIN?/Where is Thumbkin?
 464 Here I AM/Here I AM
 464 HOW ARE YOU this morning?
 465 VERY WELL/I THANK YOU
 466 Run away/run away
 467 I think I was supposed to START WITH MY HANDS HIDDEN
 468 Have you EVER SEEN THAT before?
 469 G: Yep/I've saw
 470 C: Good/good
 471 G: We sang/What was THAT ONE THAT WE SANG/Sarah?/THE ANTS?
 472 C: Oh no
 473 G: What was THE ONE about the ants? [whispers] The ants go marching one by one
 474 C: Is that one?/Oh/I LOVE that song/It goes forever/doesn't it?
 475 S: I –
 476 G: --And This Old Man
 477 C: Would you like to open this?
 478 C: And This Old Man./those are GREAT/those are GREAT

Stanza 21 (Cutting Sheets)

479 This one is um just talking about the progression of cutting skills/what children are ABLE TO DO FIRST and how they develop into HOW THEY CAN CUT
 480 So I included in here SOME CUTTING SHEETS FOR HER because obviously once THEY CAN CUT ACROSS A PAPER/a straight line is going to be the easiest one
 481 so she can practice just CUTTING ON THE LINE AS BEST SHE CAN—
 482 S: This is hard
 483 C: --So then you can see if she's able to CUT WITH A LITTLE ANGLE

484 And she doesn't have to do all of these at one sitting obviously just LET
HER DO PRACTICE/And this is like--

485 G: It looks like a w--

486 C: --a couple of angles/IT DOES/And this ONE IS A SPIRAL so that's a
little trickier

487 S: It's a [incomprehensible]

488 C: It's to see if she can CUT ON THE DOTTED LINE and she has to be able
to --

489 The reason this is toward the end is she has NOT ONLY CUT but she has
to be able to TURN THE PAPER at the same time

490 It might BE REALLY HARD for a three year-old to do/So if you decide
SAVING THIS ONE for her/not doing it right away/And after she—

491 S: [simultaneous talk]--Can YOU OPEN it?

492 C: --can kinda do the turning then she gets to the point where she can actually
CUT OUT THE OBJECT—

493 S: --Can YOU OPEN this?

494 C: --and shapes

495 G: Oh

Stanza 22 (About Kim, Sarah's mother)

496 C: Do you want SOME OF THIS OUT?/Is that what WE'RE
TRYING TO DO?

497 Did GRANDMA SAY IT WAS OKAY if we took a little play dough out?

498 G: It's fine/I let the girls PLAY WITH A LOT OF STUFF their Momma
don't

499 C: Kim's NOT SO EXCITED about/maybe? AWESOME

500 G: But it don't matter because I do [incomprehensible]

501 C: I LOVE PLAY DOUG/I just LIKE SQUEEZING it with my fingers

502 Okay/I'm trying to think if/it seems like there was one more--

503 G: --The only reason I DO MORE is because KIM WORKS

504 R: Oh/I see/So YOU'RE HERE with them a lot

505 C: Generally/she generally /she WORKS LIKE A 7 TO 5 shift right now/so
those are LONG DAYS

506 G: But today SHE DIDN'T WORK

507 C: And they were working SIX DAYS A WEEK/right?/ She said they got
SATURDAYS OFF NOW

508 C: That's A LOT/That's a lot

509 G: But WE ARGUE a lot/We've been AROUND EACH OTHER SO MUCH

510 And that's why I LIKE TO GET AWAY on the weekends

All talking --[incomprehensible]

Stanza 23 (Dina and Discipline)

511 G: And ME AND DINA/she's the oldest

512 C: She/is she/Kim said she kinda came in with what Kim called was AN
ATTITUDE or something this morning/

513 I don't know exactly what that meant when she came in this morning
 514 She WASN'T REAL EAGER TO GO/Because they GOT THERE
 LATE/she had to go right to P.E./
 515 And she WASN'T REAL EXCITED about going to P.E. /and I DON'T
 KNOW what the reasoning is behind that or whatever but--
 516 G: --I don't know--
 517 C: --so she was a little bit grumpy about that---
 518 G: --she was a little bit MAD AT ME anyways because they were playing
 with the computer and they got Solitary on it and I SHUT IT DOWN on
 her
 519 cause IF I DON'T/SHE WON'T GET UP and do anything and SHE'LL
 YELL AT ME that I did it. That's her fault/whatever.
 520 you GET IN TROUBLE when your mom gets here 'cause you're not
 ready/that's YOUR PROBLEM
 521 C: Yep/yep/Well you just NEED SOME GUIDELINES and you just HAVE
 TO STAY WITH THOSE
 522 If you HAVE A RULE that either you can't use the computer before
 school or you only get five minutes/you just have to calmly say/"You
 know THAT'S THE RULE"
 523 If you LAY IT OUT FOR HER/if you TELL HER AHEAD OF
 TIME/"This is what we EXPECT YOU TO DO and this is the way the
 rules are"
 524 and TRY NOT TO GET CAUGHT UP in that ESCALATING
 EMOTIONAL – like if SHE STARTS TO YELL and then YOU START
 TO YELL/she's just gonna want to YELL MORE OR LOUDER
 525 You just have to say/"Oh, sorry, BUT THAT'S THE RULE"
 526 G: It's just like I told her this morning/I said,/HEY DINA/you know I LOVE
 YOU A LOT/I says/my heart is real for you kids/
 527 but we GOTTA MAKE A DEAL
 528 I says you got to QUIT YELLING AT ME/I says "Because I DON'T
 LIKE IT/And I know you don't like me yelling at you
 529 And I love you
 530 Let's make a deal and TRY NOT TO FIGHT/you know
 531 She said, okay Grandma
 532 I said let's shake on it/We shook on it and that LASTED FOR ABOUT 10
 MINUTES and she started yelling at me and I thought--
 533 C: What you need to do/you and Kim need to talk about/YOU NEED TO
 MAKE A PLAN/ really
 534 It sounds kind of OFFICIAL but you NEED TO MAKE A PLAN between
 the two of you/WHAT SHOULD WE DO when/WHEN DINA YELLS/or
 one of the kids yells?
 535 You need to have something that YOU EITHER SAY or you're gonna do
 every time SO THAT IT'S CONSISTENT
 536 That's often why parents say/I don't understand why everybody at school
 says my child behaves and they WON'T BEHAVE AT HOME

537 And a lot of times when you start to pick everything apart/it's because AT
SCHOOL THERE'S A ROUTINE/There ARE RULES and the teachers
are pretty STRAIGHTFORWARD AND BASIC AND CONSISTENT
with what they expect the KIDS TO DO AND NOT DO

538 G: Well/see/Dina/SHE KNOWS SHE GOING TO GET GROUNDED from
the computer/I mean/it seems like it's ONE THING SHE GETS
GROUNDED FROM is that computer you know

539 C: Okay

540 G: And IT'S NOT FAIR

541 C: --Okay/okay/Well/then/the other thing to look at then is HOW ARE YOU
ENFORCING or how are you talking about the rules or guidelines?

542 Because IF YOU GET SUCKED IN or Kim gets sucked into THE
YELLING THING/all it does is escalate and IT JUST BECOMES ALL
ABOUT YELLING

543 G: Yeah

544 C: One of the things that a lot of the parenting things say that one of the
things YOU AS THE ADULT need to have in your head is YOU'RE
LIKE THE BROKEN RECORD/Okay

545 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY and HOW YOU'RE
GONNA REACT/and YOU DO THAT every time

546 And that's REALLY REALLY HARD SOMETIMES/because kids know
HOW TO PUSH OUR BUTTONS/to STAY IN A CALM STATE that
you're not helping them escalate--

547 S: [whispers] Grandma?

548 C: --and if they know eventually

549 S: [whispers a little louder] GRANDMA?

550 C: --that they're going to hear the same thing from you every time—

551 G: What do you want?

552 S: [Inaudible]

553 C: --they're NOT GOING TO HAVE A REASON to keep arguing

554 G: What do you want?

555 C: You want to CUT THIS CARD? How about—

556 G: Nooo

557 C: --I left you these that you can have for cutting. I LEFT YOU EXTRA
CARDS for cutting/okay?

558 S: This one

559 C: And YOU CAN KEEP the lacing ones –

560 S: I don't like this one

561 C: You can cut it if you want to/That's yours to do with whatever you
want/as long as Grandma says it's okay

562 S: I want to CUT THIS

563 C: Does that MAKE SENSE now to you?

564 G: Yeah, you—

565 C: --Because—

566 G: You tell her to go to her room sometimes/You tell her/you
know/Dina/YOU NEED A TIME OUT/ GO TO YOUR ROOM

567 C: Uh huh
 568 G: And she'll say/"I DON'T CARE"/and SHE'LL GO TO HER ROOM/And she'll do it
 569 C: Yeah/but DON'T SAY ANYTHING BACK to that
 570 G: --Nope
 571 C: --Just LET HER GO—
 572 G: No/I just turn and talk to Anne and Anne starts giggling at me
 573 and she says/Grandma/SHE JUST DID what you told her and I said/"Yeah, I know/first time
 574 C: It's that BEING CONSISTENT
 575 How about if I put it in your bag?/Would you like to keep the playdough?/This one was your bag so let's put it in this one.
 576 [To Grandma] So, does THAT MAKE SENSE though? Because IT'S HARD
 577 Kids know how to get us angry/but you know what/we're GIVING THEM THE POWER to do that
 578 S: You know what?
 579 C: --THEY'VE WON/because they were able--
 580 S: --You know what?/ You know what?
 581 C: --to manipulate
 582 G: Because I noticed when she told me/ "I HATE YOU, GRANDMA"/ SHE WON because it REALLY MADE ME MAD
 583 And I just told her, "No, that was really mean"
 584 C [to Sarah] You do what? This is yours
 Simultaneous with Grandma and Researcher:
 585 R: How old is she?
 586 G: She's EIGHT
 587 R: Eight
 588 C: Oh/ SCISSORS/How about these because my scissors are in my bag for school?
 589 I have to TAKE MINE BACK TO SCHOOL/but these are to leave here
 590 G: [to researcher] We have a seven year-old/eight year-old/and a three year-old
 591 S: Mine/and I got my other one
 592 C: And we CAN TALK IN MORE DETAIL sometime if Kim can if she FEELS LIKE SHE IS FRUSTRATED about handling some of that stuff/We can talk at another time about that--
 593 S: --Where's my other one?
 594 C: -- in more detail/Todd is REALLY REALLY GOOD AT THAT
 595 We sometimes have parents come in and we'll sit down/the three of us and WE'LL JUST BRAINSTORM and talk about/what are you're HAVING TROUBLE WITH?/And how, how can we --you know?
 596 And then WE TALK A WEEK LATER and say/you know/DID IT WORK?/DID IT HELP?/ So
 597 S: And I got my other one
 598 G: We'll I told Kim WHAT THE PRINCIPAL SAID the other day

599 [incomprehensible]/we're GOING TO GET SNOW again
 She told me to tell him that said the next time he says that/ QUIT
 SWEARING/ You're not supposed to SWEAR IN SCHOOL
 600 C: She DOESN'T LIKE THE WORD/snow?
 [All laugh]
 601 C: Well/LET ME LEAVE THIS one for Kim too/or Kim too
 602 And this side is basically/these are the kinds of things YOU CAN LOOK
 FOR A THREE YEAR-OLD/from the time they turn three to the time
 they turn four/to do in the area of motor development/JUST A FEW
 BASIC THINGS
 603 And if she SEES ANY OF THESE that she doesn't think maybe Sarah
 isn't doing yet/there are some things in this column on the side of ideas of
 how you can
 604 And THIS IS THE BRAIN INFORMATION we talked JUST A LITTLE
 BIT about at the beginning
 605 but IT'S WRITTEN DOWN HERE so that Kim would have a chance to
 look at that over too
 606 And then ON THE OTHER SIDE/the reason I'm giving you this is
 because IT'S ALL ON THE SAME SHEET
 607 SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT is on here too
 608 So she can LOOK THESE THINGS OVER/But have her let me know if
 SHE HAS ANY QUESTIONS about it
 609 You know/as a parent/if you have an idea of WHAT YOUR CHILDREN
 SHOULD BE DOING/
 610 Then you can look at them and say/"Oh yeah/She can do that/She can do
 that and that
 611 You have a little bit of sense or feeling/Okay/that SHE'S ABOUT
 WHERE WE WANT HER TO BE
 612 G: [Inaudible to child]
 613 C: And if there are THINGS THAT SHE'S NOT DOING YET/you DON'T
 HAVE TO PANIC or get worried
 614 You can just kind of look here and say/Okay/so HOW CAN WE WORK
 ON THAT and you know?
 615 And that's what we want/WE WANT HER TO BE DEVELOPING to the
 level that we want to her to be at AS A THREE YEAR-OLD right now so

Stanza 24 (Sarah to school)

616 One other thing that you can mention to Kim/ I HEARD from our Head
 Start/one of our Head Start staff administrators at Shelby/ that
 MONTAGUE'S HEAD START IS FULL right now
 617 So/if KIM WOULD LIKE to try to GET SARA ON A WAITING LIST to
 get into A PRESCHOOL CLASS yet this year/
 618 HAVE HER LET ME KNOW THAT
 because I've got all the registration stuff/And WE COULD TURN THAT
 IN

619 and then she would be/IF THERE'S AN OPENING/she might be able to
 get in/and if she's not/ she could be on a waiting list
 620 WE'VE HAD A LOT OF KIDS in [incomprehensible] of Head Start this
 year—
 621 G: Oh, wow
 622 C: --leaving and placing other kids
 623 So/if she wants to/like after the first of the year/look at maybe GETTING
 HER INTO PRESCHOOL--
 624 G: I'M SURE she does
 625 C: --HAVE HER CONTACT ME and we/because we'll have to DO ALL
THE PAPERWORK
 626 and she'll have to HAVE THE PHYSICAL FORM and all that stuff filled
 out before they can put her on a list/but let her know that we were told --
 627 G: [to child] --Do you want to go to school?
 628 C: That's the ONLY WAY SHE COULD COME TO SHELBY
 629 G: You DON'T WANT TO GO to school?
 630 S: [Inaudible]
 631 G: I wish I COULD GO BACK TO SCHOOL
 632 C: IT WOULD BE FUN
 633 I would come and VISIT YOU AT YOUR SCHOOL sometimes/ and SEE
 YOU AND YOUR TEACHER
 634 This is going to be AN INTERESTING PUZZLE/I think maybe THIS
 ONE SHOULD JUST BE FOR CUTTING for fun
 635 G: She REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO SEND HER to Whitehall
 636 C: Yeah/yeah/I kind of sense that/
 637 [To researcher] See/they live in the MONTAGUE SCHOOL DISTRICT
 but THEY CAN DO SCHOOLS OF CHOICE once children hit
 kindergarten
 638 but for Head Start and preschool/THE RULES ARE that you have to
 attend in your home district/unless THEIR PROGRAM IS FULL
 639 then YOU CAN APPLY at a different district
 640 R: Oh/okay
 641 C: So if she were signing up for Head Start/she would really HAVE TO
 SIGN UP in either Montague or Whitehall
 642 I'm not sure where their program is/but they're in the Montague school
 district so
 643 G: And Kim JUST DON'T WANT THAT
 644 C: And SHE'S TRYING TO MOVE INTO THE NEW ERA SCHOOL
 DISTRICT with just LOOKING FOR A HOUSE/right?/Or at least in THE
 SHELBY DISTRICT somewhere so
 645 Is there ANY WORD ON THE PLACE over that she told you about?
 646 G: There's supposed to be ANOTHER GUY THAT HAS A PLACE
 too
 647 well/HE WANTS TO BUY IT/ and he wants KIM TO RENT IT from him
 648 C: Okay/oh/ okay/WHERE IS THAT one located?
 649 G: It's UP HERE somewhere

650 C: Oh/so it's STILL IN MONTAGUE then?
651 G: Yeah
652 C: Okay

Stanza 25 (Carol reads to Sarah)

653 [to child] Oops/I think YOU AND GRANDMA are going to HAVE
SOME WORK TO DO
654 G: That's okay/We DO IT ALL THE TIME/don't we Sarah baby?
655 C: Boy/you are PRETTY GOOD WITH THOSE SCISSORS from your
house
656 G: You cut the ones YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO CUT
657 C: But you know what?/ We've GOT SOME EXTRA ones in the/ in the bag
658 S: [Heavy sighs]
659 C: That's hard/Uh/I have ONE MORE QUICK THING before I go,/ if you're
NOT TOO BUSY CUTTING/
660 What did I bring?
661 S: A BOOK
662 C: I ALWAYS BRING A BOOK/don't I?/Should WE READ THIS BOOK
before I go?
663 S: Yeah
664 C: Would you like to?/Do we WANT GRANDMA TO READ it or do you
want me to read it?
665 S: You read it
666 C: I'll read it/Okay
667 GRANDMA GETS TO READ you books during the day/doesn't she?
668 Can we SEE THE PICTURES?

669 *When the WIND BLOWS COLD and the SNOW FLIES ALL AROUND*

670 S: It's a/I KNOW WHAT it is
671 C: What is it?
672 S: It's a BIRD
673 C: It's A BIRD/It's the kind of bird that's called a CARDINAL/It's a pretty
red bird/Oh look/

674 *Winter friends COME TO SAY HELLO*

675 WHO'S THAT?/Do you know what that one is?
676 S: It's a rabbit
677 C: Look at his tail/though/HE'S A SQUIRREL and he CAME TO SAY
HELLO TO?
678 S: [incomprehensible]
679 C: SNOWMAN
680 S: SNOWMAN
681 C: Look at him/WHO ELSE is coming to see the snowman?/LANDING ON
HIS?

682 S: Nose
 683 C: Nose made out of a what?/DO YOU KNOW what that is?
 684 S: Bird
 685 C: It's SOMETHING YOU EAT
 686 S: TWEETY BIRD
 687 G: Mm mm
 688 C: What's this thing?
 689 S: Carrot
 690 C: A carrot/A CARROT NOSE

 691 *A FURRY FRIEND may drop in and WARM YOUR HEART*

 692 He's sitting on his hat/oh/HE'S STANDING ON HIS NOSE/That is funny
 693 S: Cool
 694 C: That is cool

 695 *Some will come TO SIT AND TALK*

 696 [whispers] That's beautiful/That's good
 697 G: WATCH your finger
 698 C: Let's ASK GRANDMA if she knows what that is
 I BET SHE KNOWS
 699 G: [whispers] A DEER
 700 C: A deer
 701 S: A deer running after her
 702 C: Oh no/WHAT'S HE DOING?/What did the deer do?
 703 S: He eating it
 704 C: He's EATING WHAT?
 705 S: His nose
 706 C: His CARROT NOSE

 707 *This snowman has a gift of SEEDS AND CARROTS TO SHARE*

 708 THAT'S WHY all the birds were coming
 709 Somebody PUT SEEDS ALL OVER IT so the birds would come and eat
 the seeds
 710 and NOW THE DEER IS COMING to eat the carrot

 711 *Bringing winter friends together again*

 712 OH LOOK/there's A BIG SNOWMAN and?
 713 S: And a BABY
 714 C: And A BABY SNOWMAN or a LITTLE SNOWMAN/That is cute
 715 I LOVE THAT BOOK/It has beautiful pictures

Stanza 26 (Sarah likes to cut)

716 I'm glad that YOU WERE EXCITED about cutting today/Look at you go
 to town
 717 Should YOU EVER CUT something that GRANDMA SAYS/"DON'T
 CUT THAT"
 718 G: [Laughs] Tell her ABOUT THE PAJAMAS/Sarah
 719 C: DID YOU CUT PAJAMAS?/ Oh no
 720 G: BRAND NEW PAIR of pajamas
 721 C: You know what?/If YOU WANT GRANDMA AND MOM to let you
 practice with scissors/you have to BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT ONLY
 CUTTING what they say is okay
 722 G: Tell Carol you MADE SOME PRETTY CIRCLES
 723 C: Ohh/NOT IN PAJAMAS THOUGH/You WON'T DO THAT again/will
 you?/Okay/good
 724 G: My mother bought them some,/uh/PRINCESS PAJAMAS/those SILKY
 SHIRTS/and she cut em
 725 C: You GOT TO BE REALLY CAREFUL about scissors
 726 It's okay to CUT MY CHRISTMAS CARDS
 727 and then you have to ask Mom and Grandma WHAT YOU CAN
 CUT/"What can I cut today?"/Okay?
 728 So will you DO SOME PRACTICING? WHAT DID WE SAY to practice
 with/ PLAY DOUGH--
 729 G: And NOT YOUR HAIR either
 730 C: --and STRINGING/AND THE CLOTHESPIN?/That was a tricky one
 731 G: Remember/"cause MOMMA TOOK YOUR SCISSORS AWAY because
 YOU CUT YOUR PONYTAIL that time
 732 C: Oh, no
 733 S: I went /and I CUT MY HAIR TOO
 734 G: They put a straighten—
 735 C: Oh no
 736 G: --they did/THEY PUT A STRAIGHTENER in her hair/That's why he
 hair is NOT SO CURLY TODAY
 737 C: Okay
 738 G: But uh/she HAD A REALLY CURLY PONYTAIL in her hair and she cut
 739 C: Unfortunately [whispers] LOTS OF KIDS --
 740 G: --You know MY SON AND MY DAUGHTER DID THE SAME THING
 741 But MY DAUGHTER/she WENT LIKE THIS TO MY SON/and then he
 just CUT A LITTLE BIT because he knew
 742 because her hair was way down here and it was red
 743 and he knew I wouldn't hurt him
 744 But I told Kim/why did you do that?

Stanza 27 (A new grandchild on the way)

745 Now I'm going to have another grandbaby
 746 C: Oh/YOU ARE?
 747 S: IT'S ME
 748 C: That's NOT GOOD?/You're NOT HAPPY?/You don't think that's a

GOOD THING?
 749 G: No/they're BOTH BIPOLAR
 750 S: IT'S ME
 751 C: With how many /do they HAVE KIDS ALREADY?
 752 G: No/THIS IS THE FIRST
 753 He JUST MARRIED last summer and he just RUSHED INTO THIS marriage
 754 C: Okay/so YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THAT BABY
 755 G: Yeah/ because of the bipolar/HE'S BIPOLAR/SHE'S BIPOLAR and--
 756 C: --Do they TAKE THEIR MEDICATION?/Do they have medication?
 757 G: He DID/He quit/That's WHAT BOTHERS ME--
 758 C: --See/THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS often
 759 G: --Because he gets mad and SAYS IT DON'T HELP/ WHICH IT DOES
 760 WE NOTICE when he's on his medication and IT HELPS/When he don't take it/WE KNOW
 761 C: Yeah
 762 G: And it just--
 763 C: --KEEP A CLOSE EYE on that situation
 764 G: Yeah/but I got to [inaudible] He won't go to Hart when [inaudible]
 765 His wife told him/"Tim/YOU NEED SOME MEDICATION/You're really OUT OF IT"
 766 Because she TAKES HER MEDICATION/so she knows that HE'S OUT OF IT AND SHE'S NOT cause she takes her meds
 767 C: Yeah
 768 G: But I'm JUST WORRIED about em
 769 She had/She's BEEN PREGNANT BEFORE because she lost a set of twins
 770 But now she's pregnant again and I was hoping that [inaudible]
 771 It was BAD FOR ME TO THINK THAT but/I just don't want to see the baby [inaudible]
 772 C: [to child] You're her baby?/Grandma/she's your baby
 773 G: Yep/ Her's my baby

Stanza 28 (Conclusion of home visit)

774 C: I have to GO BACK TO SCHOOL/ but thank you for letting me COME AND PLAY
 775 G: She's my Sarah baby
 776 R: And THANK YOU for letting me watch you/You did a GREAT JOB
 777 C: Was that FINE THAT MISS KELLY CAME?/Yeah/She's a nice lady
 778 Sometimes, YOU MIGHT SEE HER at our school
 779 I don't know about THAT TONGUE OF YOURS/That tongue is just OUT OF CONTROL
 780 I have to TAKE MY BOOK BACK because this one is from the school
 781 The ONE I BROUGHT FOR YOU TO KEEP is in there and the NEXT TIME I COME/I'LLHAVE ANOTHER BOOK for you that you can keep

782 EVERY TIME I COME/I usually bring a book FOR YOU TO
KEEP/right?

783 Yeah/but this one is FROM MY LIBRARY AT SCHOOL/ I have to take
this one back

784 So I hope you HAVE FUN WITH THESE THINGS/okay?

785 G: Sarah/what was the book that Grandma brought?/Do you remember?/ That
GRANDMA GOT YOU?/A DICTIONARY and what else?

786 C: Oh/what else? Do you know what the other one was? [Pause] Not sure

787 S: It was A DRESS

788 G: No/ it was about a –

789 S: IT WAS a dress/[unintelligible] dress

790 G: I think it was ABOUT ANIMALS

791 C: [Inaudible] --under you/You want this chair?

792 S: Yeah/but –

793 C: --We moved this around SO YOU CAN BE CLOSER to the table

794 G: I think it was the FIRST ANIMAL BOOKS WITH THE ANIMALS and
stuff/I don't remember

795 C: There we go

796 G: I don't remember

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