Chapter 5

Educational Collaboratives: Multiple Models of Mastery

As mentioned previously, most teachers function primarily in dependent or independent modes. They work within systems in which almost all educational policies are predetermined. Typically they have very little say over those policies and limited or no access to decision-making (Smylie, M.A., 2000). As a major consolation, however, they enjoy the supreme comfort of being masters of their fate when they close the door of their classroom. There they rule supreme. There they can shut out all the political rhetoric and just teach their students.

Well, not quite. Presently high stakes testing is intruding, directing and controlling. Security issues and zero tolerance are compelling a new, more self-conscious kind of vigilance. Accountability hangs over the classrooms like a generic pall. In other words, administrative overrides and intrusions have become increasingly the norm. Teachers have found their traditional sanctuary invaded. Their independence has been steadily eroded. The teacher is becoming more dependent than independent overall.

The problem is good professionals thrive on opportunities (Brown & Cornwall, 2000). Take away initiatives and teachers languish (Ed Week, Jan. 14, 2000). They act like automatons. They go about their daily business like workers on a factory floor. Survival, not growth, becomes the focus. Asked again and again to return to rote, and to teach to tests, they become expensive drill sergeants. There is less and less room and time to teach concepts and comprehension, which would bring some intelligence to the production line. But one of the

special wonders of historical cycles is that just as we appear to be encountering the law of

diminishing returns, another pattern appears. It surfaces as an alternative and argues that rather

than stay with or slightly improve the status quo, use what may be the end of something to

perceive the beginning of something quite different and challenging, such as EdVisions Schools.

As mentioned in chapter 1, educational relationships, structures and governance are

showing signs of increasingly becoming collaborative (Hill, Pierce & Guthrie, 1997); (Murphy &

Doyle, 2001); (Dirkswager, E., 2002). Moreover, such interdependence appears to have the

potential to affect the total process: administration, instruction, and measurement (National

Commission, 1999). So that this discussion is anchored in specifics, here is a matrix that spells

out a series of developmental trends and concrete examples of teacher collaboration, which

already have surfaced in key areas:

The Collaborative Spectrum

Activities	Traditional	Transitional	Transformational
1. New hires	Little or no say	Sit in on interviews	Select new hires
2. Instruction	Already chosen	Few alternatives	Cooperative learning
3. Collegiality	Limited	Committees	Team managed
4. Student roles	Controlled	Some variety	Negotiated
5. Parental roles	PTO	Involvement	Partnerships
6. Schedules	Prescribed	Altered	Fluid
7. Finances	No involvement	Budget review	Shared accountability
8. Prof. Devel.	Chosen	Half/Half	Teacher choice
9. Tech. Choices	No consultation	Committee input	Team choice
10. Teacher eval.	Principal	Principal & faculty	360 Degree self-eval.
11. Lesson plans	Individual Generic		Collaborative

12. Student work	Individual	Interdisciplinary	Collective
13. Decision-making	Administrator	Shared	Collaborative
14. Student eval.	Tests	Tests/Reflection	Portfolio
15. Best practices	Identified	Tested in classroom	Action research

One of the values of the matrix is that it visually compels the recognition of the interconnectedness of change. Specifically, three interlocking patterns appear. First, there is the necessity to integrate the three major components of the educational process: administration, instruction and measurement. Failing that, each third does not directly contribute to or reinforce the other parts and thus sets up a fragmentary tug of war between components that should be harmonized. The problem is finding the glue of commonality. Adversarial relationships between administrators and teachers have been compounded by equally testy relationships between legislators and educators in the name of accountability. The net result is the key parts of education are often at odds with each other. But in a collaborative environment, which is dedicated to bringing together what is often asunder, horizontal relations are easy and common.

But the second pattern is perhaps even more striking. As the collaborative takes hold and as teachers enjoy a greater centrality, the standards of collaboration increasingly become the same for everything and everyone. The standards for judging students, teachers, parents and programs are uniformly tasking. Accountability comprehensively applies equally to finances as to passing mandated tests. In other words, a collaborative structure compels mutuality. There is no special set of standards for teachers apart from standards for students. They are one and the same. Teachers now freer to enjoy decision-making have to extend it to students and parents. Collaborative means everybody. Access is total. All is transparent. There are no secrets and no deceptions. Everything is there for all to see and know and act upon.

The third matrix, alas, is not inevitable. The spectrum stakes out a final collaborative state, but that is not guaranteed. In other words, another value of the matrix is that it accommodates the prospect of different paths and conclusions. It makes clear that the final version as pictured is not set in stone. Indeed, what it does produce is the consideration of interventions. The key focus is the transitional state.

Three options immediately present themselves. The first is to make the transitional state permanent. Administrators and school boards may conclude that is as far as things go. They may see the handwriting on the wall and conclude that collaboration jeopardizes control and direction. That way leads to anarchy because no one is in charge. It is obviously a teacher, student, parent and community-centered giveaway. It may be tolerated in part and up to a point but its momentum must be arrested otherwise those officially responsible are guilty of abdicating their responsibilities. It is time for Pharaoh once again to assume the burden of leadership. No martyr will happily or willingly give up his/her stigmata. Besides, once pacified the old order can be gradually and even slyly restored.

The second option is indeed transitional for administrators. Through enlightenment or opportunism, they may decide that collaboration is in fact the wave of the future. Principal-teacher partnerships are gradually emerging, as in fact has occurred already in a number of schools. One of those to receive national attention is the McCosh Elementary School in Chicago (Ed Week, June 19, 2001).

The arrangement is one of shared power or distributed leadership (Greenleaf, R.K., 1984; Handy, C., 1996; Elmore, R., 2000). A collaborative team administers the schools; the teachers on the team remain in the classroom; most developments for change are teacher initiated; the principal is internally the primary facilitator and externally the link to the district and the school board.

Where it exists it appears to work well. But three serious problems have surfaced. First, principals who are willing to share leadership are frequently not popular with other principals. In fact, they may have to deny many of the central assumptions of their certified training and be willing to accept a leadership and management arrangement and style, which many find belittling. Then, too, they have to stay the course. If they leave, they are often replaced by a principal, who like our first option above, is a throwback (Elmore, R., 1996). Indeed, he or she may have been chosen in order to regain lost ground.

The other problem is that teachers may demand more. They may ask for higher pay, more assistance in the classroom, time off, change in title, etc. A few of the teachers may even question whether the principal is needed at all. They are doing all the work and making all the decisions. He is merely a token head. They thus may believe that they are doing more than just being teachers and that such differentials should be separately recognized and rewarded. If granted, the positions may become competitively desirable. But most likely the district citing problems of equity across the board will refuse to grant separate status and pay. The danger then is that the partnership may become shaky and even dissolve.

The third option is genuinely radical. It rests on the assumption, borne out of decades of observing the lack of genuine and comprehensive school change, that authentic and lasting transformation cannot occur within the current structure. For substantial change to occur it has to happen outside of the current system. This lesson was not lost on business nearly a decade ago (Christenson, C., 2000). After watching a number of new ventures being internally consumed shortly after being launched, a number of corporations decided to spawn new initiatives as separate and independent companies outside and apart from parental environs. Those generally fared much better, survived, and provided the company with a much-needed

diversification of products and services and of income. In education, the charter school movement has provided the viable alternative structure.

Not all charter schools are inherently adventuresome, innovative or collaborative; many are in fact even more conservative than schools in the same district. But where collaboration has taken hold it has done so in charter schools that at least offer a tabula rosa, or break from past patterns (Charting a Clear Course, 2001). Indeed, the EdVisions Schools fully embody and on a daily basis live the learning life of the transformational agenda (Thomas, D., 1996). Although one can visit the first school to adopt the model, the Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, MN, and simply copy or replicate what is going on there, that might be a disservice to the difference of elsewhere. It might make more sense to distill the essences of collaboration so that it can accommodate multiple applications and give us a tool whereby we may judge where schools are in their transformation.

In the EdVisions Schools and elsewhere, collaboration has minimally at least five facets. And each facet requires teacher-administrators to change their roles and wear different hats. The five dimensions are:

1. The Collective
2. The Consultative
3. The Coaching Commitment
4. Consensuality
5. Creating Community

The *collective*, like steel bands that hold a barrel together, focuses on forging commonality. Specifically, it engages the big picture of what we are collectively about and forges a common focus. The definition and redefinition of vision and mission is both institutional and individual. Indeed, it begins with each member of the collaborative composing his or her own mission

statement and work range. These are shared and aggregated upward to yield the organizational version.

The collective focus also requires that the larger issues of the future of education and future of the teaching profession be engaged. Such professionalism of learning also has to become a part of the vision and mission statement because it identifies on the one hand the context within which the collaborative mission has meaning, and on the other hand binds all teachers together in common causes. The awareness of the debates about standards, high stakes mandated testing, accountability issues, etc., surrounding and emanating from that larger professionalism is anchored by becoming members of key teacher organizations and subscribing to journals. The application of the collective focus appears minimally in the collective discussion of learning plans (Issacs, W., 2000), the development of learning rubrics for common assignments (Andrade, H., 1999), and the regular review and examination of student work (Brandt, R., 1998). As these rigors take hold, other collective activities are sure to be suggested as the collaborative approach receives further socialization and affirmation.

The *consultative* requires every member to function as a consultant to all other internal clients of the collaborative - teachers, students, parents, specialists, etc. (Ginsberg, M.R., Johnson, J.F., Moffett, C. 2001). The relationship is attitudinal. It stresses inquiry, assessment and problem solving - what in business is called customer service. But its principal preoccupation is with research and data sources. The collaborative consultant is invariably knowledgeable about current research and findings. Whenever possible the hiring process factors in the need for research specializations not available among current staff.

The two principal applications of this research commitment are undertaking schoolwide research by the professional staff and the training of all students (and if appropriate, parents) in research methodologies and design (Reason & Bradbury, 2000). Monthly seminars are held for

the presentations of teacher and student research projects and findings. Those involving

community projects are carefully reviewed and suggestions are made for their being presented in

appropriate venues. Other research is reviewed for presentation at conferences or offered for

publication. Thus, this micro application honors the larger issue of the profession.

The *coaching commitment* requires that both teachers and students be defined as

unfinished learners or unlearners. Each teacher and student has a coach or mentor (Robbins,

2001). That individual may or may not be a teacher in the program. He or she may be a parent,

a business leader, a college professor, and an elected official, etc. The function of coaching for

the staff is to encourage and structure three dimensions of continuous improvement. The first

involves evaluation of performance. The recommendation is that it take a form of 360-degree

assessment because of heavy parental and community involvement (Dyer, K.M., 2001; Nowack,

K., 1993; Romano, K., 1994; Rudman, M, 1994; and Crawford & Dougherty, June 6, 2001).

Ideally, that evaluation should be initially private and not be a part of an official process so that

the individual teachers can examine how they are multiply perceived. That is then followed by

having a coach review the same data with the individual involved, if necessary playing the role

of the devil's advocate. Finally, all the results of all the evaluations are shared and compared so

that the cumulative effect of the collaborative can be assessed on the one hand, and so that

common denominators of deficiency can be identified for professional development on the other

hand.

Each teacher and student with their respective coaches also develop professional

development plans (Thomas, D., 1996). No official approval is required. Ideally the plan is filed

on the school website and thus is available and accessible to all. All the activities and

interventions are entered, and as accomplished described and evaluated. An ongoing electronic

portfolio could thus be maintained by every teacher and student in the program and accompany

each of them like a summary transcript wherever they go (Rolheiser, C., Bower, B., and Stavahn, L., 2001). The coach adds input at each stage.

Finally, the coach works on governance. A participatory environment is not guaranteed. A team is not born but made (Buchen, I., 1999). It requires constant and full use lest it rust. Coaches thus encourage resourcefulness and increasing interdependence. Specifically, teachers and students are expected increasingly to become self-starting, self-organized, self-sustaining, self-perpetuating and self-actualizing. But they also are encouraged to strengthen and manage interdependence which is often frustrating and time consuming. The goal is to create a collectivized individual.

The *consensual* demands that collaborative decisions are not arrived at by majority vote but by consensus. The value of that process is its total inclusivity. No one is left out. No one is unheard. Everyone is on board, happily or not, but they have had their say. To be sure, it requires more time and energy. The risk is finally agreement by exhaustion. Control is not easily let go. But all that means is that teachers and many professionals initially are often not good at the collaborative process just as students are not good at democratically managing their own education without practice. Student government is often a token arrangement compared to the opportunity to manage learning through negotiation, deliberation and consensus. Collectively teachers and staff must meet to discuss and share various effective ways of benign abandonment when it appears others are not in agreement.

The ultimate yield of the transformational collaborative is to create a learning and humane *community*. It involves both social and intellectual behavior modification. All learn to live, study, and manage collaboratively together, employing a governance structure which they will help create, and which they must sustain. The students emerging from this community will be superior to their teachers in achieving consensus. They may also be more assertive

politically. But certainly they will have the cultural milieu of a democratic society from which to learn applications of democratic procedures ala Glickman (2001) and Apple & Beane (1995).

The school community in a collaborative environment is continuous with the larger outside community. Happily, charter schools have to be more sensitive to that extension because they are political creations. Often, in fact, they were opposed initially or approval was begrudging. Charter school staff are aware that there are many citizens on the sidelines cheering them on to failure. It is thus not accidental that many collaborative charter schools opt for service learning as a way of bridging school and community.

In many ways it is even beneficial for teachers and staff to experience such precariousness. They realize that their survival is neither automatic nor guaranteed. They are not complacent. They remain vigilant. In many ways they exist in a more competitive environment than most established schools. In fact, they are always in danger of closing especially if they fail to manage their finances well (Brown & Cornwall, 2000). Not unexpectedly their strongest supporters are not educators but members of the business community.

In summary then, are their any downsides to this collaborative paradise? Many. First off, it is far from being a universal solution. Most teachers would not wish to be involved. They have a traditional view of their role and they do not wish to take on the additional dimensions of administration and research. They also have a somewhat irrational need for someone to be in charge of the front office. They cannot conceive of themselves as running a school. Roland Barth (2001) estimated that less than 25% of all teachers would accept a leadership role; we would put it at 10%.

Many students also would not be interested, although because of home and online schooling that may change. But generally students are used to set classes with instructors and

being told what to do. They generally are not given any or very few opportunities to learn and research on their own with little or no supervision. Although given that opportunity, the numbers that would be interested might increase substantially.

Most parents would not be interested. They would be fearful that their children would not be properly prepared for college or work. They are wary of experimental arrangements and of their children being used as guinea pigs. Above all, many parents are generally unwilling or reluctant to become heavily involved in the instructional or administrative aspects of a school's program. That alone may make them worry about the professionalism of the entire operation.

Hardly any administrators would be attracted to a collaborative because there is no room for them to be top dog. Sadly, many already have publicly and privately derided the collaborative governance structure to interested parents in their districts and issued vague warnings of inadequacy. They also have predicted that the new collaboratives are fly-by-night or short-term operations that will fold and leave children stranded.

The members of the community are a mixed bag. Those influenced politically by the school boards and administrators of the school district are wary. A few who have attended the open houses of the school are cautiously supportive. The most enthusiastic group are the business people who are enormously impressed by the willingness to accept cost controls, even if it means that the students and teachers accept custodial chores to save money or stay within budget.

Clearly, then, the collaborative model is not for everyone. Nor was it designed to be. Three motives drive the model. A minority of teachers has a strong desire to create a different way of crafting and sustaining a learning community. And as long as that passion borne of discontent is there, experimentation with alternatives will continue. That strong desire is accompanied by the recognition that if any design is to succeed it cannot occur or take hold

within a system that is constitutionally hierarchical and controlling. New soil is required for different crops. Finally, there is general acceptance that everything about the collaborative will be small and follow human scale. The number of students will be limited, the ratio of teachers to students will be high, there will be no separate administration, teachers will be paid minimally at the level of the traditional districts or higher, the entire school can gather for a meeting and everybody will know everybody, etc. In short, the entire operation is conceived as a minority model. It is not meant for everyone. It is not transferable to a traditional school structure. It is not intended to change or reform all public education. All it asks is that it not be harassed or derided, be allowed to go about its business of offering a genuine alternative, and be judged by its accomplishments and outcomes.

Because it is never easy to overcome a culture of educating that has kept teachers from having democratic control of a collaborative learning community, taking the risk to create such cultures inevitably leads to problems of process, enactment, follow-through and just plain old human error. In establishing learning communities that are indicative of the collective, the consultative, the coaching commitment and consensuality, the following EdVisions sites indeed have discovered problems and promises. It is not an easy road. Is it worth it? Let the practitioner voices speak.

Chapter 6

Obstacles and Opportunities: Feedback from Practitioners

The highest reward of a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.
John Rankin

Creating a collaborative culture from scratch and maintaining its momentum is no easy task. Indeed, it probably is as difficult as putting an effective team together. Teams are made not born; we do not have to be taught how to take but how to share. The downside of trying out new relationships and structures early on is trial by error. The upside is a better understanding and respect for the complexities and dynamics involved. In short, it is a learning and growth experience.

But precise feedback was needed for many reasons. Ed Visions' credibility was on the line. Could the culture be in fact created and maintained in the first place? If so, at what price? What recurrent and even generic obstacles had to be overcome? Could knowing those be anticipated and dislocation minimized? Could training in advance minimize the obstacles and optimize the opportunities? Finally, how could this course of reform be recommended in good conscience to those outside of Ed/Visions without showing both its blemishes and beauties?

So a self-study was initiated. Staff members with at least two years experience in EdVisions schools from four sites were given an open-ended survey. They were asked to reflect on the five aspects of implementing a collaborative culture: the consensual, collective, consultative, coaching component, and community. Ten staff members responded. The analysis of the results appears below under the five headings. (A complete rendering of all comments appears in appendices A and B.)

Consensual

The primary obstacle in implementing consensus is use of time. The majority of teachers working in classrooms do not give time to making decisions about funding, personnel issues, overall program concerns and the myriad of committee and board meetings that democratic leaders deal with weekly. And they do not have to listen to everyone else around a table for interminable minutes getting viewpoints on all those decisions. "There are too many meetings," says one of the practitioners, and it leads to stress when confronted with time away from family and other concerns. One practitioner said that "coming to consensus after listening to all voices in the committee and full staff meetings is tiring and exhausting and can be frustrating." Often many of the discussions are "on small issues or personal preferences" that "can interfere with the communal purpose." Like another practitioner says, "it is like herding cats – so many ideas and thoughts are presented - time does not allow for all the discussion needed."

When all voices are heard, and the ideas, concepts and opinions pertaining to every decision must make the rounds, there will be a great deal of time taken up. The organizing of disparate thoughts and searching for clarity is another fairly obvious problem in reaching consensus. Not every practitioner has the same feeling for every issue, or perhaps many have different issues about which they are emotional. If the emotional "trigger" issue is not high on the agenda of the others, they may have to listen anyway in order to keep the circle process going.

Time is not the only issue. Coming to consensus is difficult because "staff may lack knowledge, experience and information needed to make sound decisions." For many teachers operating in the democratic arena for the first time, they are not trained in skills needed for consensus. "An effective decision making body requires skills and a high level of personal awareness that is not well developed in most people," said another of the teacher-leaders. "We

need training/understanding on how to implement this process effectively," said another. To teachers unused to leading by utilizing consensus decisions, frustration mounts when their colleagues do not interact professionally and in a democratic way.

One of the outcomes of this inability to interact is "people who speak 'more' and 'louder' and that intimidate some from speaking out." This can lead to one of the more troubling aspects; "it is easy to fall into a power structure and may have a tendency for people to align themselves with the power." If the teacher is not a leader, and has a tendency to lay back and let others talk, or not attend meetings, certain individuals, the louder voices, can take control and make the majority of the decisions.

Educators who are more inclined to think things through, who want information before reacting, who are more "laid back" may be "bulldozed" by those who speak loudly, overreact, or those who withhold information to further their cause. In short, simply by applying the democratic model of decision by consensus does not ensure that it will in actuality take place. And even when the process is carried out without any rancor or power plays it can be a long, time consuming process.

The majority of the comments on the promises of using the consensus model had to do with having a voice. "Great to have my voice heard and to hear other voices," said one practitioner. "It empowers all to be involved, heard and to continue growth," said another. This having a voice at the table results in three very important outcomes: new ideas are presented; the building of community; and the modeling of democratic action for students.

"We have some great brainstorming that evolves into great new ways of doing things," was the comment of one teacher-leader. Another said "everyone is a key stakeholder and we lose the perception of 'us versus them.'" And another said, "everyone backs the decision, since

everyone was a part of making it," and another commented, "everyone shoulders the positive or negative results."

This building of community can be as strong, or stronger, than the division that may take place with "louder voices." The promise of creating a positive culture of consensus becomes obvious: when educators undertake to listen to all voices before making a decision, a feeling of closeness, of "being in this together" and of "oneness" is possible. Most people like to have all voices heard, and it appears to make the decision more powerful in terms of becoming upheld by everyone being "on board."

It also models the democratic school for the students. "It is democracy in action. The civic action is easier to instill in students when they actually get to practice it. It is easier to teach because those who teach it also get to practice it as well," said one of the practitioners. In addition, "the work and collaboration of the staff serves as a role model to students of interpersonal interaction and communication." These are powerful statements and link directly to the thoughts, opinions and actions spoken of by Dewey, Boyte, Apple and Beane. The democratic school becomes possible by the interactions required by building consensus to manage the school itself.

And it makes everyone a stakeholder, not merely a worker. Everyone has the opportunity to have first-hand involvement in discussions leading to decisions. Some key quotes form the comments of the responders: "Everyone is a key stakeholder," "it forces people into professional decisions that otherwise are made by others," and "if people are comfortable saying what they mean, stakeholders have the opportunity to have a great deal of input."

Being able to have input into the daily undertaking of educating students raises the bar for everyone involved, and "empowers teachers … to make decisions … through creative control …" (Carnegie Report, 1989). Teacher/advisors in this situation can see first hand what results

from their decisions. For the most part, that appears to be a positive aspect of coming to consensus.

The fact that coming to consensus brings with it the positive outlook of stakeholders means that the school is going to have a better culture than a school with very little "buy in" on the part of the staff. The togetherness that can be fostered by a culture of consensus is very powerful, giving the culture of the school an atmosphere of interaction and camaraderie, which means that students and parents will be valued and welcomed as part of the team. This in turn leads to the continued development of the collective focus.

Collective

The above comments ought to be kept in mind when considering the problems in creating and maintaining the collective focu*s*. Some of the same comments were made that were made concerning the problems of creating consensus. For example; "The development of an inclusive community requires skills and a level of personal awareness that is not well developed in most people" refers to the lack of interpersonal skills to build consensus. It appears that many of the teacher-leaders in the EdVisions Schools also feel unprepared for maintaining the school's collective focus.

Also, "the division of staff over small issues/personal preferences can interfere with the communal purpose," was another comment. And, again, the issue of time: "It requires a great deal of time and effort to get all on the same page," said another practitioner. Other issues mentioned include making decisions when members were not present, divisions between staff with licenses and those without, manipulators frustrate the process, and "decisions morph and change with individual situations, causing confusion and or resentment."

Another problem in many schools, especially start-up charter schools, is the hiring on of new staff. Creating and maintaining a common focus is difficult in schools because the "work force" comes to a school from different places with different philosophies. Even in EdVisions schools, that are for the most part created schools by a founding group with a mission, hiring on new staff becomes a major chore. If the hired staff were not with the group from the beginning, they have to be incorporated into a culture of the collective – they have to buy in to the vision and mission. If they do not, then problems creating or maintaining the focus will surface.

Also, as mentioned by the practitioners, divisions between staff may occur over small issues and over roles people are supposed to take. If job descriptions are not clear, decision making may appear a power grab. Decisions are often made without all voices at the table, again making it appear as if those voices are not valued. And, again, the "loud voice" syndrome rears its ugly head. It is true that educators are not trained to work together at building common focus and consensus building while in their initial teacher preparation programs. Therefore, this skill must be developed by the group while they are actually managing a school.

The promises or positives in creating a collective focus are that "the mission is re-visited often and is the basis for most decisions. If the mission is foremost in the minds of the group while making decisions, then common focus can be maintained. It does take strong-minded leaders who are willing to shoulder the responsibility for maintaining that vision."

The togetherness brings about an exciting venue in which to work. One practitioner put it this way: "Common vision is incredibly exciting! Students and parents see that vision and adopt it quickly because it is coming as one voice. Strong spirit!" When that spirit is strong, then students and parents see easily that the school has focus and togetherness. Having a common focus and the willingness to work toward that common goal is one of the elements of a strong school.

It also appears that the practitioners recognize the need to build community by continued reflection and listening to all voices. "All must take responsibility for decision-making and the consequences," said one respondent. However, the community "must be kept small," making the goal more realizable.

Another comment that brings teacher leadership into focus is that working together and making decisions together "forces continued reflection on vision and mission that traditionally was easily lost in the shuffle." The collective allows for the continual re-visiting of the mission and vision, giving student-centered decision-making a strong base. A strong collective can keep everyone involved in going in the same direction. The common focus is strengthened and maintained by continual consensual activity. This certainly is a major strength when juxtaposed with the typical large staff of a comprehensive high school in which the teachers are "Lone Rangers".

Consultative

The problems with implementing the consultative aspect of the culture are similar in nature to the consensual and the collective. The frustration of dealing with students, parents and other faculty is physically draining and time consuming. Helping each other continually to learn, to do the action research, to do the staff development, to listen to those who have learned, is a time-consuming task. "The constant new learning can be overwhelming and exhausting," said one respondent.

Also, untrained teachers are asked to be mentors to new staff and to their colleagues. For many teachers new to the leadership role, "it is difficult to judge what the needs are and when someone is ready for the 'next step.'" There is uncertainty around knowing and deciding what colleagues need to improve the school. The confrontation it would take to get other staff to listen,

to do the reading, to go to workshops, is difficult when all are perceived to be equals, and some do not believe they have to improve or change. And, as one teacher-leader said, "confrontation with those who are not following through is more difficult with a group than it is with principal to teacher." Certainly dealing with a hierarchy where one person is placed in control would be easier. But then the promises of implementing the consultative would not be present.

Although it is tiring, painful and often frustrating to build the consultative element into the school culture, it can also be an enlightening and uplifting experience when staff members support each other in their growth. "It is refreshing and revitalizing," "this allows me to be more effective and satisfied," "we see that we are always learning," "we are actively involved in the profession – personal growth is greater." These comments from practitioners support the excitement that can come from whole staff support of individual growth, and the focus it provides if in conjunction with building consensus and the collective.

In addition, "the mentality of life-long learning with reflective practice gives students and staff the skills and confidence to adapt to new situations and environments." The consultative facet of collaboration creates a whole new environment in teacher-managed schools. "Reflection allows for us to see serious areas for change," said another practitioner. "The constant new learning can be exciting and gives a much better understanding of all aspects of education and the education system," said another. And, "there were a lot more frustrating unknowns when I was in the traditional school system" was another comment.

Reflective practices are essential in a democratic process and when the collective group puts emphasis on the consultative aspect, thoughts and feelings such as "effective," "confidence," "satisfied" and "personal growth" will be more prevalent. This excitement and the knowledge gained by consulting with each other appear to be aspects of the education profession missing in traditional settings.

Coaching Commitment

The coaching commitment is akin to the consultative aspect and has similar problems in being initiated and maintained. "It requires care and a high level of interpersonal communication for consistent and constructive criticism," and "teachers are often too nice to confront each other at the expense of the mission… the tendency is to not get at the deeper issues," are some comments made by respondents. It requires openness and willingness to be coached, it requires good interpersonal skills on the part of everyone, confrontation is difficult to either do or accept, and the attempt to build a good coaching element into your school may lead to frustration and time consumption people are not willing to undertake.

Most of the practitioners surveyed were involved in the creation of the school and all of the work that entailed. From the standpoint of those of us who were technical assistants to the sites, it appears as if the coaching commitment, even more so than the consultative attitude, was not a high priority. The unwillingness of teacher-practitioners to take the initiative to coach others, when not trained or holders of the principal license, appeared to be very strong.

But just as strong was the unwillingness of many to accept coaching. "It doesn't work so well for people who believe they are perfect, are afraid of change or criticism, or unable to comment on others," and "evaluating and supporting each other requires openness to new learning and understanding… it is hard and can be painful." "A majority of the staff may never buy in to the great ideas of one of the staff."

As can be seen from these comments, creating a coaching culture in a small, democratic school is not enough. A structure has to be built, and the collective, consensual, consultative facets must be supported by a process that acculturates new members and supports experienced members. When such a structure exists, the coaching commitment can be very powerful.

The promises of implementing the coaching commitment lead to growth as an educator and as a role model. Although there is a general unwillingness to accept coaching, some practitioners surveyed pointed out strengths and positive aspects about the coaching commitment. "Looking honestly at self and others in job performance can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of self and others." This can lead to becoming "more comfortable interacting with peers." In addition, small groups of teacher-leaders "can act as cheerleaders for others."

Small staff can all participate in the same workshops, discuss the details, and, by consensus, come to conclusions as to how best affect student learning. The interaction builds camaraderie, consistency and "ongoing movement toward self-actualization" as an educator. Building the coaching commitment into the school process can cause positive growth both institutionally and individually.

Community

The element of community building elicited more responses than any of the other elements of the collaborative culture. The obstacles include "the reality of pulling together along the same path," which "is more difficult than the idea. Whereas we may share the common vision and mission, we may not agree on the same path to actualize these." Another difficulty is that "people are not accustomed to being listened to, or being responsible for speaking well and ethically." Therefore, "working together is hard and you don't always get what you want," causing "some stakeholders not being involved enough to feel passionate and empowered." Getting a large number of people together to go in the same direction is a frustrating and time-consuming task.

Another problem is that communication skills concerning democratic action on the level of the "town meeting" are not inherent in groups of citizens, even if they are united around a

cause. That requires "a deep involvement in the lives of those around us." "A traditional school staff can hide in their classrooms, but we (students and staff) are in the open, warts and all, for all to see and judge – we live in glass houses," commented a respondent. It would be easy to retreat and opt for older methods of creating a hierarchy and giving power to decision-makers. But that destroys the closeness, the camaraderie, the dynamism of the democratic decision-making process.

Acculturating new staff or students into the community also proves difficult. "It is hard for students and some parents who have had difficulties in school to believe in adults and schools as a community," said one respondent. "Students are often uncomfortable with adults caring for them because they have not had that in the past," said another practitioner. Overcoming these problems presents new forms of parent and student interaction, building relationships differently and on different premises than in the traditional school setting, where the authoritarian model is the norm.

Also, one of the problems of building and maintaining community is the inability of a busy staff to find time to celebrate their successes. "We sometimes get too focused on pressing issues and what needs to be improved and not on what has been accomplished. We don't celebrate accomplishments enough." It is difficult to maintain community when all you are doing is trouble-shooting.

However, there are promises in the teachers democratically leading their schools in regard to community. Some positive comments made by the practitioners include: "We like each other. We really do. It really is a nice place to spend my day." And, "our community gives a sense of belonging and support for the development of skills and abilities."

Other comments speak to the strong community built in most of the EdVisions Schools: "A well-functioning community means most problems are talked out and dealt with before they

give rise to gossip, infighting, long-term disputes," and "the community develops important methods for relating to people and serves to benefit everyone. It gives space for further progress." "Advisors build great relationships. We celebrate and mourn together as a community."

Not only advisor-teachers and students build great bonds, but families as well: "After working with a family for a couple of years, the relationship is incredibly strong and supportive." And student-to-student bonds grow: "the students watch out for each other – they hug each other after breaks and weekends and are glad to be back in school." Another respondent said, "students see themselves as valuable members of the community and that being a citizen is as much a responsibility as a right. Many are extremely involved in and out off the school. As they get older, their view of community expands."

As other practitioners noted, "we can integrate school with the greater community – it is not school on an island" which leads to the ability to "teach a real social curriculum." Many comments were made pertaining to the interaction with the community and the potential for "contributing strengths and sharing burdens"

Overall, the community building that goes on with the EdVisions Schools program, one that allows for advisors and students to interact as adults about learning not only curriculum, but learning about life from each other and building common bonds.

The following two quotes sum up this strength of community building: "It has been good for students to interact more with each other – they become more pro-active in difficulties, and they often take the lead in conversations." "The traditional relationships are to a great extent broken – many relationships with staff to staff, staff to student, and student to student can and do become more personal than in a traditional school. We have the opportunity to be a major adult figure in many students' lives."

Creating a strong community can be very invigorating. The terms used by the practitioners to describe their communities are tremendously powerful: celebration, liking each other, watching out for each other, a sense of belonging, support, problems talked-out, giving space, incredibly strong and supportive family relationships, students as real members of the community, involved, sharing strengths, sharing burdens, opportunities for new learning, integrating school with the greater community, lead to relationships between students and staff that are incredibly strong and safe. More than anything else, these comments ought to sell the EdVisions model.

This last statement says it all: "when a child feels safe and cared for, their learning increases exponentially." That is what building community is all about. It is the first and the last, the first thing needed to be done, and the culmination of all of the five elements of the collaborative culture: build good relationships amongst all stakeholders, especially students and faculty, and the other elements will come more easily.

In addition to considering problems and promises of the five aspects of a collaborative culture, practitioners were also asked to respond to four statements pertaining to teachers managing their schools. The statements put to them were:

1. Being a member of a democratic school has provided a more cohesive and integrated sense of purpose, goals and measurements of success for our school.

2. Being a member of a democratic school has given me a greater sense of involvement in and responsibility for the school program.

3. Being a member of a democratic school allowed me to provide more individual attention to students and parents.

4. As a result of attending a democratic school, I get the impression that students develop a greater sense of involvement and responsibility for the school.

Responses to statement one (being a member of a democratic school has provided a more cohesive and integrated sense of purpose, goals and measurements of success for our school) were answered in the affirmative, ranging from yes, to definitely, to absolutely. The largest factor appears to be control of their situation:

"At my old school I was very aware of being a cog. Although I enjoyed working with the kids, I knew that it was a dead-end job. This is so different now. I am in control of where we go and how we get there." Another similar comment: "I feel like I have an integral part in the decision making process at the school. The responsibility is on me as well as my teammates to constantly address the needs of the school and how they directly relate to students. It is sometimes difficult to spread that expectation to everyone and urge them to voice it." And another practitioner said: "You create your own mission, so are not doing someone else's goals. You are allowed to do what you are passionate about."

These very positive comments were hedged somewhat by some other comments: "I believe the implementation of our sense of purpose and goals are becoming clearer, but success measurements need to be stronger and more tied to our mission. Our test scores are not good but we have students, staff and parents developing amazing self and human understanding and communication skills that will serve the future community they may live in. How is this measured?"

Indeed, how are the human skills gained by students measured? Or, how are democratic learning and leading skills measured? A fundamental problem in the democratic schools is that they need to lead to measurable standardized test scores immediately, or they do not appear to be making gains. Having only the standardized tests as the measure of school quality negates all the good that is done in creating democratic community; how involved students are in making

choices and decisions, how involved the students and staff are in community, does not get measured by test scores.

Another hedge against the positive outcome of being in democratic control of their own schools is, "…again, teachers need extensive training/preparation. Much is available, but it seems we need more." Indeed, past-driven isolation appears to be very difficult to eradicate.

However, comments such as these by the practitioners really solidify the previous comments about building community, consensus, the collective, the consultative, and the coaching commitment. Having the power to make the major decisions around the school mission empowers and makes goal setting become more meaningful, and makes building a common focus more a reality. It is not easy, but it appears to be worth the effort.

Responses to statement two (being a member of a democratic school has given me a greater sense of involvement in and responsibility for the school program) were also positive. One practitioner commented: "Definitely true. I worked hard in the traditional system but was often undermined by decisions I had no voice in. Although it is a lot of work, I appreciate this aspect of our school a lot. We teachers take our job very seriously along with the responsibilities, no matter who is in charge and who is invited to participate." Another voice said, "When I see a problem here, I know that I must do more than gripe about it at the dinner table. I need to help fix it. I have done this by calling together focus groups, voicing concerns at meetings, and implementing changes."

And often that control and those changes lead to positive results for students: "Being led in decision-making by a commitment to the students is a great benefit to the students, said one respondent. Another wrote: "I see the program tied closely with the purpose and goals of the school. We constantly address the needs in the program and who can step in and fill those

needs." And another spoke of the responsibility: "You can't look toward someone else if things aren't getting done – you can't put the blame on someone else."

The greater sense of involvement leads to a greater ability to affect change for the benefit of the students. This is also a benefit to the educators, as they feel more empowered and energized by the power to affect what happens. Some teachers appear willing to accept that responsibility.

Responses to statement three (being a member of a democratic school allowed me to provide more individual attention to students and parents.) were in the affirmative for the most part. One wrote, "Even though I have worked in small programs in the past, I have never known students and families like I do now. The level of comfort and trust is fully refreshing." Another said, "We value working with a small group for the long term. Therefore developing relationships with students and parents is a must. That allows me to address the students and family as a whole in developing their learning program." And another comment highlighted the difference between teaching in a traditional setting and a democratically controlled setting: "I used to see 160 students a day and 25% of the parents at conferences. Now I deal with 17-18 advisees and conference with all the parents once a month or more."

The only cautionary answer was, "In many ways the opposite is true. With all the additional administrative duties and learning, planning for something with students to improve learning gets postponed to keep 'the school running.' There is potential staff to interview, reports to get in, and buildings to find and care for. I now understand how bureaucracies develop. I am hoping as we are more established, this will improve."

The ability to work with students and parents in a different ratio than in previous high school experiences appears to be a positive for the practitioners. Having small advisory groups

and small school settings allows for the personalization necessary to really help students grow. A negative is, again, the time and skills necessary to do the job well.

Responses to statement four (as a result of attending a democratic school, I get the impression that students develop a greater sense of involvement and responsibility for the school) were also overwhelmingly positive, as attested to by the following:

"Definitely. Our Monday all-school meetings are student run. The student congress identifies issues and brings them to the community. Also, our circle meeting (weekly) continues to be a place for students to air concerns and celebrate successes;"

"Yes, because they see the teachers involved and asking for assistance (decision-making as well as menial tasks) and therefore believe they have a say and can make a difference;"

"Definitely. They claim their say in the program and expect to get responses to their requests. The constitution has been a remarkable way of showing that at our school." (The school has a constitution written by students);

"I think students do have more involvement and say in our school; but due to the fact that some rules and boundaries are necessary when groups of people work together, students are sometimes still unhappy they can't call more of the shots;"

"Definitely. Students volunteer for things, greet adults cheerfully, own their own learning, clean their own workspace, and learn their own time management. The buy-in is terrific."

Having students take more involvement in their own education and having students develop the skills necessary to become life-long learners is the overall goal of EdVisions Schools. The development of greater involvement and responsibility in the overall school process is a means for accepting that responsibility for self and for the greater society. By the

comments made by the practitioners, it appears that the students are becoming more responsible citizens by taking the responsibility of making decisions for the school and for themselves.

This is the hope of the democratic school. By giving students responsibility to choose the how, when and what of their high school education, by giving them a voice in the overall management of their school, democratic principles are being learned. And teacher-advisors who take upon themselves the reigns of school management and collaborative decision-making allow for democratic principles to be lived out in an everyday process. Democratic learning and leading can happen in schools; and it apparently is a very good thing for both students and educators.

<u>Appendix A</u>

Following are the answers found on the returned surveys of practitioners pertaining to the

problems and promises of implementing the five facets of a collaborative culture:

Problems with coming to consensus:

- Time consumption – the stress of finding time to commit to committee work. There are too many meetings.   (It is time consuming). (It takes time).

- Staff may lack knowledge, experience and information needed to make sound decisions.

- Coming to consensus after listening to all voices in the committee and full staff meetings is tiring and exhausting and can be frustrating.

- The division of staff on small issues/personal preferences can interfere with the communal purpose.

- Requires much time and effort to get all on the same page.

- An effective decision making body requires skills and a high level of personal awareness that is not well developed in most people (because of the organizational structure of most other institutions).

- It is a slow process – many staff would prefer the difficult decisions be left to someone else. There is still a degree of "passing the buck."

- It is messy.

- It is unclear exactly what decisions have been made.

- We need training/understanding on how to implement this process effectively.

- Decisions are sometimes made slowly.

- Having time on some of the major decisions.

- Decisions by consensus are messy. It takes everyone's time. It is easy to fall into a power structure and may have a tendency for people to align themselves with the power.

- We still have people who speak "more" and "louder" and that intimidate some from speaking out.

- It is like herding cats – so many ideas and thoughts are presented. Time does not allow for all the discussion needed.

Promises and positives in implementing consensus:

- Great to have my voice heard and to hear other voices.

- It empowers all to be involved, heard and to continue growth.

- Rules and decisions can be modified when the situation changes or shifts.

- We have some great brainstorming that evolves into great new ways of doing things.

- Involvement and awareness in all levels of management means educators, who have the students' well being in mind as a primary focus, make decisions with the students in mind.

- The work and collaboration of the staff serves as a role model to students of interpersonal interaction and communication.

- It is democracy in action. The civic action is easier to instill in students when they actually get to practice it. It is easier to teach because those who teach it also get to practice it as well.

- Reaching consensus means all voices are heard.

- Everyone backs the decision, since everyone was a part of making it.

- Everyone shoulders the positive or negative results.

- Everyone has the opportunity to have first-hand involvement in discussions leading to decisions.

- Everyone is a key stakeholder and we lose the perception of "us versus them."

- It forces people into professional decisions that otherwise are made by others.

- If people are comfortable saying what they mean, stakeholders have the opportunity to have a great deal of input.

Problems with building and maintaining the collective:

- The development of an inclusive community requires skills and a level of personal awareness that is not well developed in most people

- The division of staff over small issues/personal preferences can interfere with the communal purpose

- It requires a great deal of time and effort to get all on the same page, said another practitioner."

- Decisions morph and change with individual situations, causing confusion and or resentment.

- Manipulators and strong-armed "threateners" can undermine and frustrate the process.

- Making decisions when some of the members are not present.

- It can lead to divisions between staff with licenses and staff without licenses in decisions pertaining to licensure and professional issues.

- People regress to old habits or what is comfortable if there are not enough strong voices for moving forward.

- One vindictive and manipulative person could control others.

The promises of the collective:

- The mission is re-visited often and is the basis for most decisions.

- All must take responsibility for decision-making and the consequences.

- All individuals must develop strength and skills to hold each other accountable. We can't play the blame game.

- Common vision is incredibly exciting! Students and parents see that vision and adopt it quickly because it is coming as one voice. Strong spirit!

- The table upon which planning happens must remain small, thus forcing the community to remain small, making it easier to keep a collective focus.

- All have a voice, take part and can have ownership.

- We always have a check-in with staff.

- Decisions are approached from many different angles.

- For certain personalities, it satisfies the need for involvement.

- It forces continued reflection on vision and mission that traditionally was easily lost in the shuffle.

- The collective group can keep one person from controlling and regressing.

The problems with implementing the consultative aspect of the culture are:

- The constant new learning can be overwhelming and exhausting.

- Sometimes, ignorance is bliss. Understanding the politics can be demoralizing

- It is tiring, messy and can be painful.

- It, too, takes time.

- We don't have quick, easy access to coaches or mentors.

- It is difficult to judge what the needs are and when someone is ready for the "next step."

- Who has time? This area is vital, but we have not made the commitment on a staff level to do as much as we should to help new staff learn the basis of what we are all about.

- Difficult people (diva's) who are comfortable in what they are doing think they have a right to do what they want.

- Confrontation with those who are not following through is more difficult with a group than it is with principal to teacher.

The promises or positives of implementing the consultative aspect of culture are:

- It is refreshing and revitalizing. It is good to sit down with others and hear about what you are doing well. It is also great to be in an environment where real help is always available because everyone is in such close contact with each other.

- The role modeling of learning is much more effective than lecturing on how to learn.

- The mentality of life-long learning with reflective practice gives students and staff the skills and confidence to adapt to new situations and environments.

- Reflection allows for us to see serious areas for change.

- The constant new learning can be exciting and gives a much better understanding of all aspects of education and the education system. This allows me to be more effective and satisfied. There were a lot more frustrating unknowns when I was in the traditional school system.

- We are actively involved in the profession – personal growth is greater.

- We are all learning together.

- We learn time management.

- We see that we are always learning.

- A group as a whole generally brings people back to reality.

- It is easier to determine what is needed for staff development when teacher's have personal professional development plans.

The problems with developing the coaching commitment:

- Evaluating and supporting each other requires openness to new learning and understanding. It is hard and can be painful.

- It requires care and a high level of interpersonal communication for consistent and constructive criticism.

- It doesn't work so well for people who believe they are perfect, are afraid of change or criticism, or unable to comment on others.

- This has personally been my greatest frustration: you want to be able to welcome however inexperienced staff to the school, teaching them the process. But there are major demands to opening a school and the work has to be divided amongst the staff. The balance seems almost impossible.

- We all are learning together – no one is an expert.

- There is learning by osmosis in our paired staff structure, but a more formalized "indoctrination" would help.

- Teachers are often too nice to confront each other at the expense of the mission. Smallness of the environment means having to live with them every minute of the day, so the tendency is to not get at the deeper issues.

- A majority of the staff may never buy in to the great ideas of one of the staff.

The promises of implementing the coaching commitment mentioned by the staff members are:

- Looking honestly at self and others in job performance can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of self and others. The added feedback opens us to more of the unknown.

- We model growth for students.

- The ongoing movement toward self actualization is real.

- We learn to stretch ourselves.

- We become more comfortable interacting with peers.

- Out paired staff structure helps establish some consistency.

- The whole staff can participate in workshops together – can easily determine who is buying in and who isn't. It is tougher for an individual to sabotage a professional development plan because it is easier to see.

- Small groups of teacher-leaders can act as cheerleaders for others – always able to see what each other are doing.

The problems with creating and sustaining a caring community can be:

- We sometimes get too focused on pressing issues and what needs to be improved and not on what has been accomplished. We don't celebrate accomplishments enough.

- It requires a deep involvement in the lives of those around us – must know them as people.

- It is difficult to know what is required for sustainability. How much should be learning? How much community? Which comes first?

- Parents are too satisfied. We don't see them as often as we would like. Volunteer hours have dropped off significantly (the school is in its second year).

- The reality of pulling together along the same path is more difficult than the idea. Whereas we may share the common vision and mission, we may not agree on the same path to actualize these.

- Most people involved are strong, passionate individuals; when significant differences of opinion arise, it can be very difficult to move ahead. Because passions are strong, emotions become strong. People in our schools will ideally have a good understanding of their personal needs and styles and be willing to be open to examine their motives when they "dig in." Sometimes we need to dig in; sometimes we need to bury the sword.

- Some stakeholders have not been involved enough to feel passionate and empowered.

- People are not accustomed to being listened to, or being responsible for speaking well and ethically. We don't know how to do it. It is time consuming. Working together is hard and you don't always get what you want. Finding a group of people who posses the needed skills can be difficult.

- De-programming students from the old ways into community is difficult.

- It is sometime hard to cheer each other on as a staff. We're often seeing how far we have to go without seeing how far we have come.

- Having time with staff to connect and help students connect is difficult to come by.

- It is difficult to know how to set the tone for each year.

- It is difficult helping students and peers who start or join the group later become part of the community.

- I like the idea of going out together to socialize, but who has the time? We have cliques here and that is due to breakdowns of communication.

- A traditional school staff can hide in their classrooms, but we (students and staff) are in the open, warts and all, for all to see and judge – we live in glass houses.

- It is hard for students and some parents who have had difficulties in school to believe in adults and schools as a community.

- Students are often uncomfortable with adults caring for them because they have not had that in the past.

The promises exhibited in regard to community include:

- Monday meetings have become a place to celebrate what students are accomplishing. Students listen and applaud.

- We like each other. We really do. It really is a nice place to spend my day.

- The students watch out for each other – they hug each other after breaks and weekends and are glad to be back in school.

- Our community gives a sense of belonging and support for the development of skills and abilities.

- A well-functioning community means most problems are talked out and dealt with before they give rise to gossip, infighting, long-term disputes, etc.

- The community develops important methods for relating to people and serves to benefit everyone. It gives space for further progress.

- The community continues to grow with more networking. People are hearing about us and they want to get involved.

- After working with a family for a couple of years, the relationship is incredibly strong and supportive.

- Students see themselves as valuable members of the community and that being a citizen is as much a responsibility as a right. Many are extremely involved in and out off the school. As they get older, their view of community expands.

- Utilizing the talents and ideas of everyone in the community has a tremendous potential for sharing strengths and to create new and better ways of working together.

- Ideally it excites all people involved and they contribute their strengths and share burdens.

- It does open the opportunity for new learning, which I have definitely experienced. It can be exciting, but also overwhelming.

- Being able to de-program students from old isolated ways is a positive, also.

- We can integrate school with the greater community – it is not school on an island.

- We can teach a real social curriculum.

- It has been good for students to interact more with each other – they become more pro-active in difficulties, and they often take the lead in conversations.

- The traditional relationships are to a great extent broken – many relationships with staff to staff, staff to student, and student to student can and do become more personal than in a traditional school. We have the opportunity to be a major adult figure in many students' lives.

- Smallness allows for a much greater chance to do what is best for children.

- Advisors build great relationships. We celebrate and mourn together as a community.

- It is a safe environment for students. Every student knows there is an adult who cares for them.

- Presentations of projects to the community and community service make great common connections.

- Using community experts builds a positive community.

- When a child feels safe and cared for, their learning increases exponentially.

Appendix B

In addition to considering problems and promises of the five aspects of a collaborative culture, practitioners were also asked to respond to four statements pertaining to teachers managing their schools. The questions put to them were:

5. Being a member of a democratic school has provided a more cohesive and integrated sense of purpose, goals and measurements of success for our school.

6. Being a member of a democratic school has given me a greater sense of involvement in and responsibility for the school program.

7. Being a member of a democratic school allowed me to provide more individual attention to students and parents.

8. As a result attending a democratic school, I get the impression that students develop a greater sense of involvement and responsibility for the school.

Responses to the **first question** (being a member of a democratic school has provided a more cohesive and integrated sense of purpose, goals and measurements of success for our school) include:

• Definitely. At my old school I was very aware of being a cog. Although I enjoyed working with the kids, I knew that it was a dead-end job. This is so different now. I am in control of where we go and how we get there.

• Yes, because we all have a stake and all have responsibility.

• I feel like I have an integral part in the decision making process at the school. The responsibility is on me as well as my teammates to constantly address the needs of the school and how they directly relate to students. It is sometimes difficult to spread that expectation to everyone and urge them to voice it.

- I believe the implementation of our sense of purpose and goals are becoming clearer, but success measurements need to be stronger and more tied to our mission. Our test scores are not good but we have students, staff and parents developing amazing self and human understanding and communication skills that will serve the future community they may live in. How is this measured?

- True, but, again, teachers need extensive training/preparation. Much is available, but it seems we need more.

- We are more cohesive and integrated in our purpose and goals and we are working toward measuring success.

- Absolutely. You create your own mission, so are not doing someone else's goals. You are allowed to do what you are passionate about.

Comments such as these by the practitioners really solidify the previous comments about building community, consensus, the collective, the consultative, and the coaching commitment. Having the power to make the major decisions around the school mission empowers and makes goal setting become more meaningful, and makes building a common focus more a reality. It is not easy, but it is worth the effort.

Responses to **question 2** (being a member of a democratic school has given me a greater sense of involvement in and responsibility for the school program) include:

- When I see a problem here, I know that I must do more than gripe about it at the dinner table. I need to help fix it. I have done this by calling together focus groups, voicing concerns at meetings, and implementing changes.

- Yes, though that responsibility is heavy. Being led in decision-making by a commitment to the students is a great benefit to the students.

- I see the program tied closely with the purpose and goals of the school. We constantly address the needs in the program and who can step in and fill those needs.

- Definitely true. I worked hard in the traditional system but was often undermined by decisions I had no voice in. Although it is a lot of work, I appreciate this aspect of our school a lot. We teachers take our job very seriously along with the responsibilities, no matter who is in charge and who is invited to participate. People will often fight against and challenge the "leaders." Some is healthy, some is not.

- True. As a founder of the school I feel we had this from the get-go.

- You can't look toward someone else if things aren't getting done – you can't put the blame on someone else.

- This is true 24/7!

The greater sense of involvement leads to a greater ability to affect change for the benefit of the students. This is also a benefit to the educators, as they feel more empowered and energized by the power to affect what happens. Some teachers appear willing to accept that responsibility.

Answers to **question 3** (being a member of a democratic school allowed me to provide more individual attention to students and parents.):

- Even though I have worked in small programs in the past, I have never known students and families like I do now. The level of comfort and trust is fully refreshing.

- We value working with a small group for the long term. Therefore developing relationships with students and parents is a must. That allows me to address the students and family as a whole in developing their learning program.

- I can't pass off difficulties to someone else. I must address them and seek out support when I need it. Likewise, I must offer support to other staff in their work with students.

- In many ways the opposite is true. With all the additional administrative duties and learning, planning for something with students to improve learning gets postponed to keep "the school running." There is potential staff to interview, reports to get in, and buildings to find and care for. I now understand how bureaucracies develop. I am hoping as we are more established, this will improve.

- Yes – or at least a small school allows this.

- I am able to work with individual students, not classes.

- Absolutely. I used to see 160 students a day and 25% of the parents at conferences. Now I deal with 17-18 advisees and conference with all the parents once a month or more.

The ability to work with students and parents in a different ratio than in previous high school experiences appears to be a positive for the practitioners. Having small advisory groups and small school settings allows for the personalization necessary to really help students grow. A negative is, again, the time and skills necessary in doing the job well.

Answers to **question 4** (as a result attending a democratic school, I get the impression that students develop a greater sense of involvement and responsibility for the school):

- Definitely. Our Monday all-school meetings are student run. The student congress identifies issues and brings them to the community. Also, our circle meeting (weekly) continues to be a place for students to air concerns and celebrate successes.

- Yes, because they see the teachers involved and asking for assistance (decision-making as well as menial tasks) and therefore believe they have a say and can make a difference.

- Definitely. They claim their say in the program and expect to get responses to their requests (demands). The constitution has been a remarkable way of showing that at our school. (The school has a constitution written by students with staff support).

- I think students do have more involvement and say in our school; but due to the fact that some rules and boundaries are necessary when groups of people work together, students are sometimes still unhappy they can't call more of the shots.

- Yes, as long as the students have been sufficiently de-programmed.

- It varies from student to student, but I believe we are headed in the right direction.

- Definitely. Students volunteer for things, greet adults cheerfully, own their own learning, clean their own work space, and learn their own time management. The buy-in is terrific.

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