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ABSTRACT

Communitarian Educational Leadership in the Urban School Environment: A Case Study of Leadership within the Context of a Communitarian Reform Initiative in an Urban School District

by Greg A. Williams

School districts in the United States have been subject to a myriad of reform efforts geared to “fix” the ills of public education. Several contemporary reform efforts have advocated for the development of organizations in which educators work collaboratively and interdependently to address the issues of teaching practice. One reform framework that emphasizes these qualities is “Professional Learning Communities” developed by Rick Dufour (2002). Communitarian leadership, leadership that intentionally seeks to develop interdependence through collaboration and common values, is necessary in developing the reform initiative in Midwestern School District. As an urban school district, a classification of school district that has historically shown the most difficulty in meeting the learning demands of its students, Midwestern School District provides a challenging environment for the implementation and success of communitarian leadership.

Theoretical support for communitarian leadership in schools comes from a variety of authors focusing on organizations in general with others specifically interested in educational organizations. The contemporary work of Amitai Etzioni, a leading communitarian philosopher, and Philip Schlechty, who classifies schools using a number of cultural aspects in his sociological work, owes its foundation to Max Weber and his theories regarding organizational behavior. Rick Dufour’s “Professional Learning Communities” framework brings communitarian thinking into action as he calls for the development of focused learning communities in schools through intentional communitarian leadership. This study seeks to understand intentional communitarian leadership can develop within an urban school district in the third year of the reform and the viability of building community as a productive framework to successfully reform the Midwestern School District.

The results of this study suggest that communitarian reform is a promising initiative for the Midwestern School District. Several characteristics of the reform initiative have developed strong support from district educators as core values of the district. Interdependent collaboration has become a prominent aspect of the culture in the district. District educators reported strong perceptions of efficacy concerning aspects of

the reform effort, possibly buoyed by district improvement in state achievement indicators. Perceptions of optimism were not as strong among district educators. Several common aspects of urban districts and shared by the Midwestern School District may be influencing levels of optimism as district educators often cited lack of parental support and challenging students as obstacles to success. Perceptions of cohesion were also weaker among district educators, which may be connected to perceptions of “top-down” implementation of the reform. Strong influence from leaders with regard to developing values in the district was recognized by members of the district. Intentional communitarian leadership has begun to transform this district. The Midwestern School District has made progress in developing an interdependent culture guided by common values. Time and commitment will determine whether communitarian leadership will result in eventual organizational success in gaining high achievement for students and strong learning community throughout the district.

**Communitarian Educational Leadership in the Urban School
Environment: A Case Study of Leadership within the Context
of a Communitarian Reform Initiative in an Urban School
District**

A DISSERTATION

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my beautiful girls: To my wife, Melissa, whose love sustains me in more ways than she will ever know; to my daughters, Bree and Ally, whose smiles make my life brighter; and to my mother, Marlane, whose loving sacrifice as a single-mother raising two children made my accomplishments possible. My successes are theirs.

I would like to thank George and Carol Homan who made me feel like one of the family from the first phone call. Their love and support has been instrumental in the completion of this educational journey.

Thank you to Dr. Raymond Terrell for guiding me through the Masters and Doctoral programs at Miami University. His wisdom and encouragement helped me see possibilities that I would not have seen on my own. I thank the entire Educational Leadership faculty at Miami University who helped me to explore questions of “What if?” rather than “What is.”

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Educational Leadership and Reform

Few social arenas present the complexity of leadership challenge found within contemporary educational organizations. School leaders at every level of an organization must contend with a myriad of pressure points from within and outside the organization. External pressures to educational organizations may come in the form of governmental legislation, demands to produce more effective employees from the business sector or in the form of constant influence from an ever-changing society. Internal pressures from colleagues, students and parents with their individual human needs create a complex leadership environment. Though a number of leadership approaches and organizational systems have been brought to the educational arena from the business sector and other social organizations, educational organizations have proven to be distinctly different types of organizations that do not respond in the same way to change initiatives. Leadership philosophy within educational organizations must be cognizant of human needs within the organization as well as the organization's place within the greater society.

Educational organizations have long been a testing ground where successful systems from the industrial and corporate worlds have been introduced with the promise of transformation, but have fallen short of expectations. Whether one considers the industrial, assembly-line model that still dominates the structure of schools or the influences of Deming's Total Quality framework, educational organizations have not experienced the transformation expected at even a fraction of the success that corporations have experienced. The reasons for the poor translation of successful

business systems to education vary depending upon who is providing the explanation. Some may argue that the educational arena does not have the forceful and dynamic leaders found in the corporate world. Others may site the many differences between educational organizations and most corporations; educational organizations do not operate with an eye on profit and loss. Whatever the reason, ready-made systems or programs do not seem to be the answer for leadership in educational organizations.

In contrast to the technical-rational processes that have been borrowed from the business world to improve education, a number of relationship and culture centered initiatives have also gained popularity within public schools at certain times. The open schooling initiatives of the 1970's are notable examples of approaches that shifted the focus to developing nurturing environments for individual learners within a school. Unfortunately, such nurturing approaches did not place enough emphasis on perceived societal needs for students who could be productive in the business world upon emerging from public schools. The emphasis on student self-esteem and self-discovery did not fulfill the productivity needs of a technical society. Educational paradigms that focus primarily on nurturing students and the subsequent backlash seen in society highlight a fundamental conflict in society: to what extent will society support nurturing of individual needs at the perceived cost to the group.

Still, for all the shortcomings of organizational and leadership systems that have been tried in educational organizations, those in leadership positions cannot simply dismiss the possibility for transformative leadership and allow educational organizations to continue with the status quo; the demands of contemporary society on schools, and on students who matriculate through the schools, are far too great and the stakes far too high.

Some have even predicted the demise of public schooling (Schlechty, 1997) as legislatures push funding of public school lower on budget priority lists and more opportunities are generated for private education in the United States. For public education to thrive, or at least survive, school leaders must continue to seek transformational leadership perspectives from which to promote effective change in public schools.

Society's expectations for public schools have changed. The public school system is no longer expected to separate the top ten percent of students for college attendance and prepare the rest of the students for productive contributions to the work force. Now schools are expected to help all students reach high achievement levels as the title of recent national legislation attests, "No Child Left Behind." Schools cannot expect to achieve societal demands for every student to succeed while still operating within a system that was designed to sort and rank students (Schlechty, 2002). School leaders cannot lead from perspectives founded in a sort and rank system. Responsibility for student success has been placed directly on the shoulders of educators and differences in student achievement will be attributed to schools and teachers rather than the individual ability and effort of students. School leaders must search for ways to ensure that the collective student body reaches a level of achievement that only individual students were expected to achieve in past decades.

One leadership framework that has emerged in the wake of changing societal demands for public schools is communitarian educational leadership. Two such reform models authored by Richard Dufour (2002) and Philip Schlechty (2002) emphasize improvement processes based upon creation of a shared sense of purpose and vision as

well as collaborative processes that mobilize the collective resources of all. The initiatives are founded upon the premise that intentional creation and maintenance of community within schools is a promising vehicle to improve schooling overall and academic achievement specifically. The reforms call upon leaders to identify core values within educational organizations and establish visions that guide the organization toward a preferred future. By leading the transformation of the school or district from an organization to a community founded upon shared values and vision, school leaders are engaging in communitarian leadership. The transformative goal of communitarian leadership is realized when “The values and norms of individuals are transformed into the collective values and norms constituting the culture” (Hord, 2004). The intentional creation of community is a shift away from dyadic leadership relationships in which a prospective leader seeks to influence individuals toward a specific goal or behavior multiple times as he or she encounters individuals within an organization. Instead, a person who seeks a leadership role focuses on building a culture among those who belong to a group around certain overarching values that propel the entire group toward shared goals. Several reform models with communitarian tenets have become popular in the last several years. The creation of “Professional Learning Communities,” as described by Richard Dufour (1999), is the reform model used by the district that is the focus of this study.

Sociological and Philosophical Foundations

Communitarianism is grounded in a sociological perspective that contrasts libertarian ideas of the autonomous individual in society. People develop identity in relationship to others and the groups to which they belong. Educational organizations

develop community through developing a sense of shared values and interests, whereby the entire educational community becomes involved in the accomplishment of higher achievement. Sociologist, Michael Zey (1994) supports developing community on a national or global scales as he envisions a future in which a "...value system is already shared by the vast majority of individuals, such a society can unabashedly speak in terms of "we" when articulating nationwide programs and goals" (p.1). Such thinking is grounded in the sociological theory of Max Weber (1947) and his social action theory. Amitai Etzioni (1995) and Philip Schlechty (1976) expand upon Weber's theories in their descriptions of school communities and communities in general. Etzioni (1995) in particular expands upon this notion by describing "Progressive Communitarianism" as a culture in which a person is not successful without contributing to the group and the community is responsive to the needs of all of its members. These sociological theories support the intentional creation of community and the interest of this study.

The social action theory of Max Weber focuses on power and motivation in social environments such as societies and organizations. His ideal types of power are coercive, remunerative and normative. Coercive and remunerative power, though seen in many organizations, is not the power sources of ideal communities. Normative power is an important part of community leadership as this type of power is conveyed through the development of shared values and interests. When an organization becomes action-oriented on the basis of shared values rather than other types of power, it takes on the elements of community. Weber's theoretical descriptions of motivation also present one ideal description of the motivation that would be seen in community. Alienative and calculative individual motivations are not the ideal motivations for people within

communities, but value-oriented motivation fits well. When people are motivated to act on the basis of their values rather than fear or personal profit, a community emerges based on the shared values. Max Weber's classic social action theory forms the basis for contemporary communitarian theory and its normative project.

Amitai Etzioni is a sociologist and a leading advocate for communitarian reform in the United States. His communitarian philosophy is founded upon classic sociology and in a belief that a person is defined within the social before being defined as an individual. Community is the foundational social unit of study and individuals exist within communities. It is the loss of community and the continual emphasis of individual needs over the needs of community, according to Etzioni, that has led to the deterioration of the United States. Rights and freedoms are important within communitarian thought but must be paired with responsibilities and shared values commensurate with success of groups rather than the separation of individuals at the expense of others. Communitarian thought is clearly at the heart of recent reform models such as “Professional Learning Communities” and “Working on the Work.”

In his work depicting the sociological view of schools, Philip Schlechty (1976) classifies schools along several different continuums. Schlechty considers the orientation of student involvement using the same terminology as Etzioni: moral, calculative and alienative. He places these categories within the conception of the student within the organization as a member, client or product. Finally, Schlechty categorizes the type of school as either professional or bureaucratic and then considers whether schools in that given category have a “tight” or “loose” structure in adherence to norms. The “ideal types” that Schlechty forms through this categorization account for 36

different types of school based upon combinations of these characteristics. These “ideal types” of schools range along a continuum from those schools quite representative of community and those that are collections of individuals working toward their own interests. The implication for leaders is that they must examine what type of organization their schools or districts represent and seek to reshape them into more supportive and encompassing cultures.

Thomas Sergiovanni's (1994, 2000) theory of steward leadership also emphasizes the importance of building community and developing the "power to" instead of "power over." In direct contrast to a conception of a leader as dictator, a leader as steward seeks to guide an organization through shared meaning rather than to dictate organizational direction. A steward leader uses outrage, purposing and empowerment in order to inspire commitment within the organization toward common goals. Outrage is directed toward aspects of the organization that are not in line with the moral character of the group while purposing and empowering allow members of the group to direct that outrage toward the benefit of the organization. The leader becomes a vigilant moral steward of the community that comes together to self-direct how it will accomplish its common goals.

Collaborative decision-making is critical to steward leadership. A leader who takes sole responsibility for making organizational decisions exercises "power over" rather than "power to." Collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of responsibility among members of the group as they have shared in choosing the direction for the group based on the group's moral commitment. A community of meaning is established through group decision-making processes as each member of the group must share an understanding of the core purposes of the group and interpret such meaning through the

decisions reached by the group. Members of the group benefit from the "power to" share in decisions that are important to the entire group and gain a sense of the "power to" affect desired change and accomplishment. Communitarian leaders exercise the steward role in seeking to reshape organizations into communities.

The sociological theories originating with Weber that extend into the educational realm with Schlechty and Sergiovanni form the foundation of "Professional Learning Communities" as a reform model. The intentional establishment of community in educational organizations is the cultural change sought by the reform model to bring about more successful schools. Leaders operating within this framework seek to foster interdependence in the organization through collaboration. Individuals are not successful until the entire learning community is successful and learning communities are not successful until each member is successful. Strong communities do exist within some school districts. The relevant issue for the Midwestern School district is whether or not community can be intentionally created within this urban school district.

Research Focus

Of all the types of public schools, urban schools tend to have the greatest number of underachieving students. Whether one attributes the problems of urban schools to the socio-economic environment surrounding the schools, the unwillingness of many quality teachers to work in the schools or the cultural conflicts that sometimes occur between school and home, urban schools present some of the greatest challenges to those who would like to lead transformative change in schools. The urban school district that serves as the subject of this study will help to provide insight into the effectiveness of communitarian leadership style in unifying the school community and the potential for

improving the achievement of the district. One cannot necessarily generalize that effective leadership style in one urban school should be effective in other types of schools. An effective leadership style in a district with an urban classification, with all of the documented problems associated with learning achievement in urban schools, certainly increases the credibility of adopting a communitarian focus in any school. Regardless, identifying promising leadership practices for urban schools in general or just certain urban schools is definitely worthy of study given the historic disadvantages of urban students when it comes to academic achievement.

Unfortunately, this study will not provide any definitive answers with regard to the ultimate effectiveness of communitarian leadership in urban schools. The school district of this study is in year three of what is sure to be a lengthy, if successful, transformation. The changes sought in culture, attitudes and expectations will require time to become embedded within the district. With increased governmental accountability, districts do not often have time to wait for lengthy transformations. This study will provide a progress report of what an urban district looks like in the third year of the implementation of an intentionally communitarian leadership philosophy. This snapshot of an urban district at its current level of development within the reform model can help to guide school leaders in other districts in deciding whether a change to a communitarian leadership philosophy is warranted and whether or not their districts have the time for such an implementation. Given the lack of "quick fix" remedies for struggling school districts, the information gleaned from this study will provide much food for thought for educational change agents.

The District

Midwestern school district—a name created for the sake of this study—is an organization in the midst of significant change. Physically, the district is in the initial stage of renewal as it is constructing new buildings. Five new elementary buildings will be constructed and two others will be renovated. Though there is optimism about the new buildings, it is tempered by anxiety regarding declining enrollment and its effect on the overall health of the district in terms of finances and morale. The district is experiencing the effects of a drastic overhaul of state curriculum standards and working to overcome low proficiency test scores. At the same time, it is engaged in a time of value clarification regarding the purpose of each member's work in the organization. The district is at a time when it is difficult to determine where core values lie.

Like its physical renovation, the district is undergoing a cultural renovation. The city that the district serves has shown many signs of urban decay as its leading industry has declined significantly and areas within the district have felt the effects of fewer opportunities for employment and have suffered the impact of poverty. Schools in the district have also felt these effects with the students that they serve. Concerns over student discipline and low student achievement have led to skepticism among some educators as to the possibility of educating all of the students in the district at high levels. Despite some indications of renewed support of the schools in the form of affirmative votes to fund the schools, a general lack of optimism exists in the district. The demands of the state board of education as well as competition with higher performing neighboring districts also contribute to the lack of optimism. Reform for this district means seeking to reverse cycles of pessimism among members of the district as well as seeking ways to

improve learning among students.

Research Questions

This study of intentional communitarian leadership seeks to answer several questions with regard to the effectiveness of the leadership style within an urban school district and the efficacy of the organization in realizing achievement goals. The questions addressed by this study will help to form a foundation of understanding for communitarian leadership philosophy in educational organizations. Two issues are at the core of the study, the possibility and practicality of creating community within an urban educational organization and the benefits or detriments of successfully generating community. The questions that follow will be central to the study.

Can intentional community be built in an urban school district?

Those in favor of using “Professional Learning Communities” as a reform model operate from a presumption that the creation of intentional community is possible. Most people have experienced the feeling of community but may find it difficult to define community much less know how to create community within an organization. Though communitarian philosophers and some school reformers may advocate for community building, it does not mean that the creation of community is possible in all organizations. One of the goals of the study will be to determine if elements of community are emerging as a result of the intentional actions of leaders to build community in the district. Interpretations of data in relation to this question must consider the influence of the existing culture of the organization and the processes used to try to build community. This study will not definitively prove the possibility of the intentional creation of community, but it will seek to determine if community is emerging in the district and to

what extent certain leadership processes have contributed to fostering community.

Regardless of the findings regarding the emergence of community, this study will also analyze the obstacles presented to community building in the urban school environment. The deleterious effects of urban environments on the effectiveness of schools have been well documented through empirical and qualitative study. Many of the same obstacles to academic achievement may also present significant challenges to the creation of community. For instance, the struggle for basic survival that limits the amount of importance that many urban students place on academic achievement may also foster a pessimistic culture among educators. This example of challenge within urban districts, along with other challenging social factors, will be examined in detail by this study.

How do members of the organization perceive progress within the district?

Another important concept to be considered within this study is the perception of progress being made in the district toward achieving desired goals. The perceptions of members of the organization with regard to these two characteristics of change are important to reshaping the culture in the Midwestern School District. When people believe that their efforts will bring about the accomplishment of goals, they are much more likely to maintain their level of effort and persevere during difficult times. Therefore, perceptions of progress in the district are essential in building the momentum for the transformative cultural change sought through the reform initiative. Perceptions may be more important than actual achievement results for students because members of the organization may attribute initial favorable increases in student achievement to factors outside of their control like easier tests or “one smart class.” To sustain the

initiative and build the foundation of community in the district, district educators must perceive that their collaborative and value-driven efforts are producing the changes that they would like to see.

What influence do leaders exert in this type of change process?

Perceptions regarding the influence of leadership in the district help to reveal the importance of leadership in this type of a change effort. The intentional aspect of the reform effort in this district makes the influence of leadership a key concept in this study. The characteristics of community can be seen in any number of geographic areas as organizations and communities develop without intentional effort, as people seem to come together around common interests naturally. Community can develop around values that are mutually held by many members of an organization regardless of whether the values contribute to success within the organization. When considering the development of intentional community, the question of whether or not leaders exert influence over the development of common values within an organization is critical. People in positions of authority can mandate compliance with certain activities in an organization, and sometimes these actions can result in people within the organization coming to value the concepts. At other times, people are merely going through the motions, or worse, covertly sabotaging activities in an effort to stop them. To achieve the transformation sought in the district, members of the organization must unify around common values that will result in the accomplishment of organizational goals. Assessing the influence of leadership on the value development process is key to understanding how intentional community can be founded.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, several definitions are essential for understanding. The terms in Table 1.1 are listed with definitions that explain how the terms will be used in describing this study. The definitions are derived from common definitions of the terms and influenced by the writings of communitarian theorists. The ideas described by the terms are central to the questions posed by this study; therefore, the importance of this study of communitarian school reform depends upon a clear understanding of these core concepts. The definitions form a foundation for the concepts with fuller definitions developed through the description of the results of the study.

Table 1.1

Core Terms	Definition
Community	A collection of people who work interdependently toward common goals and share common values.
Communitarianism	A term describing a social theory with normative implications founded upon the premise that people are inherently social and the strength of groups is associated with the strength of common values in the group.
Communitarian Leadership	Intentional direction and value-driven guidance within a group for the purposes of generating effective group action toward the interdependent accomplishment of common goals.
Communitarian Reform Model	A framework for improving an organization that purposely seeks to increase interdependence among members and foster shared values in an organization.
Commonality	Shared features or attributes; shared values will be the focus of commonality in this study.
Efficacy	The power or ability to achieve the desired effect or goal.
Cohesion	Unified interdependence typified by common values among members of a group.

Limitations and Delimitations

Though case studies can be quite revealing when it comes to the specific object of study, in this case an urban school district undergoing a reform initiative, case studies are constrained when one considers generalizability. One urban school district is certainly not representative of all school districts, or even urban school districts in general. This study is delimited in its applicability to the district of study. The knowledge to be gained from this study comes from the depth of understanding to be gained from observing an urban school district led from a communitarian leadership philosophy; specifically, a midwestern urban school district in the third year of a communitarian reform model. The understanding gained from this and other studies of communitarian leadership will provide insight and perhaps begin to form the foundation of a framework for understanding communitarian leadership in educational organizations.

The methods employed in this study also have a limiting influence on the validity of information gleaned from the study. As an employee and administrator within the school district, the researcher must contend with the potential for biased observations. The familiarity that the researcher has with the district may restrict the interpretation of observed events. Alternate interpretations that an outside observer may consider may be discounted because of the embedded observers preconceived ideas regarding the district. However, the same insider status that may adversely influence the objectivity of observations may also produce greater insights into observations than an outside observer would not be able to access. Foreknowledge of the potential for bias and the use of other data gathering techniques to observe common results will help to alleviate the deleterious

effects of the embedded observer on the knowledge gained from this study. The insider knowledge available to the researcher will allow for richer observations of leadership events and more significant understanding of the processes at work within the district.

In addition to the objective limitations of the researcher's membership in the organization targeted in this study is consideration of the position held by the researcher. As a school administrator, the potential for perception slanted by position exist. Since the researcher is exposed to numerous conversations of district administrators and other building administrators, those conversations may have a tendency to taint the interpretation of observations in the district in support of administrative actions because of knowledge of administrative intentions. Furthermore, the results obtained from interviews and surveys—to a somewhat lesser extent due to anonymity—may also be influenced by the identity and position of the researcher. Despite assurances to the contrary, those educators who participated in interview may be less than forthcoming with information due to a suspicion that giving negative answers to some of the question regarding leadership and culture would result in retribution from administrators. Interviewees may also color their answers to present a positive aspect toward leadership and initiatives in the district to gain favor or just present a picture of a content member of the organization. Even survey results may be subject to researcher influence as those participating in the study may be skeptical of the anonymity of the survey. The potential for researcher influence on the responses is a factor that must be considered when interpreting the results of the study.

The possibility of artificial responses due to the position the researcher holds within the district is potentially offset by the same characteristic. Since the researcher is

known within the district, some of the uncertainty subjects may feel about answering certain questions with a stranger may be allayed. Despite the researcher's position as a building administrator, this position may inspire a greater level of trust with some subjects because of previous interactions or conversations with others regarding the researcher. If perceptions of the researcher are relatively positive or at least neutral, subjects may be more forthcoming with information because of familiarity and a greater level of trust than a person would feel with an unknown researcher. While one must be cognizant of the potential for bias that accompanies an embedded researcher, the possibility of gaining even more significant information due to the researcher's position and familiarity in the district cannot be overlooked. Researcher influence must be considered in every study and will be considered in reviewing the results of this study.

Significance

The information and insights gained from this study are potentially important to the study of educational leadership and in understanding some of the practical implications of communitarian philosophy. With the increasing pressure placed on public schools to produce higher achieving students and the repeated failures of programmatic change in thousands of public schools, gaining greater understanding of organizational change through culture is critical to meeting societal demands. In addition, the growing prominence of educational reform initiatives encouraging interdependent work supported by guiding principles necessitates an understanding of how these transformative initiatives take place and whether or not they are worth the effort. From a sociological and philosophical perspective, the study is important to communitarian theories of education and leadership. The communitarian theoretical

perspective suggests that organizations are stronger when they embody the interdependence and common values characteristic of community. This study seeks to add a thorough description of a single organization seeking communitarian transformation to the volumes of communitarian theory and the possibilities of educational reform.

Urban school districts are organizations that have struggled under the burden of urban decay and the effects of poverty among the students they serve. They are organizations that have ingrained losing cultures that, unlike business organizations, do not simply close when losing is deemed inevitable. Urban public schools continue to repeat the cycles of losing until they find some way to break them. When the effectiveness of an educational reform model is considered, there is no more difficult proving ground in the area of education than the urban school district. Of course, success in the urban arena is no guarantee of success in other types of school, but success in the urban school would certainly bode well for other schools without the level of challenge and would be considered a success all in itself it could help reverse the typical failing conditions of urban public schools. The information generated by this case study will not provide a definitive answer to questions of effectiveness in urban public schools. The description of this single urban public school district will provide some insight into the possibilities of developing community through intentional communitarian leadership in an urban public school district and seek to reveal the ways that the transformation is influencing the culture of the organization.

Beyond the educational realm, the subject of this study may contribute to understanding the influence of communitarian thinking within society. While theoretical

works in communitarianism consider concepts at an abstract, societal level, the languages of logic and philosophy have limited influence outside of the academic arena.

Communitarian thinkers may show keen understanding of a person's place among groups in society as opposed to a place among autonomous individuals, but such understanding does not have significant impact on organizations full of people who place individualistic notions at the forefront and consider group needs as a necessary inconvenience.

Examining practices that support communitarian philosophy may serve to bring theory closer to practicality. Furthermore, it is difficult to examine the usefulness of ideas on a societal level. The variation of societal influences is much too great. Examining communitarian practices within a single school district—school districts have often been called microcosms of society—provides observers with the opportunity to interpret the influence of intentional communitarian leadership within a limited environment with fewer complicating influences. The information and insight gained from this study may be a relatively small part of the body of communitarian thought, but it may add to the growing amount of literature examining communitarian practices within organizations.

The reform effort undertaken in the Midwestern School District provides yet another glimpse into efforts to reshape an organization. Its characterization as an urban school district heightens interest in the reform as urban school districts are historically low-achieving school districts with challenges that are difficult to overcome through typical change efforts. The reform effort underway in the Midwestern School District seeks transformation of the organization through a focus on common values and interdependent work to reverse the embedded cycles of poor performance in the district. The communitarian reform effort, guided by intentional leadership seeking to reshape the

organization into a collaborative, value-driven community, is the means by which this district seeks to transform a culture of failure into a community of efficacy and optimism. The intention of this case study is to describe the progress of the transformative process in the Midwestern School District to continue the efforts of understanding educational reform guided by communitarian thought.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Perceptions of Urban Districts

Negative perceptions of urban school districts are many and widely held. Issues ranging from the multiple challenges that students in urban settings bring to school to deteriorating facilities that mirror the urban decay of the surrounding areas, all help to form the mental picture of urban schools within the minds of many. Such perceptions are supported by elements of truth. Study of urban school districts have shown that urban school districts have comparatively greater problems than other high poverty districts in the areas of student transience, hiring teachers, student absenteeism, student discipline and student weapon possession (NCES, 2005). Urban districts, however, do not show significantly worse results in the area of academic achievement (NCES, 2005). The prominent issues in the areas of student behavior seem to make the deficiencies in academic achievement more apparent. The observable characteristics of urban school districts are just the beginning of understanding perceptions of urban schools.

Virtually every adult in the United States has a perception of how schools should look based upon his or her own experiences in schools. Governmental expectations of schools have changed, but many people expect schools to be the same institution they left many years previously. Since most people no longer have first-hand experience with schools, they must obtain information about schools from the media. Newspaper reports covering school violence and falling test scores are far more prevalent than stories depicting favorable outcomes from schools. Movies and television sensationalize the plight of urban school districts through films and television shows like "Dangerous Minds" and "Boston Public," respectively. Until finally, "There's a collective

understanding that urban schools mean poor children, brown children, schools that don't do well, a government that doesn't function well, a system under turmoil, and people throwing their hands up as to what to do" (Kelley, 2003). The urban schools that need more resources to meet the challenges of urban youth are then less likely to get those resources from local tax-payers as people lose faith in the ability of educators to use those resources to achieve desired outcomes.

A similar cycle of decline exists within many urban schools. When urban students come to school with so many needs, educators become distracted from their main charge of fostering learning by seeking to satisfy those needs at the expense of the academic focus necessary to achieve the high levels of academic achievement expected nationwide. Educators come to believe that educational problems cannot be solved because their efforts to meet behavioral and support challenges with students have not yielded academic successes. Effort and focus are dedicated to changing the behavior of students, which may inspire individual successes for a few students, but little system-wide improvement is realized in consideration of increasing expectations from the public. The cycle of decline is as much a product of substituting a focus on student behavioral and family support deficits for a focus on the core academic business of schools as it is a result of the challenges urban students bring to school. Nonetheless, the tremendous effort given by urban educators with few successes decreases morale in urban school districts which leads to diminished confidence that they can achieve the goals desired for the school.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her book Confidence (2004), provides a general description of organizations locked in "losing" trends that summarizes the plight of many

urban school districts very well. The doom loop, as Kanter terms the process, consists of inter-related characteristics that keep organizations from becoming successful:

Organizations have a "...lack of talent due to scarce resources, no resources due to poor leadership, poor leadership due to losing, lose because of scant resources and low aspirations, low aspirations from losing, lose due to low aspirations" (Kanter, p.127).

The doom loop of urban schools entangles students and faculties in similar cycles; students have difficulty learning due to the effects of poverty, educators focus on deficits of students, educators expect less of students, students expect less of themselves, school achievement declines, geographical areas lose confidence in schools, educators seek resources to increase student achievement, district voters refuse to invest in under-performing schools, the district cannot recruit talented educators due to lack of resources, students learn less and the cycle continues. The cycle of decline continues until the organization generates confidence in their collective ability to achieve success.

According to Kanter,

Confidence guides many personal decisions about what to do next. Individuals run a mental calculation to determine whether the system around them will support them or let them down, whether their personal investment of time, energy, effort, ideas, or emotional commitment will produce positive results or bring disappointment. Winners decide that it is worth the extra push, because the push will pay off. But if someone concludes that there's no point in trying...the outcome is foreordained. The self-fulfilling prophecy is fulfilled. He will lose, and lose again. (Kanter, p 352)

The key to reversing the fortunes of many urban school districts is to find ways to instill confidence in these organizations that present efficacy problems beginning with many of the students, which may extend through the entire organization.

Leaders in urban school districts must find ways to break the cycles of decline

embedded in the organizations. Such a task is much easier stated than accomplished. Not only must leaders in urban school districts work with relatively few resources, but they must also seek to change cultures that are almost always pessimistic. Much has been written about leadership over the course of the last 200 years as people seek to understand the characteristics of a function that is important to the success of organizations. Since leadership is an inherently social relationship, social theory is interconnected with emerging leadership theories. Understanding the foundational social theory and leadership theory supporting the communitarian leadership philosophy examined in this study helps to position the importance of examining the practical applications communitarian leadership philosophy in the urban school district of this research project.

Leadership Theory

Leadership is a social force that exists among groups of people. Human beings are inherently social with their tendency to live in groups and develop interdependent relationships. As Alan Wolfe states in *The Quest for Community*, “They [Humans] are, rather, sociable by nature. They are born to relate to others, to live in groups, and, when given the right environment, to sacrifice for the sake of the common good. The human and the social are one and the same”(pp. 128-129). Social forces are those qualities of human existence that are derived from the interdependence of living with others. If human beings were separated and lived solitary existences after child rearing, social forces in society like communication, group formation, negotiation of boundaries and creation of common meaning would not be as central to the human condition as they are today. From an early stage of development, however, humans are

defined in social terms of belonging to families, groups and cities. Belonging necessitates these social forces that help to maintain unity and direction while helping to define individuals within groups.

Like other social forces that have evolved as a result of the social nature of humans—communication, group formation, creation of shared meaning, negotiation of boundaries and other forces—leadership serves specific needs for the entire group as collections of people strive to reach goals that benefit the group and individual people. Leaders keep important issues at the forefront of groups and focus on "...mobilizing people to tackle tough problems" (Heifetz, p.21) rather than addressing those issues with the easiest fix. Leadership is necessary for uniting the group to a common purpose rather than settling for the disconnected action of individuals solely acting out of self-interest and creating a stagnant environment of people working at cross-purposes.

As a social force, leadership is created within an inter-subjective context. It is created within the social space of collections of individuals who share commonalities of purpose or need. Though leadership is created within the inter-subjective space of two or more people, once created it exists in consciousness of each person regardless of the presence of a leader or leadership group. Members of a group feel the force of leadership as they pursue the purposes and needs of the group. A person may become a leader within a given social situation based upon a number of factors. Some come to lead on the basis of personal characteristics such as charisma or competence. Others come to lead on the basis of factors that are conferred upon the leader such as status or position. John Gardner distinguishes between the activities of a manager of those of a leader by emphasizing the qualities of a leader that go beyond management: thinking long term,

attention to and creation of vision and values, consciousness of leading a unity and they think in terms of renewal (1990). Leadership, in contrast to management, that is created within the positional and hierarchical structures of organizations rests upon the meanings shared by the group and how the leader shapes those meanings.

One quality that separates leadership from some of the other social forces noted earlier is the purposeful nature of leadership. While communication, group formation and creation of shared meaning operate at a nearly subconscious level in the majority of situations, leadership relationships usually develop from conscious decisions shared between leaders and the groups of which they are a part. Accomplishment of a given task or creation of a better environments are activities that groups engage in and choose based upon shared interests.

The study of leadership has developed from varying philosophical and sociological perspectives during the course of many historical eras. Social scientists have explored leadership based on traits, behaviors, situational factors and combinations of the three. Through the years of study, several elements of leadership have emerged consistently as leadership is defined and understood. Leadership is a social relationship that may transpire between as few as two participants and as many participants as those living on the entire planet. Within the leadership relationship, leaders influence the behaviors of those led to achieve goals. Power is a critical component of the leadership relationship that has the seemingly paradoxical nature of being exercised to the largest extent by leaders and yet it is given to leaders by those led. The study of leadership within educational organizations is colored by unique characteristics of public education within the United States.

Leadership study in the context of educational organizations is complicated by the position of schools within society, the goals of education, and the organizational structures of school districts. School systems occupy a unique societal position in the United States. Virtually every resident of every school district who is not attending school has attended one. This widespread familiarity with the functioning of schools complicates educational leadership in school districts, as people are less likely to be influenced by power grounded in the knowledge possessed by educational leaders. Based on their familiarity with schooling, school district residents often feel equally qualified to judge decisions to be made within the schools. The familiarity with schooling so prevalent in the United States spawns conflicting opinions as to the ideal goals for schools. While those in the business field may believe that schools are a training ground for potential employees, parents of school children may view schools as places where their children must be provided with the skills necessary to succeed. Oppressed groups within society may see schools as a place to achieve equal opportunity in society and many hold the general conception that free public education forms the cornerstone for the prosperity of democracy.

School districts also differ from other organizational systems in that they tend to have a flat structure. Very few organizational levels separate teachers from the superintendent in many districts. With the professional development requirements of all educators, leaders in positions of formal authority like superintendents must lead without significant differences in the professional knowledge they possess and the professional knowledge possessed by those whom they would lead. The unique characteristics of school districts test the boundaries of many leadership paradigms. While the general

blanket of leadership theory covers educational leadership, one must also focus on leadership theory specific to education. Furthermore, the tenets of communitarianism must be introduced for this study of communitarian leadership in an educational organization.

Historical Conceptions of Leadership

A common belief during the 1800's suggested that leaders were born rather than made. Various trait theorists suggested that specific physical aspects or mental aspects of a person determined that person's leadership capabilities. With a listing of numerous examples of societies ruled by generations of few families, it is easy to understand how such a theory may have gained support. However, "After over 40 years of study, there is very little evidence to justify the assertion that leaders are born" (Nahavandi, p.29). Studies of trait theory did not reveal substantive support for this theory. The study of leadership turned to alternative ideas to understand leadership.

Through numerous studies of leadership behavior, researchers identified in excess of two thousand leadership behaviors in the Ohio State Leadership Studies (Hemphill and Coons, 1957). Understanding leadership through the behaviors that a person exhibits enabled those interested in developing leadership capacity an opportunity to develop training and tools for categorizing leadership behavior. One such tool, the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, seeks to identify a subject's leadership strengths in the areas of consideration and initiation of structure. The LBDQ remains a well-accepted and commonly used tool in leadership research (Nahavandi, 1997). Though research in the area of leadership behavior created greater understanding of leadership, it did not consider the influence of the leadership situations when it comes to leadership

effectiveness.

Contingency theory seeks to explain how the situation faced by a leader influences the effectiveness of leadership behaviors. Leader-Member Relations, Task Structure and Positional Power all play a determining role in how effective the style of the leader will be in influencing a set of circumstances. The theory considers the leadership situation in totality, as the leader's style is important but no more important than the situational circumstances to be addressed. The first assumption of this theory is "...There is no one best way to lead. Different leadership traits, styles, or behavior can be effective; it is the situation and the various relevant contextual factors that will help determine which style or behavior is most effective" (Nahavandi, p.32). The caveat of this theory is that one must have the insight to read a leadership situation and engage appropriate style or behaviors for the situation. The necessity of considering situation and style increases the complexity for those who would like to be effective in leadership situations by adding a second variable. In the face of such complexity, a guiding philosophy of leadership can be helpful.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational, or change-oriented, leadership seeks to help an organization evolve and adapt to be successful in a changing world. The leader becomes a guide who focuses the followers' needs for efficacy on meaningful changes that can be undertaken. Three qualities characterize the transformational leader: charisma and inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Nahavandi, 1997). A transformational leader is cognizant of the changing environment in which the organization exists and seeks to influence the organization, which is typically change

resistant, to meet the challenges of change. Inspiring members of the organization through co-generation of a vision leads to a need to learn new ways of facing problems throughout the organization. Developing a personal relationship with each member of the organization allows a leader personalize the vision with each person and keep abreast of attitudes within the organization. The change oriented leader focuses charismatic power in generating shared meanings and builds intellectual needs to focus members of the organization on meaningful change.

“If the leadership is transformational, its charisma or idealized influence is envisioning, confident, and sets high standards for emulation” (Bass & Steidlmeier, p.187). Education, specifically in individual schools, is in significant need of transformational leadership: leadership that is inspiring and motivating for people, spurring them to reach beyond the status quo in redesigning schools. The potential for positive change under the leadership of a transformative individual is considerable, but transformational leadership also comes with risk.

A transformational leader requires what Stephen Covey (The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989) would call a “moral compass.” The leader must lead from the standpoint of the entire society rather than acting from a personal vision of right and wrong:

Authentic transformational leadership provides a more reasonable and realistic concept of self—a self that is connected to friends, family, and community whose welfare may be more important to oneself than one’s own. One’s moral obligations to them are grounded in a broader conception of individuals within community and related social norms and cultural beliefs. (Bass & Steidlmeier, p. 186)

The active components of transformational leadership described by Bass and Steidlmeier (p.187)—inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration—must be governed with an ethical voice to avoid the catastrophic effects realized by strong leaders who combined their self-serving goals with their remarkable influence and brought ruin to their organizations.

Transformational leaders with well-developed moral conviction are in possession of tremendous power to affect significant positive change within an organization.

Confidence in the ability to get things done is a defining quality of the transformational leader, as it bolsters a leader's charisma and ability to inspire. Many people have a natural humility or, quite simply, a propensity for self-doubt. Although such doubts are common, the change-oriented leader must seek to minimize these doubts as he goes about the business of leading an organization. "Those who control the primary self, the entity that is the source of self-doubt, and combine this with the secondary self, the entity that evokes confidence and belief, will find that nothing can stop them from achieving their potential" (Carling, p.124). The ability to evoke confidence and belief is the link between the leader's internal power and radiating the internal power to those within the organization. Carling notes, "The courage of a good leader inspires and motivates team members to take more responsibility for their actions, and so improve their self-esteem" (p.125). The leader's confidence becomes a source of strength for those within the organization who grapple with the problems created by their own self-doubt. To maximize power, the school leader must release his position at the top of an organization in favor of a position at the center of many powerful groups of people. Principals maximize the internal power generated through self-discipline and moral courage by fostering both in all of the members of the organization. "Facilitative power reflects a process that, by creating or sustaining favourable conditions, allows staff to

enhance their individual and collective performance through teamwork” (Walker, p.42). Thus, the transformational leader with confidence and efficacy can redouble that power by modeling such behavior and creating an environment in which teachers and staff can maximize their own internal power.

Traditional leadership can be compared to the tall radio transmitters used by radio stations. The signals from the radio station radiate out to receivers in the general area of the transmitter. Like the radio signals, however, leadership signals tend to fade when the receivers are further from the power source. The power of the visions and goals are lost to the members of the organization on the edges of the structure, regardless of the power of the leader.

Transformational leaders strive to avoid the fading of power. In fact, leaders can multiply power by releasing “power over” leadership models in favor of “power through” or “power with” models (Fennel, 1999). “Power through” models of leadership emphasize the importance of relationships and the significance of facilitative structures within the school organization. The leader seeks to share power with all within the organization to harness the skills and talents of many people rather than rely on the innovative resources of a single person. When summarizing the leadership style of four women principals, Arlene Fennel suggests, “...By acting in ways which are examples of alternative concepts of power, such as ‘power through’ and ‘power with,’ they increase the potential of being able to positively transform the contexts of schools in which they lead” (p.48). When those within the organization feel that they have a significant role in the development of a plan, the commitment and efficacy in the implementation stage of the process are magnified. “Collaboration to achieve a school’s vision stemmed from

deep commitment and resulted in collegial efforts to achieve shared goals” (Blase & Blase, p.488): a positive report from a school lead by a principal who is willing to share power and vision to create a synergistic partnership for success. Transformational leaders are not content with building only their own power through self-discipline; they must be willing to model and share power generating structures such as vision and moral commitment.

Peter Senge (1990, 2000) elaborates upon the importance of a learning orientation for organizations in his books The Fifth Discipline and Schools that Learn.

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, many people seem to prefer old fixes to problems or at least do not recognize the need for learning required by a new issue. Such situations require leadership of learning and leadership through learning. One should not assume that it is only those who follow who need to learn in order to see transformational opportunities that exist in issues. Leaders need to recognize that they must model learning with regard to issues, bringing new ideas and provocative questions to the forefront, in order to inspire leadership in the group. Senge sees the transformational leader as one who leads visioning in an organization to identify what members would like the organization to become. Leaders then become teachers leading the learning of the organization, as members must develop new understanding to realize its vision. When a leader can help to create learning within the group, the opportunity is “ripe” for leading through learning. As members of the group come to consider more aspects of a problem and conceive of it in alternative ways, the leader and group can capitalize on the learning to transform thinking around those issue and thus transform the group.

Ronald Heifetz refers to this leadership-learning relationship as adaptive leadership in his book, Leadership Without Easy Answers (1994). Adaptive leadership occurs when learning must take place to understand a problem the organization is facing and learning must take place to develop a solution. One aspect of positional power that is often ignored while exercising the power of “what to do,” according to Heifetz (1994), is the power of “how to do.” In other words, leaders can merely use their power to implement a “fix” for a problem or the leader can engage the entire organization in a learning process to deal with a problem and create a shared sense of ownership in the solution. Such a practice shifts people within an organization from a “fixing” mode to a “learning” mode. Progress is possible as people become willing to avoid pitfalls of traditional thinking and learn to see challenges in a new way and seek solutions that get to the heart of issues. By leading learning, a leader can generate the potential for transformation in the group.

When using learning as a mode of leadership, a leader increases the potential power of the entire group. The temptation for a leader to enter a situation and seek to remedy problems in an individual and autocratic way that often leads to changes that fit the way the leader thinks but may not be in the best interests of the group. The role of the group has been ignored in that the group will be largely responsible for “living” the remedy to the problem. The group does not have access to any of the power that would provide the persistence and commitment necessary to successfully complete transformation with regard to a given issue. A leader has an opportunity to multiply the power of the group by learning with the group instead of robbing of the group of potential power by coming in and “saving the day” with a quick fix.

The reciprocal nature of the leadership relationship allows for the power of the leader and the power of the group to increase simultaneously. Since the leader derives power from the trust and willingness of the group to follow, increasing the power of the group leads to an increase in power for the leader. When group and leader can learn together, it leads to the common understandings and shared values that guide decisions and assure commitments to decisions. The leader fosters this learning by asking tough questions and participating in meaningful dialogue that has been initiated by the leader or others. Rather than operating as a centralized power source that stands at the top of a group and watches power dissipate the further it travels from the top, the leader can generate power that courses through the group much like the networks utilized in information systems. The learning that takes place throughout the organization is the catalyst for that power. A group with the capacity to generate and maintain learning power increases the power of the leader who is in a central position of the network.

Transformative leadership builds upon historical thinking regarding leadership and infuses the importance of learning in leading change in an organization. The importance of vision and a moral compass are aspects of transformative leadership that form the foundation for communitarian leadership. The philosophy of communitarianism builds upon this foundation by associating leadership with the intentional creation of community within an organization. Interdependence among members of an organization guided by strong common values characterizes community. The communitarian leader seeks to identify and develop common values in an organization and then champions those values as the guiding force for the organization as it encounters challenges within its environment.

Social Theory Foundations of Communitarianism

Leadership, for the purposes of this study, is defined within a social context and based on power. Leaders, whether they have formal or informal leadership positions, use power to influence the actions of followers. To understand the leadership relationship on a fundamental level, one must first consider the perspective from which social interactions are viewed. Social theories range from viewing humans as autonomous individuals (Rawls, 1993) to those defining humans by their interactions with others. Individualistic conceptions of social interactions render the leadership relationship as a series of dyads in which leaders seek to influence single followers and may seek to influence a series of followers if the leader is seeking to influence a group. When social interactions define a person by relationships with others, the leadership relationship exists among the entire group and between the entire group and a leader simultaneously. The social foundation for this study is defined from a communitarian perspective that recognizes that the groups to which they belong define individuals. The basis for this social standpoint owes its origins to the sociology of Max Weber.

Community is Critical: Understanding

Community is an often used and vaguely defined concept in society and in literature. People seem to have a vague understanding of community in the way that they advocate community watches and support initiatives for community parks. Community, in the above examples, refers to those living within a vaguely, or at times distinctly, defined geographic area that could be served by the two projects. Others see entire nations as a community and seek to minimize plurality and fractiousness within a given nation by exhorting the benefits of a shared national vision that can unite all sub-

communities within the “national community.” Others lament the declining sense of community among various groups of people, even the lack of solidarity within neighborhoods in the small area of one square block. The individualization of a society in which the majority of individuals only advocate for themselves removes the spirit of unity in supporting others and receiving support in return. So, how does one define community and how does community exist beyond an arbitrary grouping of individuals?

To begin to understand how a community is determined and in what way the concept exists, a consideration of the motivation and meanings of human interaction must be explored. Such an exploration must begin with the work of Max Weber and his theory of social action. Randall Collins (1986), in his book Max Weber, identifies several important concepts central to Weber’s social theory: “...*Verstehen* (understanding) as the correct sociological method, the use of *ideal types*, and his conception of society as the product of *meaningful human action*” (p.31, italics in original). The idealism of Weber produced his notion “... that society must be seen as the product of human wills” (Collins, p.36). Furthermore,

Weber thus uses the conception of will, as separate from ideas, to found his doctrine of means versus ends, and of the free choice of ends. This leads him not only to methodological view of the role of values in social science, but also to his theory of social action. (p.36)

Human will is central to individuals and to organizations as individuals form groups. The values held in common by groups of individuals and their motivations for acting become central to the conception of community.

According to Weber, humans act on the basis of a number of rationalities. Instrumental rationality is means/ends thinking in which a person carries out an action on the basis of accomplishing a succeeding end. The actor determines whether or not the

action is worth completing on the basis of the potential reward or punishment consequent to its completion. Value rationality defines actions that are executed for the sake of the action. In other words, the act itself is worthy of the individual's completion regardless of the end. The individual's motivation for an action stems from beliefs in the right (as opposed to wrong) or the good of acting in such a manner. Emotional action is undertaken under less rational conditions than the first two motivators, as people acting within this orientation are motivated by emotions that lead, at times, to irrational acts. Traditional acts are those that are executed because that is how actions have been chosen previously in identical or similar situations. Weber views emotional and traditional rationality as lower orientations of rationality than instrumental and value rationality. Individuals within social situations, for Weber, act in accordance with their orientations depending upon the type of situations and are also subject to expectations determined by the orientations of the groups to which they belong.

The purpose and goals of a given organization determine to a great extent what type of orientation members of the group will demonstrate. For Weber, instrumental rationality and value-rationality comprised the higher-ranking orientations developed within individuals acting within larger systems. Instrumental rationality is shown clearly within modern capitalism as it consists of businesspersons making calculated choices (Collins, p.42) to maximize profit. Value-rationality is most clearly demonstrated through political or religious action as charitable or ideological acts are completed for their own sake and the ideal that they represent. Emotional and traditional orientations, for Weber, are non-rational motivations for action and serve as obstacles to the rational orientations discussed earlier. All four orientations will exist in varying circumstances

for individuals and entire groups, but one will become primary for most groups depending upon the aims of the group. Orientations of individuals not only contribute to the association of individuals to groups but also influence the general orientations of the group.

Communities will have individuals who will act in accordance with orientations of each type. Some will have more dominant inclinations toward instrumental and value rationality while others may exhibit traditional and emotional orientations. The orientation that will bring the community together, however, will be those values that are held in common by the members of the community. The existence of beliefs shared by members of a group that provide meaning for members and inspire actions valued for their own sake is critical to defining community.

The work of Ferdinand Tonnies provides additional foundational support for communitarian thought. His development of a continuum by which to examine geographical groups begins to capture the fundamental aspects of communitarianism. Tonnies used his German terms, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to describe geographical groups of differing values. *Gemeinschaft* describes members of a specific geographical region who are united by common values and goals. *Gesellschaft* also describes people who live within specific geographical area but have disparate values and are driven by individual interests rather than the collective good. It is the *Gemeinschaft* community that most closely resembles the communitarian ideal. By developing shared values and acting primarily in the interests of the group, groups and their individual members should maximize the success of all.

Communitarianism

Amitai Etzioni (1961), a noted communitarian, founds his understanding of organizations upon Weber's theory in his sociological work, A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations, in which he describes the orientations of differing types of organizations, those social units that are devoted to the attainment of specific goals. Etzioni offers a classification of many types of organization based primarily on the purpose of the organization and the structure. People within given organizations act based upon moral, calculative or alienative orientations. Moral involvement is further divided into pure and social involvement.

Etzioni explains,

Pure moral commitments are based on internalization of norms and identification with authority (like Reisman's inner-directed "mode of conformity") social commitment rests on sensitivity to pressures of primary groups [communities] and their members. (p.10)

The power exercised in organizations is also separated into three categories: coercive, remunerative and normative. Morally oriented individuals act on the basis of values and the organizations to which they belong engage in actions that are ends in themselves. Normative power is based upon meanings of value in which the actions are undertaken because they are "good" in themselves and have a value-rational orientation. Charitable organizations have predominantly normative power structures and are comprised of individuals with moral commitment. Those acting within a calculative orientation engage in actions that they believe will result in rewards or absence of punishment. Like the instrumental orientation described by Weber, calculative actions are demonstrated well within a business environment as individuals within the organization act with

the extrinsic motivation of money as the primary motivation. Businesses rely upon remuneration as the primary power structure. Etzioni also defines an orientation that seems to exist on a different level, as those with an alienative orientation act based on coercion from a dominant group. Individuals acting from an emotional orientation may experience a similar circumstance to those in an alienative state as circumstances dictate, to a certain extent, the reactive condition of the person within the organization. Though other combinations of involvement and power can exist, the power structure and the orientation of the individuals described here are most often found in organizations because of their congruence. “Congruent cases are more frequent than non-congruent ones primarily because congruence is more effective, and organizations are social units under external and internal pressure to be effective” (Etzioni 1961, p.13). Etzioni pulls Weber's theory into a much more specific analysis of distinct organizations and how each tends to operate.

Not all organizations are communities. Some say that a group that constitutes a community can be determined geographically, as briefly mentioned previously, but community is much more than proximity. For the sake of this study of leadership within educational community, community shall be defined as an interdependent group of individuals who share common purposes or values. This definition is sufficiently broad to capture geographic definitions of community and communities that may form over greater geographic area—including theoretical geographic area like cyberspace—focusing upon shared concerns.

Etzioni (1993) warns,

Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside of the interdependent and overlapping communities to which all of us belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention energy, and resources to shared projects. (p.253)

Community exists in direct contrast to individualism in communitarian discourse. Communitarians believe that "...those most concerned about rights ought to be the first ones to argue for the resumption of responsibilities" (Etzioni 1993, p.10). Community differs from society in terms of minimal requirements for the groups: societies are bound by rules for respecting the individual rights of members while communities are founded upon values that promote cohesion and support the good of the group. Responsibility within the community and commitment to the success and survival of the community are paramount concerns from a communitarian perspective. An individual may end up in a group or organization based upon arbitrary factors like geography or employment, but a community cannot exist without shared values that constitute a moral commitment. As much as individuals constitute communities, communities also define individuals. It is the rare individual who lives outside of communities, and even then that rare person is defined by himself and others by that lack of social commitment to others. An individual may be part of several communities at once depending upon the purposes deemed important by the individual and the given communities. Though respectful of the individual and individual human rights, a communitarian perspective relies upon the shared values of the community to bring the needs of the community into a more equitable balance with the rights of the individual.

Ultimately, the common primary interests of individuals, with accommodations

for secondary interests, catalyze the formation of community. The moral commitments of the individuals will determine the strength of the normative power, which operates socially and expressively within the community. The essence of community is determined within the inter-subjective space between individuals united for the common purpose. No individual alone can define community. Community must be generated by many individuals whose commitments shape the common purposes in the unification of members and comes to exist beyond the combined orientations of the individuals. Once generated, community is felt by individuals within the community regardless of the presence of other members of the community. So, though community is generated within the inter-subjective space of individuals united by common interests, once community is generated it exists quite distinctly within the consciousness of each individual. Daniel Bell (1993) refers to “The Hidden Hand of the Community” as that part of an individual's thinking that shapes his actions, though he may think that he is making his own decisions outside of social entanglements. The manifestation of the continued presence of community exists in the form of responsibility felt by the individual. Etzioni (1993) states, “Claiming rights without assuming responsibilities is unethical and illogical”(p.9). While a person may or may not feel responsible to the unknown person from another country, most will attest to feelings of responsibility to those with whom they share common values such as their families, friends, organizations or other groups. The power of the community comes to influence the actions of all members of the community both inside and outside the actual social encounter. Communitarians seek to strengthen those commitments that have been eroded by the forces of individualism.

The person chooses many of the communities to which he belongs while having

actions and motivations influenced reciprocally by the communities to which the person belongs. The individual may also choose to terminate involvement in the community though he might still feel the influence of the community despite rejecting the common purpose of community membership. The individual chooses membership on the basis of the orientations of importance.

Community can be seen in the way that individuals identify themselves in the context of the groups to which they claim belonging. Orders of Moose, Daughters of the American Revolution, Democrats, Republicans, Buckeyes and Redhawks are all communities that influence the conversations, communication and thinking of people within the respective communities. The common goals of the community often take center stage, but often it is merely the sense of belonging that is the engaging characteristic of a community. Though community membership is not always obvious, people can often identify to what group a person belongs by their topics of conversation, values espoused and common goals.

Certain qualities distinguish communities from other collections of individuals. To identify communities, it is important to understand the characteristics of community. Max Weber created the foundation for studying social organizations in his descriptions of "Ideal Types." Weber "...believes that one never knows anything apart from the categories one applies to it... all things one might know are seen through ideas" (Collins, p.34). Since we can never truly know reality, Weber establishes frames through which he explains social behavior. Weber constructs categories of organization based upon analysis of a single quality of organizations. Though the construct would not exist as a "pure" organization in reality, the "ideal type" can be used to explain social behavior if

social systems were constituted by just that specific characteristic. The explication of the "ideal type" leads to understanding that can be applied to those social systems in the world that have aspects of the given type. Organizations in "reality" will have combinations of the qualities from various categories, but understanding the one aspect can bring clarity to the study of the entire organization.

According to Randall Collins (1985) bureaucracy is one such ideal type in which Weber was interested. The emergence of capitalism and organizations driven by instrumental rationality led to a bureaucratic type which is an organization that is run strictly by rules, where each individual has a role that is strictly defined and lies within a specific hierarchy. Casual conversation in almost any organizations will reveal a general distaste for bureaucracy. Schools have a bureaucratic aspect. By analyzing "pure" bureaucracy, Weber sought to simplify the complexity of studying organizations while searching for causal mechanisms that help to explain the entire organization.

Amitai Etzioni builds upon Weber's conceptions of ideal types in his work describing complex social systems. In his work, Etzioni identifies the types of organizations based upon power structures that fit within the categories he identifies. Based upon the purpose of the organization at a given time, the organization may utilize coercive, remunerative or normative power structures to motivate members at the lowest tier of status within the organization. So, when looking at prisons, the purpose of the organization is the confinement of prisoners (the lowest tier of status within a prison), which makes a prison organization alienative in Etzioni's structure since the prisoners are in opposition to the core purpose of the institution. In factories, the social organization is remunerative as line workers participate in business in exchange for the monetary reward

and not as result of coercion. The pure form of normative organizations takes the form of volunteer organizations like charities whose workers complete their tasks for the common good and are rewarded through symbolic, normative means. Participation in normative organizations takes place for the opportunity to complete activities for their own sake and not for extrinsic reward. The "Ideal Types" as conceived by Etzioni place organizations into discrete categories based upon the main purpose of the organization.

Communities, as a type, will be characterized by moral commitment from members and will rely upon normative power. A community may undertake the accomplishment of specific goals that are in alignment with the shared meanings of its members, and thus assume some characteristics of an organization. A community may be what an organization aspires (or claims) to be in order to gain the most commitment from its members and create a sense of meaning among individuals in the organization. In order to qualify as a "pure" community for the purposes of this argument, the organization must not only have the interrelationships among individuals seeking a common goal as organizations do, but the members must share values, moral commitment and normative orientations with regard to the primary shared meanings of its membership. A community is held together and defined by meanings shared among the members.

Schools come with varying orientations and purposes, though Etzioni (1993) places all schools within the category of normative organizations. It seems as though schools would be more similar than different in the purpose for the organization. Depending upon many factors—surrounding area, student demographics, teacher contract—the main purpose of the organization may be defined along a continuum from

maintaining peace within the school (a purpose likely to result in coercive or remunerative structures) to preparing students for a lifetime of learning (lending itself to normative orientations). Since the purpose can be defined in such varied ways within a given school, a school may or may not have the capacity for moral commitment necessary to become a community. In a presentation given at the Indiana Association of School Administrators in October 2001, Rick Dufour paraphrased an unidentified educational researcher in stating that some schools are associations of independent contractors (teachers) who share a common parking lot. In his work depicting the sociological view of schools, Philip Schlechty (1976) classifies schools along several different categories. First, Schlechty considers the orientation of student involvement using the same terminology as Etzioni: moral, calculative and alienative. He differentiates these categories focusing upon a conception of the student within the organization as a member, client or product. Finally, Schlechty categorizes the type of school as either professional or bureaucratic and then considers whether schools in that given category have a “tight” or “loose” structure in adherence to norms. The “ideal types” that Schlechty forms through this categorization account for 36 different types of school. Not all of the types fit with the idea of “community” discussed to this point. Schools that have a professional orientation, that treat students as members and that have moral commitment from all members, are the schools that have developed community. The consideration of the student as a member is key to Schlechty (1976) as he states, “The idea of membership carries with it some recognition of moral commitment, reciprocal obligations, shared goals, and a sense of belonging or community” (p.91). Etzioni’s (1993) description of the “Responsive Community” is particularly descriptive

of the type of school that becomes a community: “A responsive community is one whose moral standards reflect the basic human needs of all its members” (p.256). Certainly, many schools can be considered communities operating within the wider communities of their respective neighborhoods and towns. Those operating with a normative orientation have the greatest opportunity to become the mutually satisfying community that most schools aspire to be.

Why would (or should) schools aspire to be a community? The answer to this question lies in a common view of what the purpose of schooling is: the purpose of schools is to facilitate student learning. The facilitation of student learning is quite a different undertaking than the incarceration of people or the manufacture of goods, though many schools adopt such orientations in their procedures. Learning and the promotion of learning require commitment from teacher and student as well as collaboration among all members of the educational organization. Without community, educators can go through the motions of teaching and learning and can, perhaps, unleash a sliver of the potential for student learning. Within a community, however, the commitment to the core value of learning, along with the interdependent work to inspire profound student learning, can provide the foundation for the type of student learning sought by society. The shared meanings bring the organization beyond alienative and calculative interests to those of a community.

Communitarian Leadership

Communitarian leadership places the shared interests and values at the forefront and uses those key features of community life for guidance in the leadership relationship. Vision and values determined by the group and for the group help the leader to shape the

direction for the group and shape an environment in which the values are paramount in the minds of group members. Vision, the preferred picture of the future for the community, defines leader's purpose: guide the community toward realization of the vision. Leaders must be keenly aware of the changes in community attitudes and values so that the group does not find itself chasing a vision that does not satisfy current values. Communitarian leadership places the leader or leadership group as custodian of the vision of the community that is shaped by the values the community holds above all others.

Leadership, as defined from a communitarian perspective, is for the others and not for the leader. A person assumes the role of leader for the purpose of helping the group reach its goals as opposed to obtaining a position of power solely for personal gain. Many leadership theories view leading from a psychological perspective that emphasizes manipulation of individualistic motivators in order to influence people to accept and execute a task or pledge support. Those leading in a community lead with a power that is developed within the community in the form of common values and common vision. Straying from the will of the community will result in the power to lead being revoked from a disconnection of the leader from the common driving force behind the group: values. The groups they lead define leaders and leaders of communities are defined by the core values and vision of their communities.

With communitarian leadership comes the danger of majoritarian dominance and disregard of certain members of the community. Communities and communitarian leadership must encompass two inviolable values in order for the community to stay healthy. The community must value the success and satisfaction of all members of the community by embracing the values of non-discrimination and non-repression (Amy

Guttman, 1995). These values combat the influence of majoritarianism within a community. Though many members of a community may come to think in a particular way regarding a specific issue, the refusal to disregard the voice and status as a member of the community will require responsiveness on the part of the community and therefore leaders within the community—Amitai Etzioni refers to this strong regard for individual members of a community as “Responsive Communitarianism” described more fully in *The Spirit of Community*, 1993. Healthy communities remain true to core values regardless of the will of the majority. Leaders who value community will emphasize those values in order to achieve progress for the entire community and not just a select few.

Defining leadership as a social force brings the reciprocal nature of leadership to the forefront. Leadership is a relationship that develops between people in an inter-subjective environment. It requires at least two people for the creation of the leadership relationship but leadership remains in the consciousness of all involved in the relationship even when the people involved in the relationship are no longer present with other members. A communitarian perspective draws leadership out of the realm of the individualistic manipulation of motivation to a notion of shared values and common goals. In this sense, communities lead leaders as those communities develop the common values and leaders must lead from the common values or else lose the power given by the community. Leaders become the custodian of the values and are able to bring direction toward the accomplishment of the vision of the community. Assuming the role of leader comes with responsibility of remaining devoted to the community values but also allows the leaders creativity to influence the values as they evolve over time. Though one

person may become a leader, leadership is constituted by the relationship involving all members of the community.

Within communities, the leadership of groups (even the entire membership) and individuals springs from common values. To be sure, leadership as it applies to social groups that are primarily concerned with the rights of individuals also taps into interests that individuals have in common, but those interests place the individual over the group. To the extent that the interests assure each individual certain aspects of life to be left unfettered by others in society, the interests can form the foundation from which an individual or group can sway the actions and gain the support from those in the larger society. From a communitarian perspective, the formation of leadership around the rights of individuals to the detriment of social groups ignores significant factors in society. First, people live in groups. To formulate one's interests around the idea of the autonomous subject seems to ignore that such an idea presupposes that people can live completely outside the influence of others. Second, the very foundation of leadership must be called into question within such an individualistic perspective, as the rights of the individual should certainly supersede any influence that would be generated by leadership. Furthermore, how can leadership transcend the notion that individuals make decisions outside the influence of others in its attempts to gain support of various ideas? Leadership, as it champions the interests of individuals is vulnerable to calculative followers who base loyalty to ideas on remunerative aspects rather than the moral commitment of values important to community.

Community suggests the formation of a unity around shared values and meanings, which must of course be created by the individuals within the community in the interest

of valuing the entire membership. Some community members (leaders) or collections of members will be influential in the advocacy of those shared meanings and the shaping of the values. Etzioni (1961) defines this advocacy as “Expressive Communication.” “Expressive communication changes or reinforces attitudes, norms, and values” (p.138). Leadership relies upon expressive communication to motivate others within the community to focus on the group’s shared values as community members undertake action. Other community members, in turn, either support the interpretations of these influential members of the community, which will increase their influence, or will reject the interpretations, which will decrease the influence of such members or cause them to rethink their interpretations. A cyclical phenomenon develops in which community norms are constantly being shaped by individuals within the group who articulate those values in calls to action and then re-articulates the values as time passes and community visions and needs change. Leadership, whether it come from a single individual or a collection of individuals, interprets values as a means to influence and in turn is redirected by the values important to the community.

Leadership is the ability to influence the actions of others within social relationships. Leaders within this conception of leadership must necessarily have others who become followers within the context of the social situation. John Gardner (1990) elaborates on this conception when he describes leadership: “Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by an individual (or leadership team) that induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p.1). Just as community is an inter-subjective creation that is formed among a group of people and exists even in the absence of the group once created, leadership has the same

quality, as it is the meanings conveyed through expressive leadership that endure within the individual outside of the social context. Followers outside of direct interaction with the leader will feel the influence of leadership. “Leaders are inevitably symbols...The top leader of community or nation symbolizes the group’s collective identity and continuity” (Gardner, p. 18). The leader is at once an influence, symbol and director for followers but is provided with that influence by the will of the followers and the strength of the shared meanings that exist within the community. The reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers rests upon the meaning developed in the community.

The inter-subjective context within which leadership is created is not dependent upon a set formula for defining leaders and followers. At a given time within a community, several competing leaders may exist or groups of leaders. At other times, the community may be unified behind one dominant leader or find itself in a situation in which the entire community comprises the leadership team and follows its own jointly interpreted meanings.

Any social group, if it is more than a crowd of unrelated strangers, has shared needs, beliefs, aspirations, values, hopes and fears. The group creates norms that tend to control the behavior of its members, and the norms constitute the social order. It is in this context that leaders arise; and it is this context that determines what kinds of leaders emerge and what is expected of them. (Gardner, p.28)

Leadership will develop within a given social situation based upon a number of factors. Some come to lead on the basis of personal characteristics such as charisma—an important term in Max Weber’s theories. Others come to lead on the basis of factors that are conferred upon the individual such as status or position. Leadership should not be confused with management. Managers make decisions based upon procedures or regulations without a great deal of meaningful reflection on the matters. Managers may

find themselves in the position of leader, just as leaders will find themselves functioning as managers in certain situations. Leadership, in contrast to management, rests upon the meanings shared by the community and how those in leadership situations shape those meanings. “Leaders do not create motivation out of thin air. They unlock or channel existing motives” (Gardner, p.14).

Much literature is devoted to great leaders and much research and speculation has been directed toward identifying those who can successfully lead. Despite the attention to the topic, no exact set of qualities can be narrowed down for great leaders nor can any procedure be found that identifies leaders with precise accuracy. Some authors attribute strong leadership to the set of circumstances in which the person finds him or herself while others continue to seek the formula of qualities necessary for strong leaders in given situations. What many agree upon, in a post-facto arena, is that leaders do come to the fore of social situations and have significant influence upon the unfolding of events. History is packed with examples of likely and unlikely leaders who are interpreted as instrumental within their particular circumstances. Given the importance of leadership, the study of internal and external characteristics of leaders will certainly continue. Leadership in the context of community can be seen in the same manner though without the same level of fanfare.

Leadership emanates from the will of the group. Though pluralism will exist within the group, it is the primary shared vision and values that unite the members of the community to a common cause. Viktor Frankl (1959), in his description of his therapeutic technique called Logotherapy, describes the existential crisis in contemporary societies and advocates “the will to meaning” as the driving force in human motivation.

In other words, people need to find meaning in their lives in order to consider life worthwhile. “Commitment to community is not unrelated to the problem of finding meaning in life—an ancient problem but never more widespread than today” (Gardner, p. 189). Community must provide meaning for its members. It is the shared meaning and values that provide the platform from which leadership develops, and the membership can progress to the realization of the preferred picture of the future. Leadership is at once a reflection of the community and a catalyst to the membership. The community depends upon leadership to challenge and motivate people within the community while leadership depends on the community to generate the shared meanings that garner the commitment from individuals to realize the visions of the community.

John Gardner takes up the subject of deviance within leadership roles in his book, On Leadership. A deviant leader takes the meanings developed within the group and twists them into an immoral quest, which serves the interests of power rather than the interests of the community. The community under deviant leadership will slowly lose the important elements of normative participation and move to a more coercive organization in which the alienated orientation of members in the organization will increase. Community will degenerate until it becomes an organization operating under a deluded sense of their corrupted original vision or a group trying to recover its direction. If the organization seeks to regain its direction, it will mean removal of the deviant leader as those with commitment to the core values of the organization must come to the lead in reestablishing community.

Communities require expressive leaders who lead from a foundation of the core values of the community.

Humans are believing animals. They have religious beliefs. They hold to one or another political doctrine. They have beliefs that supply meaning in their lives, beliefs that tell them how to conduct themselves, beliefs that console. The leader who understands those beliefs and acts in terms of that understanding has tapped a source of power. If the system of ideas is deeply embedded in the culture, it can play a significant role in legitimizing leaders and in validating their acts. (Gardner, p. 61)

Constant expressive communication is the key to effective and influential leadership within the community as the leadership must continuously place the core meanings of the organization in front of its membership so that the group can continue to progress toward its goals without losing its way as a result of the short-sighted thinking that tends to distract individuals within their day-to-day lives. “Expressive communication is essential for the effective performance of normative organizations” (Etzioni, p. 140). Leadership becomes a symbol of the common causes of the community as the communication of the leadership has a lasting effect within the membership. Though an individual member may never meet a given leader or hear the leader's message at a given point in time, the influence of leadership will still be felt as the message of the leader and the entire community will resonate with individuals outside of the direct interaction between a leading member of the community and a following member of the community. Leadership is formed within the inter-subjective communication of people within a community and extends its influence beyond those confines to impact the thinking and actions of community members beyond direct interaction.

Communitarian Leadership in School Reform

Recent trends in school reform suggest a tendency toward communitarian thinking in educational organizations. The “Professional Learning Community”

framework espoused by Rick Dufour and the “Working on the Work” initiative authored by Philip Schlechty are two such reform models that begin with a foundation of building a shared sense of purpose within a given school and working in a highly interdependent environment in order to achieve the shared goals of the educational community. Public schools have long been dominated by a factory model institutionalization of practice that places students in the position of products as the output of the school. Within the factory model, teachers fall into the role of line workers who install a piece of knowledge into the student and pass the student to the next teacher until the student becomes finished.

“Professional Learning Communities” and “Working on the Work” are more representative of communitarian thinking as these models seek to integrate the knowledge and the skills of the collective to strengthen the entire community and facilitate success for students.

Thomas Sergiovanni's (1994, 2000) theory of steward leadership promotes the importance of building community and developing the "power to" instead of "power over." The leader as steward seeks to guide an organization through shared meaning rather than dictate organizational direction as the CEO of a major corporation might. Outrage, purposing and empowerment are the tools used by steward-leader to inspire commitment within the organization toward common goals. Outrage is directed toward aspects of the organization that are not in line with the moral character of the group while purposing and empowering allow members of the group to direct that outrage toward the benefit of the organization. Effective steward-leaders unify the community in such a way that it self-directs how it will accomplish its common goals.

Steward leaders rely on collaborative decision making to unify the entire

organization around important decisions. A leader who takes sole responsibility for making organizational decisions exercises "power over" rather than "power to."

Collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of responsibility among members of the group as they have shared in choosing the direction for the group based on the group's moral commitment. A community of meaning is established through group decision-making processes as each member of the group must share an understanding of the core purposes of the group and interpret such meaning through the decisions reached by the group. Members of the group benefit from the ability to share in decisions that are important to the entire group and gain a sense of the "power to" affect desired change and accomplishment.

In Etzioni's work, A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations, he places schools in the category of normative institutions. The development of standards movements and strict government accountability has taken many schools toward a more calculative orientation from its members. Actions are undertaken within the organizations by students, teachers and administrators in pursuit of higher test scores as measured by standardized tests. Though any educational reform model must ultimately yield results in student achievement, "Professional Learning Communities" and "Working on the Work" emphasize shared meaning among members of the educational community as the foundation for community guided by the core value of student learning. The foundation for "Professional Learning Communities" is confirmed by Richard Dufour (2002) when he states, "The first critical rule of building a learning community is to build a solid foundation of shared mission, vision, values and goals" (p.4). Philip Schlechty (1997,) in describing the "Working on the Work" initiative,

elaborates on the powerful meaning of shared values when he states, "...words like beliefs, vision and mission have meaning in the context of the lives of organizations complex as schools and schools systems" (p. 60). In a previous work, Schlechty (1976) categorized schools, while expanding the ideas of Etzioni, and showed how schools can adopt many orientations toward the completion of their respective educational edicts. Ultimately, Schlechty and Etzioni agree that an organization will have rules and processes that are congruent with the orientation, or the dissonance created by incongruence within the organization will gradually cause the rules and processes to move into congruence with its orientation. The building of community within a school, an organization with a highly normative orientation, places meanings and values as the compelling aspects of the organization and suggests a leadership style based on shared meanings.

Leadership within school reform models with a communitarian orientation places school leaders in the position of keeping primary values before members of the community at all times. The message of the leader will be clear in all communications from staff meetings to memos that must have the values and goals of the community as the foundation for action. The educational leader becomes a model for the values of the community in the decisions made for the future of the organization. The charisma of the leader in the form of strong beliefs and compelling expressive communication becomes much more important to the educational leader as opposed to the manager who relies on the power of the position rather than the leadership power of community meaning. The leadership style must be congruent with the interdependent nature of community in order to keep the organization from reverting to calculative or coercive orientations.

From the sociological foundations of Weber, through the communitarian treatment of Etzioni, and the educational focus of Schlechty, the orientation of organizations and those individuals within the organizations dictate the power structure within an organization. The inter-subjective creation of community and leadership among groups of individuals is founded upon shared meanings and common values. Community and leadership are created within the inter-subjective realm and then carried by each individual so that both influence the individual regardless of the presence of other members of the community. The powerful social forces are the conduits of power that support the accomplishment of shared goals and are key components for meaningful educational environments.

The urban school district serving as the focus of this study provides a challenging environment for communitarian leadership. Social theory and leadership theory provide the logical foundation for the work being undertaken in the Midwestern School District, but the viability of communitarian leadership within this urban district will be better understood through assessment in practice. Intentional creation of community in the Midwestern School District will depend upon focused leadership and developing a sense of confidence in the organization. Close examination of the Midwestern School District will provide insight into the community development process, if it is viable, and give a sense of the progress made in the district.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Methodology

Understanding the influence of communitarian leadership and reform within an urban American school district calls for interpretation of varied forms of data. Survey and interview data begin to form a picture but these data sources alone cannot provide the depth of information necessary for an understanding of how communitarian reform and leadership are influencing Midwestern School District. In Learning by Heart (2001), Roland Barth laments, “Sadly, our profession seems neither to trust nor to rely on the accumulated wisdom of its own practitioners” (pp 55-56). The work of third person social scientists and educational researchers is a more privileged way of knowing than the first person work of educators who live the study day-by-day. Barth adds,

What is desperately needed in deliberations about the reform of our nation's schools is a continual conversation between social scientist and educator. Each has tough and important questions to ask the other. I believe that only with the provocation, with the checks and balances each part of the knowledge base provides the other, can we accomplish what neither can accomplish alone. (p.63)

This study seeks to add information from sources that honor the experience and expertise of professionals in the field of education through observation, survey, interview, and document analysis to the theory and research of social scientists. Placing the results of each mode of data collection in the context of the information collected through the other modes will provide a view of this district undergoing communitarian reform that holds much insight and information that a purely quantitative study could not provide.

A variety of methods must be employed to answer the questions posed in this study. To answer questions regarding the feasibility of creating community within a school and seeking to present the status of the district with regard to the establishment of

community requires interpretive analysis of beliefs and attitudes that lends itself to a qualitative study. The use of survey, interview, document analysis and embedded observation will best reveal the influence of this reform effort within the district. Each of the modes of inquiry will seek to determine the influence of communitarian leadership as it pertains to five dimensions. Two of the dimensions, commonality and cohesion, are indicators of the district's progress toward becoming a community. The second two dimensions, efficacy and optimism/perseverance, are examined to determine the extent of support the reform has among members of the organization and the likelihood that members of the district will "stay the course" of the reform. The final dimension, leadership message, reveals perceptions of the influence of leaders in the district in the consistency of their communitarian message and the influence of their leadership. The five dimensions frame the interpretation of Midwestern School District's status in communitarian reform.

Commonality

To gauge the district's communitarian environment, it is important to ascertain the degree of commonality that is developing in the district. Commonality refers to the extent that people within the district share common beliefs, attitudes and values as they refer to the mission and the reform framework in the district. For Midwestern School District, the critical aspects of commonality center upon the beliefs that all students can learn at high levels and the complimentary values encouraged within "Professional Learning Communities" reform initiative. The degree of consensus around these ideas shows the development of community within the district. Assessing attitudes and beliefs as they regard the critical aspects of this community involves gathering information in a

variety of ways.

The fundamental belief that supports the development of community around learning issues is a belief that all students can learn at high levels. Building a collaborative culture, one that emphasizes educators working collectively and collaboratively to improve learning continuously, is likely an empty endeavor without a belief that the work can result in higher levels of learning. Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) describes the commonality of ideas in *Building Community in Schools*, “Instead of being tied to bartering arrangements, this social structure bonds people together in a oneness and binds them to an idea structure. The bonding together of people in special ways and the bringing of them to shared values and ideas are the defining characteristics of schools as communities” (p.4). Organizationally supportive beliefs and commitments held in common form the community culture. Ascertaining the level of commitment around fundamental values involves interpreting information from a number of sources. The actions of people in the district in both formal and informal settings should indicate a belief in the learning ability of all students. The belief should also be a frequent part of written and oral expression in communications in the district. The belief in student learning for all students underlies the characteristics emphasized in “Professional Learning Communities.”

Several values guide the focus on student learning in the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative. The common belief in the potential of all students to learn at high levels is supported by shared values in how to improve student learning. Collective acceptance of these values orchestrates the actions of members in the community toward the common goal of increasing student academic achievement. Unlike some

organizations that may share a common belief but do not coordinate common action, the common values of “Professional Learning Communities” seek to assure that actions guided by values are well directed. The degree of commonality in the beliefs, values and actions of the district determines the progress of this district in creating educational community.

Cohesion

When considering communitarian leadership, cohesion within a group is a quality indicative of the group's progress in developing community. Cohesion is a characteristic of groups that describes togetherness as demonstrated through interdependence and commonly held values among the people within the group. Cohesion transcends the willingness of people to support the general direction or will of the group; rather, the belief in the importance of the values held by the group and the interdependence of the group combine to show greater cohesion. In the words of Roland Barth (1994),

In communities, for example, the connection of people to purpose and the connections among people are not based on contracts but commitments. Communities are socially organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them ... The bonding together of people in special ways and the bringing of them to shared values and ideas are the defining characteristics of schools as communities. Communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of "we" from "I." (p.4)

Cohesion is as much felt as it is seen by group members when groups coalesce around common beliefs and values. When groups commit to certain ideas or values that guide their work, the people within the group unify with the common values as the central point. Cohesion is a vital part in the transformation cycle of a group as common values and goals help to build greater cohesiveness in the group. Greater cohesiveness then

contributes to stronger belief in the mission of the group as close personal relationships create stronger motivation for people support the group. Cohesion is an important part of developing community in a district.

Within groups of people who strive with common purpose is the potential to develop an intangible enhancing characteristic the helps to spur the group in reaching its goals. Cohesion operates in a reciprocating process with fundamental values and beliefs in a group. When a group begins to develop a core set of values and beliefs, the degree to which members of the group adopt the ideas encourages unity among the members. People become closer on a variety of interpersonal levels because of the shared core beliefs. The bonds that develop increase the level of commitment to the core beliefs, as those beliefs are the foundation for the commonalities that define the interpersonal bonds. The process continues in this mutually strengthening cycle and strong community is founded on the shared core beliefs of the group.

The strength of cohesion within a group is partially dependent on the perceptions of cohesion among members of the group. Though people in the group may believe strongly in the goals of the group and act accordingly, the degree of belief in the cohesiveness of the group also has a bearing on the potential for cohesion in the group. People are more willing to commit to a group when they see that many people within the group are similarly committed. On the other hand, people who do not perceive that others are committed to a group may still adhere to many of the values shared within the group but will not commit their belief to the group. When this happens, the group cannot benefit from the mutually beneficial cycle of cohesion that contributes to the creation of community. Building a strong community requires adoption of a common ideology and

recognition among members of the group that others in the group have pledged commitment to the common mission.

Efficacy

People prefer to participate in meaningful activities in which they feel they can be successful. Building community within a group depends to a certain extent upon the perceived ability of the group to be successful. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2004) explains,

Expectations about the likelihood of eventual success determine the amount of effort people are willing to put in. Those who are convinced that they can be successful in carrying out the actions required for a successful outcome—who have "self efficacy"—are likely to try harder and to persist longer when they face obstacles. (p.39)

The perceptions of efficaciousness felt by people are influenced by results they get from their initial efforts. Also, the extent to which people attribute results to the efforts of the group rather than external forces or the work of chance greatly influences the feelings of efficacy among members of a group. Assessing the level of efficacy experienced by members of a group takes a twofold effort of ascertaining people's perceptions of results and their attributions made regarding the cause of the results.

In a laboratory, with all of the inherent controls and safeguards for validity, researchers securely report the results of their experimentation. Social scientists, who conduct research immersed in the complexity of society, use triangulation to draw qualified conclusions regarding social situations but not with the same degree of certainty. Conversely, people assessing daily results while absorbed in the web of social interaction also draw many conclusions about the results of their actions without the conscious attempt at qualified objectivity claimed by the social scientist, but make those judgments with the certainty shown by the laboratory scientist. Therefore, when people

are judging efficacy within their groups, the level of success combined with the perceptions of those within the group help to determine the degree of community development in the group.

People attribute results to a number of varying factors as they observe social phenomena. Often people will look at the most apparent factors when making attributions. For instance, they may attribute causation of a result to an event that immediately preceded the result. In other circumstances, people have been known to attribute results to mere luck or chance. Since causal factors of social results cannot be determined with absolute certainty, people can assign cause to any number of factors and justify their conclusion, especially to themselves. Though positive results for an organization may occur in close connection to the adoption of communitarian interaction within a group, members of the group may attribute the positive results to other factors. Obtaining member commitment to communitarian group processes through efficacy is partially dependent upon group successes and the tendency of members to attribute those successes to communitarian initiative of the group.

Perseverance

Intentional community does not coalesce in the course of a few months or the entire school year for that matter. Furthermore, maintaining community requires continuous monitoring by members of the community in order to retain coherence and focus. Optimism, as it pertains to a positive sense that the group will reach its goals and willingness to endure setbacks on the way to achieving those goals, is a necessary ingredient for the group for community to develop and endure. A general sense of optimism among members of the group leads to the perseverance so important to

consistent progress. Belief in the capacity of the organization and faith in the vision of a better future are critical pieces of a strong community.

Groups do not achieve important goals without determination in the face of challenges. When stated in the context of school improvement, this definition of perseverance takes on the quality of understatement. The changing demands of public schools coupled with entrenched traditions make transforming schools into successful learning institutions a test of tenacity and endurance. The ability to persist in the face of great challenges comes with member perceptions of power. “The heart and soul of community development is the work of empowering the people. Empowerment is the process of setting up situations so that other people have access to power: power to change things, power to heal themselves, power to build a better future” (Marum, p.62) Power gives people in a community the will to continue with group courses of action in the face of initial failures and constant barriers to change. They must be willing to bridge the gap between knowing what to do to actually doing the difficult and enduring work (Dufour, 2005). The success of the group must be so important that people can set aside excuses and continue to press forward. The meaning behind the struggle unites and supports a community intent on success.

A belief in the ability of the organization must be complimented by a corresponding belief that the goals of the group are worth achieving. A similar concept is developed in Viktor Frankl’s book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Viktor Frankl is a psychotherapist and survivor of the Holocaust. He captures the heart of perseverance when describing the attitude that helped him to survive Nazi concentration camps when, in a twist of bitter irony, he quotes Nietzsche: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear

with almost any *how*" (p.97). Though building a successful learning community cannot rival his struggle for survival, his statement illuminates an important aspect of perseverance. As long as people know why they are changing comfortable practices, enduring setbacks and taking on difficult challenges the will to continue in spite of challenges is more prevalent. On the other hand, those who do not see the point are likely to surrender their goals at the first sign of the inevitable setbacks that accompany any transformation process. Meaning is essential to sustaining the optimism important to building and sustaining community.

Leadership Message

The "intentional" aspect of intentional community is greatly influenced by leadership of the group. Gardner (1990) suggests, "Skills in the building and rebuilding of community is not just another of the innumerable requirements of contemporary leadership. It is one of the highest and most essential skills a leader can command" (p.118). Those who seek to exercise those essential skills, both formal and informal leaders, must be cognizant of the messages guiding the group toward community. Leaders must be willing to monitor their messages and be sensitive to the messages being received. Focus is key for leaders as they seek to keep the attention of the group on core values and shared goals of the group. Continual effort must be made by leaders to obtain feedback from all members of the group regarding the messages received. Though leaders may consider their intended messages right on target, the focused intentions will not help the groups develop community if they are not received the way they were intended. Revealing the perceived leadership messages in a group is an important indicator of developing community for a group.

One aspect of leadership that influences the perception of messages is the competence attributed to leaders by members of the group. For leaders who are respected for their ability, members of the group are much more likely to give credence to what they say and commit their effort to plans for change that they suggest. “Leaders are inevitably symbols” (Gardner, p.18) and perceptions of their ability to be successful carry through to the membership. Conversely, those leaders who are not seen as capable by members of the group will have difficulty garnering the group’s support regardless of the quality of the leader. In extreme cases, one could argue whether or not the term leader applies to a person who may have authoritative positional authority but lacks significant influence in guiding the actions of the group. Leaders gain credibility through successes brought to the group. It is important for leaders to attain successes in leadership opportunities in order to have influence in successive leadership situations.

Once leadership capacity is established through attributes such as competence, leaders in a group must convey a clear and focused message within the group. “Expressive communication is essential for the effective performance of normative organizations. In order to attain their goals, they must maintain an intensive flow of downward expressive communication and remove blocks that may develop” (Etzioni, 1961). A leader in the group may become powerful through early successes, but the influence may be misdirected if the leader does not have a clear vision the leader does not convey the message clearly. A strong leader may powerfully misguide a group, though not intentionally, if that person does not articulate a direction for the group in such a way that people understand how to proceed. A leader may also cloud a vision by encouraging so many courses of action that the group loses focus on the most important actions and

finds very little success on any of the many activities. Leadership credibility must be accompanied with leadership focus if the group is to achieve its goals.

Qualitative Methodology

Developing a clear and credible picture of how communitarian reform is taking shape within an urban district requires interpretation of a number of sources of information. Intentional community is not a concept that can be measured in a purely quantitative process. “Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus” (Flick p.229). The data to describe this reform came from a variety of sources that are compared to one another to draw probable conclusions regarding the progress of reform.

To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, researchers employ various procedures, two of the most common being redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations (Denzin, 1989; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). For qualitative casework, these procedures generally are called triangulation. (Stake p.148)

Survey and interview data seek to gauge the attitudes and perceptions of members of the district regarding reform values and the current success of the reform. Document analysis and district data analysis—in the form of accountability measures required by the district's state board of education—help to describe the leadership message within the district and the level of success of early initiatives. Observation from an embedded observer provides insight into all of the aspects of the reform that would not necessarily be available from an outside observer. Triangulation of method works to develop an accurate and useful interpretation of the progress of reform in this district.

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln p.4). The embedded researcher’s existence within the environment of study locates the researcher within this organization undergoing transformation. The role

of embedded observer affords this researcher the opportunity to reach a clarity of observation that may not be available to an outside, clinical observer. Holding an administrative position in the district opens observation to administrative meetings, lunchroom conversation and daily interaction among staff members. Furthermore, the administrative role places this researcher in leader and follower situations in position to relate varying experiences in relation to leadership in the district. A certain level of familiarity is also available to an embedded observer where an outside observer may not engender the same level of comfort. Embedded observation offers a richness and depth of observation unavailable to a clinical observer. The type of observation that makes observing the emotional dynamics and social interactions that constitute "community" and recognizing them through the familiarity with the people involved. Though embedded observation offers many advantages, one cannot ignore the greater potential for bias from this source.

Observation of events within the district and the day-to-day functioning of the schools reveals a perspective of the district's vision and values in action. Careful observation of events not only helps to interpret what values drive the organization, but observation helps to reveal to what extent those values guide the organization. Districts can display statements of vision and values on letterhead and wall hangings, but it is the actions of all members of the organization that truly indicate what is important to the district. Interpretation of observations of the district will be critical to the study. Conducting research as an inside observer allows for a rich interpretation of the events that will help place them in a perspective not otherwise available. Interview information will serve as a guiding force to observational interpretation to help avoid

misinterpretation in addition to adding its own perspective. Observing key events in this midwestern district helps to define its progress in the early stages of reform.

Clinical observation, with the prerequisite protocols, seeks to limit much of the bias inherent in human observation. Many studies utilize a clinical observer who seeks to capture only what can be observed so that factual information can be gleaned untainted by interpretation. Since the observer has no previous experiences with the subjects or environments to be observed, the potential for bias in the observations is limited; limited, but not eliminated. Despite the clinical rigors with which researchers seek to capture situations and the assumed neutrality of the observer, human factors do not vanish. Unfortunately for the conception of neutrality, even the most dispassionate observer sees situations through the lens of previous experience. Often, observers have biases of which they may not even be aware. Regardless of the clinical or embedded stance of the observer, a critical aspect of relating observational data is making plain the biases of the observer.

The observer in this study is a school administrator in one of the schools within the district. Working as a leader in one of the schools inspires a degree of loyalty to the district and those who work within the district. Therefore, this researcher must be continually aware of only noting those events and interactions that show the schools and district in a positive light. As a leader in the district, it is also easy to relate leadership actions through the lens of the intentions behind the actions rather than the perceptions of those actions from followers within the district and the results generated from various courses of action. This study will seek to capture all facets of leadership practices through many data gathering modes in addition to observation. Awareness of these

biases, in the reader as well as the researcher, will help to mitigate the bias inherent in embedded observation.

Document analysis provides information about the organization that is important in developing a complete picture of aspects of communitarian leadership in the district. One quality of the information gleaned from document analysis is that the documents are created in the course of the usual functioning of the organization. Unlike information obtained through interview or survey, those who generate documents disseminated within the district are largely unaware that the documents will be examined to seek information regarding communitarian qualities of the district. As Rick Dufour says in closing On Common Ground, “The true mission of a school is revealed by what people do, not by what they say” (Dufour et al 2005, p. 229). Though the people creating the documents do not specifically speak to communitarianism, the subject and the actions described in the documents speak volumes toward what the people in the district value.

Information gained from document analysis also provides another viewpoint from which to situate information gained from the observations of an embedded observer. Documents have a quality of lasting tangibility unavailable to observation. The observer must make decisions in the moment regarding what information is captured and what information is omitted. Documents can be reviewed more than once and also can be reviewed outside of the time window in which they were generated. So, a researcher can analyze documents with a high degree of scrutiny as well as review them long after events tied to the documents have transpired with the perspective of hindsight. While the methodology of document analysis is still subject to the biases of the researcher, the tangibility of the documents provides an important dimension combined with other

methods of qualitative data collection.

Survey and interview responses complete the research methodology of this study. Surveys were distributed to all certificated members of the district. Interview respondents were chosen to represent every building in the district by a random selection of at least two respondents from each building. The strength of data gained from these sources is the direct relevance of the questions to the subject of study. Interview and survey questions were written with specific goals in mind to gauge district members' attitudes and beliefs regarding the concepts of "Professional Learning Communities" and toward communitarian interaction and leadership. The potential liability with surveys and interviews is the subjects' knowledge of participating in the study. Subject reliability can be influenced by a desire to select answers that position the organization in what they consider a positive or negative light depending upon their feelings without carefully considering the accuracy of their answers. Another potential source of bias, especially with interview data, stems from the possibility that negative answers to questions regarding leadership and the direction of the district may have adverse consequences if revealed to authority figures in the district. Informed consent confidentiality assurances may not alleviate such concerns. Interview and survey responses as they relate to the five dimensions of communitarian leadership provide specific information valuable to the study that must be placed in the context of information obtained in other ways.

The answers to interview questions asked of various people within the district will help to describe the perceptions of change, if any, that are occurring in the district. Communitarian reform seeks to build elements of community intentionally. Community is founded on a sense of shared meaning found in its vision and values. Observation may

reveal people acting as though they are committed to the ideals of the district though they may secretly oppose or question the effectiveness of such actions. Interviews will seek to learn how much action is taken as a result of belief and commitment as opposed to fear of reprisal. Though interviews include a potential for subjects to mislead, careful presentation of methods to insure anonymity should mitigate any motivation to provide anything but honest answers. Interview information is a necessary compliment to observational data in forming a more complete analysis of the district.

Interview and survey questions were created with the direct intent of gathering information around five common themes. The questions were designed to elicit member feedback concerning the degree of commonality, the feeling of optimism, the level of cohesion, the sense of group efficacy and the competence and focus of leadership. Member feedback is essential to obtaining information about these important aspects of the organization. A Likert Scale was used to determine the degree of agreement or disagreement with statements concerning each one of these aspects of the organization (Survey Instrument and Interview Protocol are located in the Appendices). Survey questions encouraged an open-ended response in which respondents could answer in any manner they chose. A review of these questions follows.

The statements designed to evaluate the common values among the members of the group focus on critical characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” as defined by Rick Dufour (1998). Survey questions designed to assess attitudes toward the capabilities of all students, collaboration among staff members, common learning values, continuous improvement, focus on results and data, shared inquiry and action research were asked in the survey. Table 3.1 lists the questions and the rationale for each.

Responses of 2 or 1 for these questions suggest a high degree of commonality among the members of the organization. The table also includes interview questions created to reveal interviewees attitudes toward the values. Agreement and positive responses with regard to these values would suggest a developing learning community with these values at the core.

Table 3.1

Question Statement or Question	Rationale
Every student is capable of success in every subject (Survey)	Measures agreement with foundational learning value that supports intensive work with all students.
If a student is given enough time and varied instruction, that student can master any subject (Survey)	Measures agreement with foundational learning value that supports intensive work with all students.
More than half of the people I work with agree to common learning values developed in collaboration with each other (Survey)	Measures member perception of the development of common values at their work sites.
I believe that my school district must continually strive to improve (Survey)	Measures agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
Teacher use of data is essential for improving student achievement (Survey)	Measures agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
Focusing on results is essential for improving student achievement (Survey)	Measures agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
I believe that intervention strategies are essential for increasing student achievement (Survey)	Measures agreement with core learning value of individual intervention with student to support learning.
Using action research to determine if teaching practices are working is essential for increasing student achievement (Survey)	Measures agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
Collaboration among teachers is essential to improvement in student achievement (Survey)	Measures agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
What do you consider to be the dominant values of our school district? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of core district values.
Have values changed since the introduction of professional learning communities? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of “Professional Learning Communities” influence on core district values
Do you think that collaboration is highly valued where you work? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of work site agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work

Do you think that using data is highly value where you work? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of work site agreement with core value of “Professional Learning Community” work
Do you think that people adhere to the values and vision that have been created where you work? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of work site acceptance of core values.

Several survey statements focused on the respondents' agreement or disagreement with the possibility of a favorable future for the entire district and school groups.

Optimism and confidence are strong indicators that people will remain committed to an initiative for an extended duration. Without a sense of optimism, the organization could be subject to adopting other reform strategies or succumb to going through the motions of change rather than working with a true expectation of success. Table 3.2 lists the questions from the survey and the interview created to measure subjects' feelings of optimism. Responses of 1 or 2 on the survey and expressions of confidence from the interview are indicators of commitment to the process. Complex, social change takes time; commitment to a lengthy change process is essential.

Table 3.2

Statement or Question	Rationale
I feel strongly that our Professional Learning Community will achieve its goals (Survey)	Measures member confidence in the work performed in site collaborative team.
I believe my school district is improving (Survey)	Seeks member perception of recent district performance.
I am optimistic that my school district will reach its goals guided by Professional Learning Community values (Survey)	Seeks member perception of confidence in success for the district with the current reform initiative.
How do you feel about future prospects for the district with Professional Learning Communities as the focus? (Interview)	Seeks member perception of confidence in success for the district with the current reform initiative.

Member cohesion is investigated through inquiry focusing on individual tendency toward belonging to an organization and perceptions of overall organizational togetherness. Feelings of belonging to the organization or sub-groups of the organization indicate growing community within the organization. Belonging engenders a sense of commitment and purpose above simple employment or participation. Perceptions of overall togetherness within the organization suggest that members of the organization sense a movement that is bringing people together with a sense of shared purpose. Survey responses of 1 or 2 from the questions listed in Table 3.3 suggest a high level of cohesion within the district. Interview answers that emphasize togetherness also suggest a desire by subjects to engage in communitarian reforms. Developing community suggests fostering greater cohesiveness in an organization. Supportive responses to the survey questions may be indicative that communitarian reform is germinating.

Table 3.3

Statement or Question	Rationale
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my Professional Learning Community (Survey)	Measures member sense of cohesion with collaborative team.
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my school (Survey)	Measures member sense of cohesion with school.
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my school district (Survey)	Measures member sense of cohesion with school district.
I believe that Professional Learning Community concepts have drawn my school district closer together (Survey)	Seeks member perception of reform initiative influence on cohesiveness at school district.
My school district is a more cohesive community than it has been in years past (Survey)	Seeks member perception of school district cohesiveness in comparison to past years.
My school is a more cohesive community than it has been in years past (Survey)	Seeks member perception of school cohesiveness in comparison to past years.
I believe that Professional Learning Community concepts have drawn my school closer together (Survey)	Seeks member perception of reform initiative influence on cohesiveness at school.

A critical factor to any reform is belief among members of the organization that the initiative is working. People want to engage in activities that are successful. A number of questions in the survey and interview seek to measure the feelings of efficacy among members of the organization. The perception of organizational efficacy has a great deal of influence over commitment to the values and goals of the group as well as general commitment to the organization as a member. The questions listed in Table 3.4 are created to obtain information about subjects' perceptions of efficacy around key concepts of “Professional Learning Communities.” Interview questions are also listed in the table to obtain more detailed information about the perceived efficacy of the organizational values including identification of organizational values. A high level of agreement with the efficacy of the values and positive responses to interview questions regarding the values is suggestive of developing community around core values. Community is dependent upon shared goals and confidence in common values for achieving those goals is essential.

Table 3.4

Statement or Question	Rationale
Opportunities for collaboration empower teachers to solve problems of teaching practice (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative processes.
Conducting action research has contributed to increases in student achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of action research.
Analyzing and using data has contributed to increases in student achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of analyzing data for educational decisions.
The mission, vision and values of our school guide educational decisions at my school (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of mission, vision and values statements in guiding school decisions.
The values advocated by Professional Learning Communities support district improvement in achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of the reform initiative in its entirety.

I feel that I have influence with regard to decisions affecting student learning (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of their own empowerment to influence educational decisions.
Developing shared vision and mission has contributed to increases in student achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of mission, vision and values in increasing student achievement.
Collaboration has contributed to increases in student achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative processes.
I believe that intervention strategies are essential for increasing student achievement (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of the effectiveness of student intervention practices in increasing student achievement.

The final set of questions included on the survey and the interview pertains to perceived leadership influence within the district. These questions seek to discover the perceptions of members of the organization regarding the consistency and effectiveness of leadership. The responses to these questions will help to answer the questions of whether building intentional community is feasible. Members of an organization know better than anyone how influential leaders are in influencing the direction of the organization. The questions listed in Table 3.5 address leadership in the district in terms of focus and consistency of message. Responses of 1 or 2 on the questions indicate agreement with the idea that leaders have been influential in building support of common values. The responses to interview questions should also yield important information regarding the influence of leadership in building community. Perceptions of leadership in the district should provide insight into the influence of leaders in generating communitarian support through this initiative.

Table 3.5

Statement or Question	Rationale
Collaboration is highly valued by leaders in my school district (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of district leaders focus on collaboration.

Focusing on results is highly valued by leaders in my school district (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of district leaders focus on emphasizing results.
Using data to increase student achievement is highly valued by leaders in my school district (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of district leaders focus on using data.
Conducting action research to increase student achievement is highly valued by leaders in my school district (Survey)	Measures member perceptions of district leaders focus on conducting action research.
How has the district changed, if at all, since the introduction of Professional Learning Communities? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of changes seen in the district since the introduction of the reform initiative.
Have you noticed changes in the attitudes and beliefs of people in the district since the introduction of Professional Learning Communities? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of changes noted in attitudes and beliefs of people within the organization since the introduction of the reform initiative.
Do leaders in the district influence the core values? If so, how? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of leaders' influence on the core values of the district.
What leadership practices, if any, have led you to become a more productive member of the educational community or a stronger supporter of building community? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of changes of leadership practices that have led to stronger support of developing community in the district.
What leadership practices, if any, have had an adverse effect on your participation or support of building community? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of changes of leadership practices that have led to resistance to developing community in the district.
Have there been any changes in the way that you work with others since the implementation of Professional Learning Communities? (Interview)	Seeks member perceptions of changes seen in work practices within the district since the introduction of the reform initiative.

The purpose of this study is to present a picture of an urban district undergoing intentional communitarian reform. In studying the information from this study, there may be conclusions that can be generalized to other urban districts or school districts in general. Generalizability, however, is not the strength of case studies. Research in many school districts would need to be completed in order to answer questions around generalizability with any kind of probability. This study seeks to reveal, in depth, a district undergoing possible transformation using a reform initiative touted by many

educational researchers and supported by communitarian social theory. Understanding the development of this organization in year three of its reform effort is the goal of this study. By gathering and interpreting information around many aspects of developing community, this study can serve as one example of how such a reform can progress and how influential leadership from a communitarian standpoint can have influence. The validity of this study is derived from the triangulation of several information sources: “Triangulation surfaces as a critical element in the practice of social science: ‘adding’ one layer of data to another to build a confirmatory edifice” (Fine et al, p.187). One source of data may point to possibility, but may also mislead a researcher. With multiple methods of data collection, the findings of a social science study become much stronger. Embedded observation, document analysis, survey and interview information must all be synthesized to create the most revealing picture possible. The implications suggested by this study will be based upon consideration of each mode of investigation as they pertain to each aspect of a growing educational community.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

The District

Midwestern School District—a name created for the sake of this study—is an urban organization in the midst of significant change. Physically, the district is in the initial stage of renewal as it is constructing new buildings. Five new elementary buildings will be constructed and two others will be renovated. Though there is optimism about the new buildings, it is tempered by anxiety regarding declining enrollment and its effect on the overall health of the district in terms of finances and morale. The district is experiencing the effects of a drastic overhaul of state curriculum standards and working to overcome low proficiency test scores. When the social and physical renovation began, the district was engaged in a time of value clarification regarding the purpose of each member's work in the organization. The district was at a time when it was difficult to identify its core values.

The city that constitutes most of the land area of the district is supported economically, politically and socially to a high degree by a steel plant. Unfortunately, the steel plant and the city are not what they once were. Various state agencies have discovered an assortment of violations at the plant and the customer demand for steel has declined. The area's dependence on the steel plant has exceeded the plant's ability to meet its needs. Midwestern School District reflects the diminishing vitality in the area in the demographics of the student body and the academic challenges it faces. The urban schools are home to a high number of students who come from single parent homes or homes where there is little or no income as jobs have decreased within the steel plant and other local businesses that depend upon the plant. The number of students who do not

speak English has tripled within the last year and the addresses of Section 8 housing developments can be found on a rising number of student enrollment forms. Clearly, the level of student need is high. Still, the focal point of concern for the urban district is the poor testing scores of Midwestern School District students and the perceived failure of the educational organization.

The perceived failure of the schools is just another degradation of the city that critics within the city use to justify the minimal effort made to restore the area to its past standard of living. Why not help beautify the town? Vandals and criminals will only destroy what is done. Should we pass a bond issue for school facilities? No, "You don't feed a dead dog," in the words of one city councilwoman delivered through the local newspaper. A recent district report card ranked Midwestern School District as a district in Academic Watch and three standards shy of matching the performance of a neighboring district, a distinct rival of Midwestern School District in several ways, including education. The Midwestern School District School Board reacted to the state report card and perceptions within the area by calling for each school's principal to deliver a data driven report regarding what was being done to advance each school's proficiency scores and how such programs were working. The call to accountability may have provided positive results for the efficacy needs of area critics and the school board, but the initial adverse effect within the schools added to a culture of losing among district educators.

The proud athletic and industrial history of the Midwestern School District holds the contemporary state of decline constant in the minds of many in the area. The recent citywide commotion over proficiency scores has fed into the lack of confidence and pride

already felt by many within the educational organization. A palpable defensiveness remains present within teachers as they continually cite the problems that students in the district bring to school that make them difficult, if not impossible, to educate. Even the students themselves seem to be aware of the perceptions and seek to excuse poor performance by adopting those expectations: "I'm dumb anyway." A steady pessimism was taking hold.

The reform framework initiated within the district, "Professional Learning Communities," was introduced to reverse the trend of poor results and the subsequent poor perceptions in the district. By focusing and combining the collective wisdom of educators in the district on matters of learning, the goal of the reform is to help the organization be more successful in its core business, student learning. The "Professional Learning Communities" framework serves another purpose, which is the focus of the study. The processes advocated by the framework are geared toward building community within the organization and allowing the strength of value-driven interdependence among members of the organization to bring success to the district. Creating and fostering community become the lynchpin in the success of the reform. Leaders in the district must be able to build community and foster values within that community that gain the collective commitment from educators in the district that will lead to educational success for students.

The annual leadership academy is a time when district leaders, teachers and administrators, come together to improve their understanding of district focus and initiatives. The 2004 gathering began with an activity that called for each school to review their respective vision and mission statements. Each school spent most of the

academy discussing the vision statements and what their schools need to do to realize the vision and fulfill the missions. The values for the district, and each individual school, were the focus of activity from the onset of the meeting. Each school shared highlights of the discussion and gave an outline of their plans.

Intermixed with the values of each school were messages from the assistant superintendent reviewing the six characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities.” At times, the assistant superintendent would ask all of the participants to list the characteristics. During the sharing of individual school discussion and plans, the assistant superintendent would refer to how the values reflected in the presentation did or did not fit with the values implied by the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities.” The academy activities, which included reading various materials and focused analysis of practices within each school, continued to revisit and clarify values held by participants.

District leadership, particularly in the central office, constantly emphasizes values. With the introduction of “Professional Learning Communities,” the value of collaboration is a constant focus as the reform model is founded on the belief that people working collectively can achieve greater success. Professional Learning Communities are powered by people working collaboratively with focus on district issues so that the organization can harness the insight and talents of all. The board of education is instrumental in district value leadership. In response to citizens in the Midwestern District, the board established fostering of diversity as one of the district goals. Leadership in the district was charged with the duty of creating a more harmonious and diverse multicultural environment within the schools. Values supporting this important

district goal as well as those that support a key feature of the district's reform model seem to receive highest priority from district leadership.

This case study of the Midwestern School District seeks to reveal the progress made toward creating the educational community within the district. By interpreting data collected in the areas of commonality, optimism, efficacy and cohesion, a picture of community development in this urban school district begins to form. Examining the perceptions of leadership in the district provides insight into the influence of leadership in the formation of community. This case study, taken in totality within the greater body of work in communitarian theory, may be helpful in describing the influence of communitarian leadership in urban educational organizations.

Results of the Study

Survey data, as the data source with the greatest number of subjects, provides an overview of the results of the study and forms a foundation for discussing each of the aspects of developing community. A compacted analysis of the statements related to each aspect showed a greater amount of agreement among district educators with a given category than disagreement with the statements. Commonality, efficacy and leadership message showed the greatest amount of agreement from the subjects surveyed based on the questions associated with those categories. The modal response in each of these categories was 2, which indicated an "agree" answer as the most common response. The averages of these categories were all between 2.17 and 2.39, which indicates a significant amount of "agree" and "strongly agree" answers from those who responded. These indicators of community development seem to be relatively strong in this district.

Questions focusing on optimism and cohesion did not show the same strength of

agreement. Although cohesion had a modal score of 2, the mean of the questions associated with cohesion was 3.0 (a score on the survey that would indicate "undecided"). The number of responses for 3, "undecided," and 4, "disagree," were nearly the same amount as 2, "agree." Optimism had a modal score of 3, which indicated that the greatest number of respondents were "undecided" about their sense of optimism for their schools and the district. The mean score of 2.9 is another indicator of the diversity of agreement around optimism as there were more answers of 5, "strongly disagree," than there were answers of 1, "strongly agree." These aspects of community do not seem to be developing among members of the organization as well as commonality, efficacy and leadership message.

While these descriptive statistics may provide a summary of the attitudes of Midwestern School district educators, they do not provide the quality of detail necessary to develop a meaningful understanding of this district undergoing transformation. To develop a more complete understanding of the district in its intentional community development, greater detail from observation, interview and document analysis must be incorporated in the description. With greater detail comes greater understanding of the development of community in this urban district.

Commonality Findings

Within this urban district, data revealed several areas of strong commonality and areas that have not developed to the same degree. Collaboration, as the focal point of the initiative, received the most attention in the organization and is supported by most members of the organization. Continuous improvement and use of data also have developed support in the organization. Conversely, there are areas of PLC development

that do not benefit from the support of district members. One such area is a common belief in the ability of many students within the district to achieve at high levels. Focus on results, action research, shared inquiry, and guidance from mission, vision and values are also characteristics that seem to lack the understanding and commitment as values of a developing learning community. The development of common values is progressing but significant progress is still needed for the district to form strong community around these values.

Collaboration

Collaboration among members of the organization is a value that was embraced immediately by most of the organization. The collaboration process within the district—several one-hour meetings each month with learning as the topic—was the subject of negotiations between the teacher's union and district administration. The negotiation resulted in a memorandum of understanding added to the collective bargaining agreement that instituted the meetings in each school in the district. In a meeting held to discuss the merits of the practice, one teacher even stated that collaboration was something that many teachers had complained the district lacked so why not do it. Groups constituted by grade level and subject matter were formed in each building. The “Professional Learning Community” (PLC) groups began with the development of norms and group values to guide their focus on learning. Many members of the district expressed gratitude for the structured collaboration and found the process productive.

A number of teacher teams in the district have developed into what district administrators and the members of the individual groups consider strong teams. These teams have influenced significant change within the district. One member of a district

PLC commented, “We have become much more focused in what we are trying to accomplish since we began to collaborate.” Some of the teams have created common calendars to align learning in their subjects. In many cases the calendars have been accompanied by the development of common assessments that allow educators to examine common results and address learning problems among student populations as a team. The minutes of many PLC meetings reflect sharing results of common assessments as well as planning to intervene with groups of students who do not meet the learning goals. Some schools in the district have realized significant gains in the number of students passing statewide tests and improved individual student performance since beginning collaborative work within their PLCs. Strong collaborative cultures have developed at least in sections of the district schools.

Support of the structured collaboration emerged in interviews with diverse members of the organization. Those holding administrative positions within the district expressed favorable opinions of the collaborative process. When asked about changes that had taken place in the district since the introduction of PLCs and about changes in the attitudes and beliefs of organizational members, those holding administrative positions in the district commented that collaboration had provided a supportive structure for growth in the district and that the district was headed in the right direction with collaboration. Though teachers' support of collaboration varied in the interviews, most of the teachers interviewed commented favorably regarding collaboration and several spoke about a heightened focus that the collaborative meetings brought to their school. Interview data affirmed the observed favorable consensus around collaboration in the district.

Agreement was not consistent with regard to questions asking for a response about whether values have changed in the district since the introduction of “Professional Learning Communities.” A district administrator reflected that he could not say for sure because though he had noticed that people talked about different issues, he had not noticed that they had begun to act differently. He added that he did not believe that there had been wholesale change in the district. One teacher, whose answer echoed the comments of several teachers, believed that values had definitely changes and that the values were all related to success in assessment and less about people in the organization. A different teacher stated that she believed that a shift had occurred that was more student-centered and that she expected that the coming years would bring more changes in values if the district stayed with the “Professional Learning Communities” framework. Perceptions of value change varied greatly depending on each individual interviewed.

Survey data also supports collaboration as a common value throughout the district. 232 members of the organization responded to the survey statement, "Collaboration among teachers is essential to improvement in student achievement." The mean score of all the responses was 1.69 on a 1-5 Likert scale. A response of 1 was the most frequently given score, which means that the most frequently given answer was that members of the organization strongly agreed with that statement. These scores are a strong indication of the level of support for collaboration among members of the district. A low mean score and the frequency of a "strongly agree" response indicates a high level of support for this value. Survey, interview and observational data mutually support district acceptance of collaboration as a core value.

Of course, general support of collaboration as a value is not to say that every

member of the organization holds the same belief. Over the course of the two-plus years of development for this reform model, the frequency of the meetings changed from four meetings each month to three. After a year of the meetings, some teachers began to see the meetings as a means of control with the frequency and duration requirement attached to them. After much discussion, the district and union leadership acknowledged agreement on the importance of collaboration and focus in Professional Learning Communities and placed that value above process values like frequency and duration. Contract language was formulated to maintain the collaborative process in the district and mitigate the controlling aspects of the process. In addition, some members of the teachers' union adopted a stance against Professional Learning Community type meetings outside of the times dictated by the contract; objecting to discussing PLC issues in staff meetings is an example of this resistance from some staff members. Though much data supported the developments of collaboration as a value in this organization, acceptance of the value was not unanimous within the district.

Members of the Midwestern School District seemed ready for the introduction of a collaborative culture as the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative was introduced. Reviewing the data collected in a variety of ways within this district, with few exceptions, reveals that collaboration has emerged as a strong shared value in the district.

Continuous Improvement

The second characteristic that has developed into a widely shared value within the district is striving for continuous improvement. “Professional Learning Community” literature encourages an attitude among communities of educators that does not allow for

settling for the status quo. Learning communities must continuously strive to increase effectiveness through learning and innovation. Within the Midwestern School District, a strong core of educators attend varying district learning opportunities in the areas of diversity, technology and curriculum. Though the district has made significant gains in several academic areas, a significant portion of district members seek learning opportunities to maintain the improvement. PLC minutes of teacher teams who have experienced near total learning success with their students reveal educators working collaboratively to resolve learning issues for the few students who still must reach the learning standard. A number of veteran members of the district accepted a completely new role and a challenging curriculum to become reading diagnosticians in the district to work with students who have experienced repeated failure while learning to read. Despite the rigorous educational program required and the challenge of adjusting to a new position, these members of the district showed their commitment to continuous improvement for themselves, for the district as a whole and for the students who struggle most with reading. The value of continuous improvement is evident in these and other learning activities aimed at improving academic achievement in the district.

Continuous improvement is evident in various forms of evidence collected within the district. The mission statements, which included a statement of vision and values, show a prevalent theme of continuous improvement. In one specific school, the mission statement included a sentence that is representative of several of the documents: “The most important criterion for measuring our success will be continuous improvement on standardized test scores.” The mission statements were developed and adopted by the staffs of respective schools within the district. The commitments to continuous improvement in the mission statements were supported by

survey responses collected during this study. When responding to the question, "I believe that my school district must continually strive to improve," 231 district members' responses resulted in a mean score for the question of 1.32, the strongest agreement of any question on the survey where a response of 1 corresponded to "strongly agree." Like the statement in the survey related to collaboration, the modal score of this question regarding continuous improvement was also 1. Survey data and document analysis reflect a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

The value of continuous improvement emerged in the answers to multiple interview questions. When asked about changes in the district since the implementation of the "Professional Learning Communities" initiative, several administrators noted positive changes and followed their statement with "...but we are not there, yet." Despite perceived improvements in the collaboration of staff members and increased scores on statewide tests within the district, administrators remained focused on improving the process in their buildings. Both teachers and administrators shared similar answers to the question, "How do you feel about the future prospects of the district with Professional Learning Communities as the focus." Nearly all of the respondents expressed a favorable impression of the potential of Professional Learning Communities but couched their responses in the necessity of everyone becoming more productive in the communities. Continuous improvement is a strong common value in the Midwestern School District.

Though the value of continuous improvement is evident and strong within the district, there are some parts of the organization where the study revealed some doubts. Discussions in meetings and casual conversations often contained the word "overwhelmed" when speaking of the various aspects of education that were in need of

improvement in this district. The sheer number of areas needing improvement in the district has led to initiatives within the “Professional Learning Community” framework that require more meetings, time and commitment. One administrator noted that more work was planned in the areas of equity and assessment and the administrator did not know how all of the changes could be accomplished and still be accomplished well. Reading and math have multiple development initiatives that teachers in the district attend and implement. Assessment training and equity seminars are also development opportunities that receive a high priority in the district. While many members of the district acknowledge the importance of these initiatives, the sheer volume of the work generates doubts among some members regarding whether the district can be improved in so many areas simultaneously.

Formalized data collections through survey confirmed some of the doubts observed among organizational members. Along with the expressions of agreements specifically sought from the survey, some respondents included written responses to various questions. One person responding to the statement, "My school district is improving," wrote "At the expense of morale." Another wrote "How?" with several exclamation marks when asked to respond to the statement, "The district must continually strive to improve." The doubts expressed in these unsolicited written responses correspond to the thoughts expressed by one administrator in the interview. When asked about the future of the school district with Professional Learning Communities as the focus, the administrator spoke highly of the potential of Professional Learning Communities and added that the addition of more initiatives "...is just too much." The overall sense of commitment to continuous improvement in the district is shadowed by

doubts in the human capability to meet the many demands for improvement.

Teacher Use of Data

One value that shows signs of development, but has not reached the level of support of collaboration and continuous improvement, is the use of data by teachers in the district. Like many school districts, members of the Midwestern School District used data very little in making instructional decisions. Instead, the typical mode of operation relied on teacher perceptions or the most recent innovation brought to the district.

Lessons that students liked, or lessons that were guided by a district initiative, were much more prevalent than lessons that were delivered because they were found to work.

Evidence collected during the study suggests that using data is becoming valued in the district. When responding to the statement, "Teacher use of data is essential for improving student achievement," 228 responses yielded a mean score of 2.11, which suggests a significant amount of agreement on the five point Likert scale. The most frequent response was 2, which corresponds to "agree." The survey results pertaining to the development of this concept in the district indicate growing acceptance of the practice.

Teacher responses to interview questions were also supportive of using data to inform instructional decisions. When asked, "Do you think that using data is highly valued where you work?" many teachers responded with a definitive "Yes." Several added that using data had become a part of regular processes for designing intervention and enrichment for students and part of lesson planning. When responding to the question, "What do you consider to be the dominant values of our school district?" several interviewees identified using assessment data as a dominant value. Interview data

supports the development of the use of data as a value.

Similarly, evidence collected through document analysis and observation revealed signs of development. The increased use of data in the district has been apparent in the development of pilot teams to interpret data in many of the district schools. The district testing coordinator has become a more frequent visitor to schools in the district as teachers and administrators in the district ask more questions about how to interpret testing data to inform educational decisions. Finally, examination of the minutes of various PLCs reveals prominent use of data as the minutes showed the use of state testing data, and data generated from assessments developed in common by teachers, guiding teaching decisions in many groups. Use of data is developing into a strong value in the Midwestern School District.

The findings that indicate that using data has not emerged as a strong value in the district are best illustrated in interview data. While the majority of those interviewed agreed that using data is valued, they tended to qualify their statement with further explanation. A common clarification from respondents to the interview was that there was not enough understanding of how to use data among members of the district. Some members of the district doubt whether the data gathered from various sources in the district is used correctly or productively. In addition, two interviewees described how data showing poor results was explained away or dismissed rather than being used to identify and solve serious problems in their school. Members of the Midwestern School District must become more skilled at working with data before this value can be considered fully developed in the district.

Focus on Results

Members of the Midwestern School District began to accept focus on results as a value in the district. Observations of district meetings, celebrations and informal gatherings share a common theme as educators within the district devote a great deal of time to results in the district. Survey data supports these observations the most frequent response to the statement, "Focusing on results is essential for improving student achievement," was, "agree." The mean score of all of the responses given to this statement was 2.13, which suggests that the majority of those who responded to the survey were in agreement or strong agreement with the statement. This characteristic is developing as a shared value in the district.

The focus on results is a commonly held value as far as observation and survey results are reviewed, but interview data suggests contrasting views on the type of results that should be used. One teacher reported how certain types of data or results were dismissed according to favorable interpretations of the information. Other educators in the district expressed dissatisfaction with the privileging of achievement testing data over qualitative information from educators within the district. One respondent to the survey wrote on the outside of the envelope "Achievement scores do not mean student learning" expressing a similar thought. While many educators in the district agree that focusing on result is important, there is some contentiousness over the type of results that should be valued in the district.

Characteristics with Equivocal Support

While some values of "Professional Learning Communities" have become prominent in the district, other very important concepts have not received strong

acceptance. Common belief in the capabilities of every student, commitment to the missions of each school, action research and shared inquiry are concepts that the study showed equivocal evidence of their development in the district. The results in many areas of the study showed doubt and resistance to integral aspects of the reform.

A central tenet of “Professional Learning Communities” is a conviction among educators that every student served by the organization is capable of success. Initial analysis of the survey instrument revealed contrasting viewpoints with regard to this concept. The number of written responses to the statement, "Every student is capable of success in every subject," far exceeded unsolicited written responses to any other statement on the survey. Among the responses were questions asking for definitions of success and statements of limitations to the learning of some students. One response, "At their level," indicates a belief from this respondent that each of the students may only be able to reach a certain level of learning that may or may not be at the standard expected in the district or the state. Another response included adding a "+" sign to the "5" response indicating something greater than "strongly disagree" to this statement. Many questions were also written to accompany this statement like "Success? Please define," which shows a lack of common understanding of this concept. These unsolicited responses to the belief in the capabilities of students frame other findings with regard to this concept in the study.

Survey data underlines the mixed attitudes toward this concept within the district. The mean score of the 229 responses given to the statement, "Every student is capable of success in every subject," was 2.62. The mean score of the 232 responses given to the statement, "If a student is given enough time and instruction, that student can master any

subject," was 2.91. Though both statements had a modal score of 2, the combined number of responses of strongly disagree numbered 47. The survey results correspond to observations in the district summarized by a district administrator as "Yes, but..." statements. These statements tend to be delivered in the district when people are explaining the lack of academic success of students by naming barriers to learning that the students bring to school. "I wish the parents cared enough to support their kids' learning" and "We have a lot of kids who come from poverty" are common laments among Midwestern School District educators when speaking of the limited ability of students to learn. Students can learn, but not necessarily at the level of other groups of students who do not have such disadvantages. The tendency of many district educators to express their beliefs in student learning capabilities with qualifying statements indicates wavering commitment to the belief in all students' capabilities of learning at high levels. The Midwestern School District has not reached a consensus on the ability of all students to achieve academic success.

Though the study uncovered evidence to suggest that belief in the capabilities of students was not commonly held in the district, some evidence did support confidence in the capability of students to succeed among educators in the district. Though the mean score of the responses related to belief in the success of students was higher (indicating a level of equivocation among the totality of district educators) in relation to other questions, one cannot ignore that the modal score of those responses was 2—agree. In other words, agreement with the statements was still the most frequent response. Observational data also reveals pockets of strong belief. Success with struggling readers through the intensive work of reading diagnosticians has led to affirming statements of

confidence about the abilities of all students to read. Special education teachers in some schools have also expressed a high level of confidence in their students as their success in inclusion settings has improved. With the exception of some pockets of high levels of confidence, however, belief in the capabilities of students is a concept that is in need of much more development to become common value that adds to developing community.

Mission Vision and Values

The pillars of strength for developing Professional Learning Communities is the mission, vision and values statement created at each school at the beginning of the initiative. Evidence collected during the study suggests that the collective statements of vision are not the pillars of meaning for the organization as they were meant. In response to the survey question, "Developing shared vision and mission has contributed to increases in student achievement," some written responses to the statement were "When did we do this?" and "Those are just words." These written comments were echoed in the responses to the interview question, "Do you think that people adhere to the values and vision that have been created where you work?" There were several responses of "No" and several that suggested some percentage of the staff but not the entire staff. As one elementary teacher said, "Some do and some don't [adhere to the vision and values]. Some come to the meetings prepared and some contribute nothing whatsoever." The guiding documents of the district do not have the level of commitment from members of the district to elevate them to strongly held values.

Action Research

A key facet in the culture of Professional Learning Communities is the use of action research to verify the effectiveness of educational methods. This is the process

that keeps learning communities within the organization focused on those methodologies that yield results as opposed to the most familiar or comfortable practices. Public schools in the United States have operated for the most part within traditional modes of instruction developed at their inception, and Midwestern School District has not been an exception. The results from a survey presented by district administration suggest that the organization has a good distance to travel in the development of action research into a common value. Along with shared inquiry, action research was the least understood of the characteristics of Professional Learning Communities in the district. The results of this district survey were reiterated in the data collected for this study.

Survey results, including unsolicited text, showed uncertainty among members of the district with regard to action research. The mean score of all the responses given to the question, "Using action research to determine if teaching practices are working is essential for increasing student achievement," was 2.58. The modal score of 2 means that "agree" was the most commonly given response but the high number (85 of 231 responses) of 3 answers, "undecided," shows some of the uncertainty of district members around this characteristic of "Professional Learning Communities." The added text by survey respondents supports the uncertainty as several wrote comments regarding this statement. "What is this?" and "I am not sure what action research is." summarize the commentary of those who added text in addition to the requested response. The lack of understanding of action research interferes with its development as a common value.

Little evidence could be found in the document analysis of the district to show that action research had been conducted with any regularity. Minutes from PLC meetings from various buildings showed occasional references to brief studies to test teaching

methodologies or classroom management practices such as increasing the number of homework assignments submitted. This study found one document outlining action research as a process and this document was not disseminated to all of the schools. Informal conversations among staff members suggested an exaggerated conception of the work necessary to complete action research in the classroom as many members of the district equated the process to writing a formal research paper, an undertaking that few were willing to embrace. This characteristic of “Professional Learning Communities” has experienced little development in the district.

Though action research appears to have undergone little development in the Midwestern School District, the study revealed possible reasons for the delay. The survey revealing the lack of understanding of action research was conducted less than a year before this study was conducted. The complexity of change within this district may have allowed the organization to address this characteristic in a meaningful way as the volume of documents indicates that district administrators have sought to develop other characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities.” Also, the aforementioned lack of understanding of action research limits the ability of educators in the district to recognize when they are conducting action research. Without the understanding to describe action research, members of the district would not be able to generate evidence.

Optimism Findings

Assessing the level of optimism in the Midwestern School District requires consideration of data obtained through survey, interview and observation. District documents were not informative on this aspect of community development in the district, though some documents disseminated from the central office of the district could be

judged as optimistic. Because of the ambiguity of determining optimism from a written document and the role of district administrators in promoting initiatives (the role of promoting initiatives would call for optimistic communication even if it were false optimism), the focus on this aspect of developing community will come from the data sources directed toward exposing members' opinions.

When examining the survey questions related to optimism as a group, the existence of optimism among members of this district is equivocal. Of the 695 total responses to questions related to optimism in the district, most of the responses were "3" or "undecided." However, the number of "agree" responses was nearly that of the "undecided" responses, and responses of "1" or "2" outnumbered the total responses of "4" or "5." In sum, many people were unsure about their outlook on the future but more people expressed optimism than over pessimism. This overview of optimism, as viewed through survey results, begins to capture a picture of the district acquired through interview and observation. The organization holds pockets of optimism, pockets of uncertainty and pockets of pessimism. Examination of these areas yields insight into the status of this characteristic of developing community.

When responding to the question, "I believe my school district is improving," members of the district returned a modal value of 2, which means that "agree" was the most frequent response. District achievement scores have improved and the district improved its state rating by one ranking on a five-level scale. This relatively positive response to perceptions of improvement contrasts responses to two other questions assessing the optimism of district educators. When given the statement, "I feel strongly that our Professional Learning Community will achieve its goals," responses from district

members yielded a mean score of 2.90 with a modal score of 3. Similarly, when given the statement, "I am optimistic that our school district will reach its goals guided by Professional Learning Community values," the mean response was 3.09 and the modal score was 3. Though a significant number of educators in the district agreed that the school district is improving, there does not seem to be a corresponding level of optimism for attaining goals.

Optimism among educators was often clouded by teacher description of barriers some students bring to the schoolhouse used by educators. In numerous observations, district educators cited economic and cultural factors when discussing the limited prospects of academic success for students as they expressed faith that educators were working as hard as possible. One middle school teacher observed, "We have phenomenal teachers and phenomenal students, but we are always judged by the scores," and then added, "You can change the way you are teaching but unless we can get people in the community to buy into that and make sure their kids are here, it will be hard raise them up to the next level." Optimism is tempered in this district by perceptions among educators that many students are difficult to educate to high levels because of their backgrounds.

Observations of the district suggested a cultural influence limiting optimism in the district. A review of Faculty Advisory Committee documents from three schools within the district showed concerns and complaints regarding conducting of "Professional Learning Community" activities outside of the hours designated by the collective bargaining agreement in the district. Negative attitudes toward "Professional Learning Community" activities also were noted in informal comments heard within the district.

Conversations between some district members concerning “Professional Learning Communities” describe a lack of confidence that their work in the learning groups will yield positive results due to the ineffectiveness of team members or time wasted when they could be working on other activities. This anecdotal evidence, when considered in light of equivocal survey results, describes low morale and lack of confidence within some groups in the district.

Though characteristic among some segments of the district, lack of confidence is not characteristic of the entire district. Many educators within the district expressed appreciation for the time to collaborate initiated by “Professional Learning Communities.” Interviewees, from district administrators to building administrators to individual teachers, commented that they felt the district was headed in the right direction when asked, “How do you feel about future prospects for the district with Professional Learning Communities as the focus?” Evidence collected with regard to optimism among district educators is equivocal. Survey results suggested mixed attitudes within the district, while observational and interview evidence illustrate the optimistic and pessimistic attitudes regarding district success and “Professional Learning Communities.”

Cohesion Findings

Like optimism, cohesion is an aspect of developing community that has not developed to a high degree in the district. Review of the compacted chart summarizing the seven questions meant to assess the level of cohesion in the district reveals a modal score of "2," which indicates that the greatest number of any single response was "agree," but it also shows the total number of "undecided," "disagree," and "strongly disagree" responses exceeded the total number of responses in agreement. Negative and undecided

perceptions of cohesion in the district outnumbered those with positive perceptions of this aspect. Reviews of the responses to individual cohesion questions as well as examination of other evidence collected provides insight into the attitudes founding the lack of perceived cohesion among members of the district. The most informative description of the level of development of cohesion in the Midwestern School District comes from interpretation of specific data.

Examination of individual questions related to this aspect of cohesion reveals interesting attitudes in the district with respect to “Professional Learning Communities.” When responding to statements regarding a strong sense of belonging to their school, a strong sense of belonging to their PLC and a strong sense of belonging to the district, members of the Midwestern School District responded with agreement. "Agree" was the most common answer given and the mean scores of the questions were in the 2.31 to 2.68 range. The range of mean values is a relatively strong indication of positive perceptions of belonging. However, when people were asked about the cohesiveness of their district and school in comparison to past years, the mode of the responses was "3" and the means ranged from 3.17 to 3.44. The majority of respondents were undecided. Finally, members of the district showed a significant amount of disagreement when responding to statements regarding the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative drawing schools and the district closer together. Educator's perceptions of cohesion diminished as the questions became more specific to the influence of “Professional Learning Communities.”

Observations in the district help to explain these results. Several instances of contention have arisen over the course of the three years of reform implementation.

Contention has taken the form of quiet conversations regarding the value of the additional meetings to formal meetings to interpret what constitutes “Professional Learning Communities” or negotiating the number and frequency of the meetings during the month. Interview responses suggested a trend among educators regarding the implementation of the reform. The phrase "top-down" recurred in the interview responses of building administrators and teachers as people seemed dissatisfied in the method by which “Professional Learning Communities” came to define the way the district conducts improvement. A sense of "us v them" was noticed among some teachers with regard to Professional Learning Communities in the district.

The culture of negativity and opposition among some members of the district is also seen in commentary from a few district teachers. The district convocation is an event that occurs once at the beginning of each year in which the entire district meets to inaugurate the new school year. The ceremony lasts approximately two hours. Considering the conversations of a few educators within the district, even this event may be a sore spot that should be reduced in length or eliminated in the judgment of some educators. The observed resentment of a few educators within the district to an event that generates a guiding message for the district helps to explain some comments offered on the survey. The unsolicited text of one person regarding “Professional Learning Communities” bringing their school closer together was answered with the comment, "Nearly destroyed it." Cohesion within this district is challenged by a seeming culture of negativity among a few observed members.

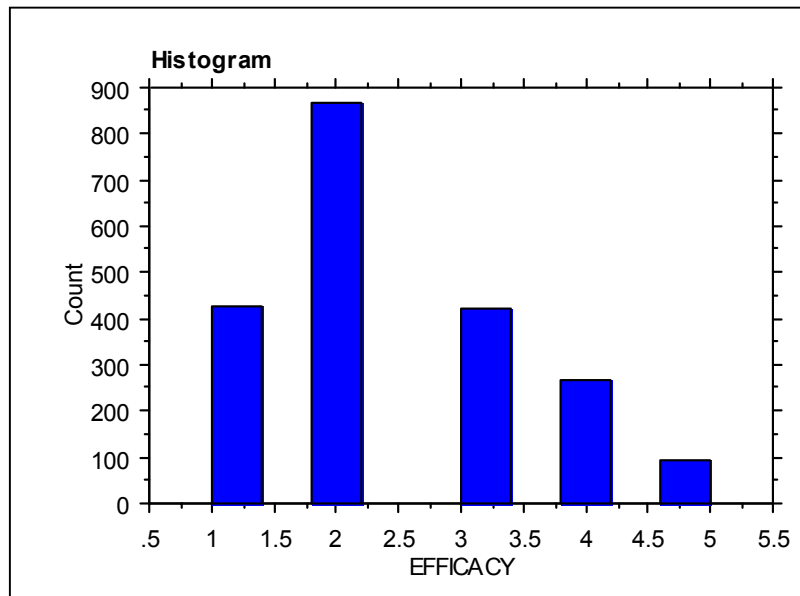
The dissent observed among some members of the organization does not define the range of perceptions regarding cohesion in the district. Among those interviewees

that responded in a complimentary way to the effect of “Professional Learning Communities” in the district is one teacher who stated, "This kind of change has been profound. It really got us focused and all together." In addition, observations of several district PLCs at work have revealed a number effectively functioning teams who take pride in the accomplishments of the group. As one teacher acknowledged negative perceptions from others during the interview she responded, "You're always going to find people who find something wrong in everything." While there may be a culture of negativity undermining cohesion in the district, a similar culture of support is emerging among some groups within the district.

Efficacy Findings

A critical aspect of building community in an organization is the perceptions of efficacy members hold toward the actions emphasized by the reform. People who perceive that their actions will yield results are much more likely to sustain effort in those areas. For the Midwestern School District, there are strong perceptions of efficacy around the efforts encouraged by “Professional Learning Communities.” The histogram (4.1) describing the response to the seven survey questions related to efficacy in the survey, in summary form, shows a sense of efficacy among a majority of the members of the district. The responses of "agree" or "strongly agree" outnumber the responses of "undecided," "disagree" and "strongly disagree" combined. The most frequent response to questions focused on efficacy was "agree." The response to individual questions in the survey varied, but this summary view and specific evidence from the other modes of inquiry in this study shows that perceived efficacy is well developed in this district.

4.1



A review of specific interview questions assessing efficacy in the district reveals areas in which members of the organization sense the greatest efficacy. Collaboration, just as it was found to be the strongest common value earlier in this text, showed the greatest amount of perceived efficacy among district educators. When asked to respond to the statement, "Opportunities for collaboration empower teachers to solve problems of teaching practice," educators in this district most frequently responded with "strongly agree" and the mean score of all the responses was 1.66, an average reflective of a high level of agreement. In a subsequent question, educators were asked to respond to "Collaboration has contributed to increases in student achievement." This results for this question showed a most frequent answer of "agree" and a mean score of 2.23. Collaboration is an area in which members of this educational organization believe their efforts will yield positive results.

Additional areas of perceived efficacy included specific intervention with students and teacher use of data. Specific intervention with students showed relatively strong agreement and compared favorably with collaboration in this study. Responses to the statement, "Intervening with individual students has contributed to increases in student achievement," resulted in a mean score of 1.86 and a mode of "2," which suggests a relatively high level of agreement within the organization. The survey question, "Analyzing and using data has contributed to increases in student achievement," also had results that showed agreement among a large segment of district educators. The mean of all of the scores was 2.32 and the most frequent response was "agree." Several district educators echoed perceptions of efficacy in noting the focus that these values have brought to their work and the benefits to students. These two key characteristics of "Professional Learning Communities" are supported by perceptions of efficacy in this district.

Survey results also yielded interesting levels of perceived efficacy with regard to questions regarding mission and Professional Learning Communities specifically. When responding to questions regarding the influence of mission, vision and values on decision making within their respective schools and their role in increasing student achievement, the answers were generally in agreement. The most frequent response for each one was "agree" and the mean score for each item ranged from 2.60 to 2.73. Even when the "Professional Learning Communities" initiative was mentioned specifically in questions, "The values advocated by Professional Learning Communities support district improvement in achievement," the reports of efficacy were similar. The most frequent response was, again, "agree" and the mean was 2.66. Given the results around these

concepts when considering optimism, the agreement with efficacy statements around these concepts is interesting.

District results in this area do seem to support the feelings of efficacy described by the study. A review of the district report card shows improvement in several areas of the district since the beginning of the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative. The district itself has achieved a higher achievement category, moving from academic watch to continuous improvement. Several of the individual schools have also achieved a higher achievement category including one school that rose from continuous improvement to effective according to state guidelines. One commonly occurring phrase when answering an interview question about the future prospects of the district summarizes the perceptions of efficacy supported by recent improvements in the district. Several interviewees including teachers, building administrators and district administrators used the phrase, "I think we are headed in the right direction." Survey results, document analysis and interviews validate the perceptions of efficacy.

Though the most frequent responses to questions in the interview and survey supported positive perceptions of efficacy about important aspects of district reform, the perceptions are not unanimous. The number of "disagree" and "strongly disagree" answers should not be discounted though they were given less frequently than answers of agreement. There are some members of this organization who do not feel that the action described will help Midwestern School District be successful. Interview results yielded one possible explanation for doubts regarding the effectiveness of the efforts. Several teachers mentioned the "baggage," a colloquial code word for characteristics that keep students from learning, that students in the district bring to school. This conception of

district students may begin to explain some of the doubts some district educators have with regard to the efficacy of the efforts made through “Professional Learning Communities.”

Leadership Message Findings

Examining the influence of leadership in the development of community within this educational organization help to answer the question of whether community can be built with intention. Two elements of the leadership message are important to this study. The first is whether or not leaders in the district are delivering the message they intend for members of the organization to receive. The second element is whether or not the message is influential in affecting district values and motivation. Interpretation of the survey questions, in summary form, directed toward leadership message begins to answer the question of whether leaders in the district are communicating focused messages. The compacted results of the four questions meant to assess leadership message yield scores similar to those of commonality in the district. The most frequent response given to leadership statements was "agree" as each of the questions sought a response to whether one of the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” was valued by district leaders. The mean score of all the responses was 2.17 with two of the questions registering a mean between 1.94 and 1.99. A significant number of the respondents to the survey perceive that district leaders convey a belief in the values that the leaders are seeking to develop in the district.

Evidence collected from interviews and survey data suggests a focused leadership message perceived by members of the district. When district educators were asked how the district has changed since the introduction of the “Professional Learning

Communities” initiative and if they have noticed any changes in the beliefs and attitudes of district educators since the introduction of “Professional Learning Communities,” “Focus” is a word that was used by several educators. At least one teacher, one building administrator and one district administrator commented upon how the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative had initiated more focus in the district. The leadership focus is seen in the individual survey results of leadership statements. When responding to statements regarding district leaders' value of data and results, district educators most common answer was "agree" and the mean scores were both less than "2," which is indicative of strong agreement in the district. When asked to respond to questions regarding leaders' value of collaboration and action research, district educators most frequent response was "agree" and both mean scores were less than 2.5, which is again indicative of relatively strong agreement among district members. The leadership messages with regard to characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” have been focused for a large segment of the organization.

Another observation in the district that suggests a clear and influential leadership message is the continuing attention paid to mission, vision and values for the district and individual schools. To begin each year, the mission statements of each building are a key part of the leadership academy. The documents are not merely for review. District leaders, school leaders and teachers examine and critique the documents in an effort to decide if these guiding statements for the schools are actually what educators want the organization to become. School leaders leave the meeting with the charge of revising the documents if they do not capture the vision for their schools. Interview data also revealed that district values and vision are prevalent in the thinking of members. When

asked to describe the core values of the district, several teachers recited the vision of the district "...to become the first urban district to be rated excellent by the state of Ohio" which is a verbatim recitation of the district vision. Another educator responded to an interview question regarding the value of data by saying, "That's us, data driven," which refers directly to a value advocated in "Professional Learning Community" literature. Though attitudes may vary regarding some aspects of the reform, it is clear from observations and interviews that the leadership message is influencing thinking and conversations in the district.

Administrators in the district seek to understand how important aspects of "Professional Learning Communities" are being interpreted and received. A survey has been disseminated to all schools in the district in which educators at each school read a continuum of descriptions of their learning communities in the form of a rubric. The educators then assign a number value to their experience that corresponds to the best description of their learning communities. This survey serves as a barometer for how the organization is progressing toward becoming professional learning communities and also helps to reinforce the critical aspects of each characteristic. The results of the survey are shared with the organization and plans are made to address areas of interest. The characteristics of "Professional Learning Communities" are kept in the forefront of the organization with the help of the survey and other leadership activities in the district.

Interview responses revealed perceptions of the influence of leaders on the core values of the organization. All but two interviewees responded in the affirmative when asked if district leaders influenced core values. The responses ranged in characterizing the influence as "channeling" the values of the surrounding community to "dictating" the

values through their actions. The leadership actions that district educators identified as important to gaining their support focused on allocation of resources, developing collaborative teams and availability to schools. A number of leadership actions that adversely influenced support were also identified and these actions present an element of danger.

During the course of the reform initiative, resistance to developing the reform has been encountered in a number of forms. Development of some aspects of the reform has been hindered by contention with the teacher's union in the district. The reform has been challenged with regard to the amount of time and the structure of PLC activities. Interview responses provide some insight into the foundation of the resistance. A number of educators noted a "top-down" leadership approach as one leadership activity that adversely affected their support of developing the reform. Also, the word "overwhelming" was common in expressing their feelings toward developing all characteristics of the "Professional Learning Communities." As influential as district leadership has been in developing common values in the district, some elements of leadership have had a deleterious effect on the development of community in the district.

People interviewed in various parts of the organization agreed that leadership, especially that of the superintendent, is influential in shaping district values. Variation in responses came in whether the person considered the changes in district values beneficial or not. Various administrators stated that district values had become more focused and that the values were more supportive of student success. Teachers who were interviewed were more dubious of the benefit of redefined district values. Noting a focus on test scores and changes that

were "more about results and less about people" left teachers skeptical about core values in the district. Agreement was unanimous that leaders in authority positions in the district had directed changes in district values. The degree to which district values have developed varies according to the value.

Summary

The Midwestern School District has developed elements of community during the early stages of the "Professional Learning Communities" reform. The development has been intentional as leaders within the district have sought to maintain a consistent message and the influence of that method has been observed and perceived in the district. Several common values have developed in the district and other characteristics have mixed commitment among segments of the district. Educators within the district also have a positive perception of the efficacy of the reform as expressed confidence in effectiveness of the characteristics of "Professional Learning Communities." Despite development of common values and feelings of efficacy in the district, cohesion and optimism in the district do not show the strength of agreement as other aspects of the developing community. These qualities of the organization may improve with merely the passage of time or district leaders may need to implement strategies to improve these dispositions. Given improvements noted in learning results for students and support within the surrounding community, development of the learning community in the Midwestern School District seems to be making progress with a promising future.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Developing Learning Community in Midwestern School District

Midwestern School District is developing as an intentional community. Of course, the district showed some characteristics of community before the intentional work of developing community through Professional Learning Communities started. When educators come together in a school or district, the common purposes of educating students cannot help but bring like-minded people to the organization with coincidental common values. The Midwestern School District, like many others, was still prone to short term educational fads and educators working at cross purposes under the individual auspices of doing what is right for kids. The construction of an intentional community around specific values is beginning to bring people and processes into alignment in the district with the common goal of improved learning achievement for student in the district. Study of this reform effort placed in context with other work studying communitarian leadership may provide insight into developing community in other urban school districts as a productive means of reform.

The data generated from this study is informative in several areas of communitarian leadership and urban school leadership. The commonality of belief and attitude that is developing in this district around certain values suggests an emerging learning community in terms of developing common values. With the emergence of the common values, the mixed results concerning cohesion and optimism in the district revealed in the study is somewhat surprising. Especially in light of the perceived efficacy expressed among members of the district. The perception of the influence of leadership in the district and the prevalence of member awareness of the core values espoused

supports the capability of leaders in this district to intentionally influence the development of community. In an urban district with the accompanying sense of pessimism, the possibility of creating an efficacious learning community around core values holds promise. Since this district is in the early years of reform, the level of development seen thus far points to the probability that the district may become the strong learning community it has sought to become.

Development of Values

One indication of the emergence of community in the district is the development of common values in the district. It is not particularly surprising that the values of collaboration and striving for continuous improvement would be important in this school district. The traditional lack of opportunity for educators to collaborate in schools makes collaboration a desirable novelty among teachers. Sharing stories, insights and exchanging craft knowledge are activities that reduce the isolation felt by teachers who spend so much of their time as the only adult in the midst of their students. Likewise, teachers' inherent inclination toward helping students makes valuing continuous improvement a virtual given. With the range of student ability challenging urban teachers as well as the overlay of standards based expectations on what has traditionally been a sort and rank system makes a improvement desirable and necessary. The agreement around these values is not surprising, but the strength of agreement with these values along with the development of others suggests that intentional work around values is influential.

Collaboration and continuous improvement showed exceptionally strong agreement. Evidence of strong support was seen in observation, interview and in the

survey data that resulted in a mean score close to "1" which was associated with a response of "strongly agree." With the attitudes and dispositions that typify urban school districts and failing organizations in general, the agreement shown in this district around any issue is significant. With the exception of a small segment of the district who responded with "disagree" or "strongly disagree" this district has embraced these values. Collaboration and continuous improvement are strong in this district and others are developing.

Teacher use of data is a value that educators in this district support. In an organization that has a recent history of poor results, the development of teachers use of data is important and interesting. In one respect, poor results may inspire an avoidance of data and the inclination among members of the district to explain away discouraging data. To a certain extent, such behavior has been observed in this district in the way that teachers mentioned the "baggage" that students bring to the schools. On the other hand, some may consider extensive use of data the answer to poor results by facing problems directly. In this district, a significant number of educators have chosen the latter option with the influence of "Professional Learning Communities" as a guide. Where one may expect a relatively even split in data avoidance or analysis, teacher use of data to address problems of teaching practice is developing well.

Focusing on results is another value that is showing signs of support, but not at the level of support shown for using data. Once again, the history of poor results in the district may inspire a tendency to avoid results. In fact, some of the educators expressed a belief that measurable results are not the only standards of student success nor should they be the most important. Nevertheless, the value of focusing on results did have

substantial support in the district. The survey revealed that more than half of the district agreed with the value, while interview subjects acknowledged the importance of improving measurable results. With the recent improvement in state ratings of the district and the individual schools, focusing on results in this district may become more tolerable for members of this organization and a more prevalent value.

While some of the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” have strong support or show signs of development as values, action research does not show as much development as a value in the district. The survey results around this value showed ambivalence in the district as a whole and the document analysis in the district revealed a general lack of understanding of the characteristic. The lack of understanding helps to explain why the characteristic is not highly valued in the district. In a survey conducted by the district, this value was identified by respondents as the characteristic that people were least comfortable addressing. Also, very few documents in the district addressed the characteristic and it has received the least amount of professional development support. Though it is an important facet of “Professional Learning Communities,” the lack of development is understandable given the relatively small amount of intention given to its development. If a greater amount of attention is given to the development of this characteristic, action research may show the same signs of development as a value as the other characteristics.

A surprising lack of support was shown in the area of belief in student success. In an organization comprised of educators, one would be inclined to think that believing in the possibility of student success would be automatic in educators. Why else would people become involved in the education of students? Midwestern School District,

however, showed a troubling lack of belief in the ability of students to meet learning standards. This pessimism was shown in comments made by educators during the interview and in the mixture of survey results on statements addressing this attitude. The attitude may be related to the history of poor results in the district. An additional explanation may be found in a fundamental disconnect uncovered by examining other data generated by the study.

A closer examination of the prevalent skepticism about the ability of students to achieve academically reveals a lack of agreement regarding the definition of student learning success. The increasing use of data and focus on results in the district has brought pressure to district educators to judge student learning on the basis of measurable data and results. This pressure calls for a shift in culture among educators who tended to view student learning through an anecdotal lens of progress made over the course of the year. Though students may not have met standards measured by assessments designed by the state to measure learning objectives, district educators were still able to point to the ability of students to complete somewhat more difficult school work at the end of the year than they did at the beginning. This definition of student learning makes it easier for educators to feel effective in their work with students.

When a dominant belief such as the definition of student learning is challenged within a school district, resistance to the challenge is inevitable. While some people within the district may adapt well to different expectations and judgments rendered through a new lens, others will maintain their hold on the previously accepted standard. The resistance to new definitions of student learning is illustrated by data collected during the study. Comments written on the envelope containing the survey responses like

"Student achievement is not student leaning," show the rejection of this definition.

Interview responses also illustrated the rationale as some interviewees tended to vilify expectations constructed by state legislators. They saw legal mandates as forces outside of the organization negatively influencing the culture of the organization and especially resented the changes coming from those who were perceived not to understand education. Coupled with the perception of urban students' lack of ability in the Midwestern School District, one can understand how district educators' perceptions of new expectations would translate into mixed survey results with regard to the belief that all students can be successful.

"Professional Learning Community" texts espouse the power of collaboration in initiating positive change in learning organizations. The claims of Richard Dufour (1998) and others are supported by educators in this district who agreed that collaboration is essential to student achievement. Just as collaboration can be a powerful improvement activity in the district, it can also be, in the words of Rick Dufour, "powerfully wrong." That is to say that learning teams formed within the district can use the power of collective thought and consensus to resist cultural and systemic changes in the district. While some groups in the district may be enhancing their abilities to help students achieve as measured by district and state assessments, there are groups in the district who are united by definitions of student learning that do not include high achievement on assessments. Or sadly, may find consensus around improving conditions for teachers by focusing on student behavior or influencing administrative decisions to make the organization more comfortable for teachers with the needs of students secondary. Regardless, the ability to share beliefs and work collaboratively enhances the ability of

such groups to resist the changes advocated by reform. The cornerstone of developing Professional Learning Communities among the educators of this urban school district the same value that allows some groups within the district to perpetuate elements of the negative culture that exists in some pockets of the district.

Efficacy Implications

The development of common values in the district has been accompanied by relatively strong perceptions of efficacy in adhering to those values. Interview and survey results showed that many educators in the district believe that actions guided by the values of “Professional Learning Communities” have led to increases in student achievement in the district. With several recent successes in the district, educators in the district would seem to have sound reasons for feelings of efficacy. The combination of belief in the effectiveness of the techniques and the development of commonality would seem to be a strong catalyst for expanding the work of the district Professional Learning Communities, but it has not transformed the entire district. A gap exists between the level of belief in the common values developing in the district and the belief in the long-term success of the district.

The gap may stem from a conception of “Professional Learning Community” work that the processes are such that they can be started and stopped according to the dictates of a collective bargaining agreement. If values indicative of strong learning community were fully developed they would be evident at all times in the district. Examples of the superficial regard for the reform among some educators are evident in observations from various places and times within the district. Complaints from members of the district that Professional Learning Community matters should only be

addressed during the hours designated by the collective bargaining agreement suggest a temporal limitation over when people within the district should be operating with the common values in mind. Also, the ubiquitous comments regarding saving time by addressing various topics within Professional Learning Community meetings (i.e. field trips, discipline matters, scheduling) to the exclusion of matters of focused directly on student learning suggests that saving time becomes an end of more importance than the district goal of improving student achievement. Though a significant portion of district members share feelings of efficacy in the values, not as many show a strong commitment to the values.

Other factors in the district seem to be having a strong influence in the culture beyond commonality and efficacy. While the values seem to appeal to a moral sense of what should be done in the district, other factors seem to confound the overall commitment to the reform. The relationships among administrators, teachers and students include attitudes and beliefs that limit the progress of the district as it engages in this reform initiative. Morale was an often-cited term in interviews and observations as educators attempted to capture the mood in the district as it pertains to the reform effort. Low morale was seen as a distinct outcome of engaging in the reform effort. The perceptions of low morale in the district show the impact of emotional perceptions on developing and sustaining community in this urban district: though there are many tangible indications that the district is improving, the web of social interactions reiterating negative impressions of the reform go far in influencing individual perceptions. Common values and the strengthening of efficacy have made progress in reversing elements of the pessimistic culture of this urban district, but the negative

culture formed through years of failure maintains its influence over some in the district.

Cohesion and Optimism Implications

With the development of several common values in the Midwestern School District, one might expect the development of cohesion and optimism in the district to follow. Perceptions of cohesion and optimism do not show the strength of agreement seen around the developing core values. The perceptions of cohesion and optimism in the district are decidedly mixed in the district. In some respects, the lack of cohesion may be due in part to the consensus developing around some values as many in the district are adopting new patterns of behavior. As some people change and others cling to previously held practices and beliefs, people in the district may perceive divisions among factions of the organization. With perceived divisions may come doubts about the ability of some people to bridge those divisions and thus negatively influences optimism in the district. Regardless of the reasons, cohesion and optimism must increase for the district to continue its development as a learning community.

With change comes the complexity of adjusting to new practices and new ways of interacting with people. As people confront change, members of an organization will fall somewhere along a continuum from acceptance to rejection depending upon the aspect of change. This in itself is enough to influence the perceptions of cohesion in a district. In the Midwestern School District, a strong perception emerged through the study that the reform initiative of “Professional Learning Communities” was imposed by district administration rather than a collective effort based on consensus throughout the district. This perception among members of the district is key to the perceived lack of cohesion within the district.

Interview responses from teachers to administrators made reference to "top-down" implementation of the "Professional Learning Communities" reform. Some questioned whether such an implementation could influence the deep change in culture that they felt was needed in the district while others harbored resentment that a reform that was billed as a process that would empower teachers seemed to be heavily directed from administrative levels. These insights gained from interviews granted by district educators help to explain mixed survey results around cohesion.

Most district educators who responded to the survey agreed that they felt a strong sense of belonging to their specific Professional Learning Community and to their specific schools. The responses to these two topics on the survey were the highest affirmative results to any of the statements created to measure aspects of cohesion in the district. However, agreement was much less frequent when educators were asked whether the "Professional Learning Communities" reform had brought schools or the district closer together. For an initiative founded upon close collaboration among educators, the significant negative response to statements related to cohesiveness seems surprising. When one considers the responses in context with the interview responses regarding the implementation of the reform, a possible explanation emerges.

When considering whether "Professional Learning Communities" had brought the district closer together, one survey respondent added the following text to the response, "Almost destroyed it." It seems that within the Midwestern School District, the name of the reform initiative, "Professional Learning Communities," engenders a negative response among some members of the organization. So, while they may feel a strong sense of belonging to their learning community, school and district, linking the reform

with closeness within the district does not fit with the predispositions of some to dislike the initiative. Jokes made at teachers' association functions, sarcastic remarks in faculty lunchrooms and caustic complaints at meetings meant to foster greater understanding among educators merely continue to feed the negative perceptions of the title of the district reform movement, while individual parts of the reform such as collaboration and continuous improvement show strong appeal within the staff. People in the Midwestern School District feel connections to those with whom they work closely but do not attribute cohesion to the practices endorsed by the "Professional Learning Community" reform; however, it may just be a matter of time and more educators becoming comfortable with changes in the district for more cohesion to be perceived.

Despite recent advances by the district, optimism is an aspect of this district that warranted mixed feelings among district educators. The lack of optimism about the future of the district may be due in part to the feeling of animosity harbored by some members of the district. In other words, if the "Professional Learning Communities" reform is perceived to have caused conflict in the district, how can it hold the probability of generating success in the district? A negative predisposition toward Professional Learning Communities does not account for the level of pessimism among some members of the district. A review of other attitudes in the district helps to account for mixed levels of optimism in the district. Examining educator attitudes toward the ability of students and the complexity of change helps to explain the level of doubt found in the district.

During 2005, the Midwestern School District experienced several moments of celebration. First, a critical operating levy passed that allowed the district to avoid

devastating cuts to personnel and programs. In addition, several of the schools received higher ratings from the state than experienced previously, and the district as a whole also received a higher rating from the state. Even with these successes, district educators still tended to focus upon the deficiencies of students when discussing the possibility of future success in the district. One can hardly blame them, “Teacher candidates are told that ‘culturally different’ children are mismatched to the school setting and therefore cannot be expected to achieve as well as white, middle-class children. They are told that children of poverty are developmentally slower than other children” (Delpit 1995, p.178). One interviewee noted the work that had been directed toward the improvement of teacher work in the district and followed by saying that until measures are taken to improve the dispositions of students entering school, there would be little educators could do to bring success to the district. Similar informal conversations in the district reflect the same attitudes as educators dwell on the deficiencies of students rather than focusing on the impact of the collective work of educators. Belief in the abilities of students has shown little development in this district and the lack of belief is reflected by the mixed results obtained regarding the level of optimism in the district.

A third significant variable influencing the level of optimism in the district is the level of confidence educators in the district have in their ability to manage changes. In several interviews conducted with members of the district from varying levels of the organization, the word "overwhelming" was common. Similar sentiments were expressed in countless observations of formal and informal conversations from district meetings to lunch room conversations. When elaborating on feelings of being "overwhelmed," district educators commented upon the number of initiatives being

undertaken in the district and the speed with which changes were taking place. The feeling of being unable "to do one more thing" may have a strong influence on the seemingly discrepant results of relatively high perceptions of efficacy in the district and mixed results generated around the characteristics of cohesion and optimism. Morale, in some segments of the organization, strongly influences perceptions of hope and togetherness more so than perceptions of efficacy..

When an organization becomes a community, a greater level of interdependence is established as well as shared guiding values. When one considers that this organization has been asked to develop community around educational values while engaging in a number of other large and small initiatives, a generalized feeling of being "overwhelmed" is to be expected. Interdependence, by its very nature, creates a much more demanding environment for a person. While the "things" that people are doing may be changing or even increasing, the number of people on whom they depend and those who depend on that person magnifies the level of responsibility. Instead of working individually on a task and reporting to a supervisor, those working in small and large communities work collaboratively on tasks and report to all members of the group. One can easily see why those within a developing community would feel "overwhelmed" and be somewhat unsure of their ability to succeed with such increases in responsibility.

In addition, the increasing web of connections may also have influence over the perceptions of cohesion in the district. The intentional creation of interdependence in the district means that people who may not otherwise choose to work together around certain values are now compelled to associate and depend upon each other. What separates the intentional community from other communities is that the relationships formed are not

voluntary. Under these initiated circumstances, people who do not get along or espouse different philosophies are compelled to work together. Even people who are at slightly different places on a continuum of belief around the core values of the district may experience dysfunction. Perceptions among district educators that the reform has been "top-down" combined with interpersonal conflicts that come with new relationships helps to explain the mixed results found regarding cohesion and optimism in the district.

Finally, the urban Midwestern School District is subject to the common cultural attitudes noted in many districts of varying types. In addition to the frameworks and programs that have been generated specifically to improve schools over the years, schools have also been the target of improvement processes generated in the business arena. Even educators who have worked in schools for as few as ten years may have experienced three to five improvement initiatives that were instituted and then abandoned. Not surprisingly, many educators have developed a certain amount skepticism with references to any initiative as merely a passing fad. Statements like "This too shall pass" are common in many schools and were noted in this study. "Professional Learning Communities" is regarded as a fad by some members of the district. Uncertainty regarding the commitment to this reform initiative is influencing the level of optimism in the district.

The results generated in the areas of cohesion and optimism reveal the power of attitudes and beliefs enduring in the Midwestern School District. In spite of several recent successes in the district, many of the educators in the district are still guarded in showing optimism for the future of the district. In addition, some perceptions of cohesion may be influenced by the growing web of responsibility initiated in efforts to

intentionally develop community in the district. Typical characteristics of organizations in poor performance cycles like assigning blame to external factors (families of students) and lack of confidence (overwhelmed) are still part of the culture of the district. Time will tell whether or not intentional development of community in this district will result in decreasing the level of skepticism in the culture of this urban district.

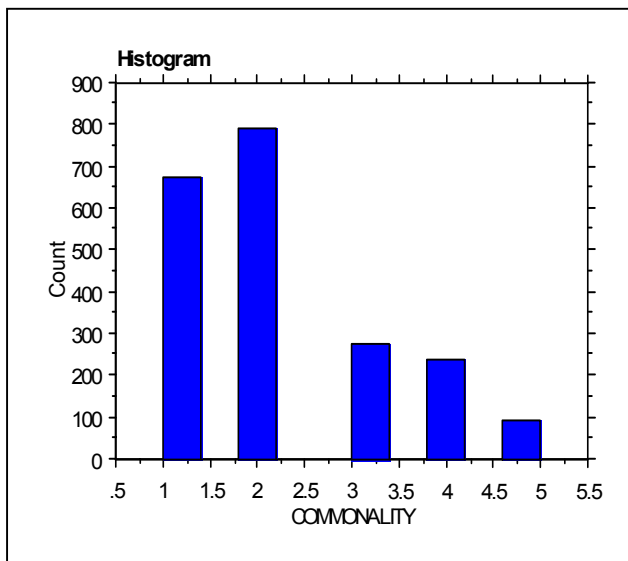
Intentional Community

Two findings in this study support the possibility of intentionally establishing community within this urban school district. First, several of the values promoted in the “Professional Learning Communities” framework have become strongly supported values in the district. Survey results and interviews with district personnel identified the values of collaboration and continuous improvement as core values in the district. Second, members of the district supported a clear leadership message in their agreement with statements about district administrator’s value of “Professional Learning Community” characteristics. In addition, several interviewees in the study stated beliefs that leaders in the district influence organizational values and some perceived that values had changed since the inception of the reform initiative. The district did not just coalesce around spontaneously generated educational values; a directed and influential effort has inspired the developing sense of community in this district.

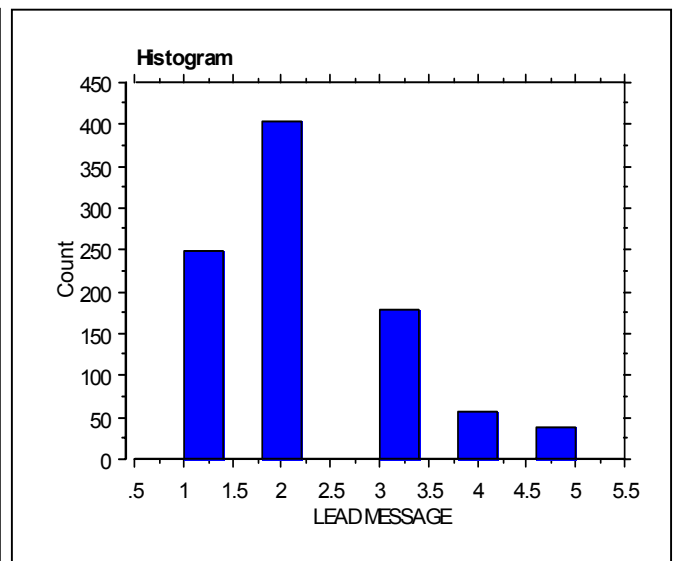
The similarity in results generated with regard to commonality and leadership message suggests a connection between efforts to encourage the development of values in the district and support for the values among members of the organization. The graphs in figure 5.1 and 5.2 show the similar distribution of survey responses on questions measuring commonality and leadership message. The level of attention given to

promoting learning around the values, describing actions supported by the values and monitoring the development of the values seen in observations seems to have been influential in generating relatively strong beliefs around values in the organization. Some of the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” are still in need of continuing education in the district for them to gain more support throughout the organization. With the degree of influence perceived for the impact of leadership on organizational values, a continuing concerted effort around the minimally developed characteristics may promote their development into strongly held values in the district. The intentional work of building community seems to have fostered common beliefs and collective action in this urban district.

5.1



5.2



The intentional work that has fostered the development of community in the organization has not been without compromises. The perceptions among district educators describing the initiative as a “top-down” reform have manifested themselves in

resistance to some aspects of the reform. Since the reform is described in its literature as a framework for empowering teachers to improve student achievement and predicated upon the professional judgment of teachers to identify the issues that need to be addressed, some of the requirements imposed upon the teacher learning groups seemed to run against the communitarian ideal behind the reform. If the values of the organization and the professional judgment of educators are at the core of the reform, why would the groups be asked to perform specific tasks at the direction of administrators? This is a valid question from district educators. Although the group sustaining characteristics of cohesion, optimism and morale may have suffered from the authoritarian approach, the development of common values and organizational efficacy may have benefited from directed efforts to practice the values. District leaders must continually monitor their efforts to keep district values at the forefront through “expressive communication” so that the intense focus does not become disempowering, directive micromanagement. The directive introduction of the reform initiated the processes through which community could develop intentionally and leadership through common values and interdependence could emerge.

Collaboration is one of the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities” that has become one of the core values of the organization. Although some degree of negotiation took place within the district to initiate the methods of collaboration, the initiation of the collaborative processes was primarily directed by district administration. Measures were taken through interpretation of the collective bargaining agreement and development of new agreements to make collaboration a mandated part of district routine. A great many educational meetings were also held

throughout the district to support the development of practices to take place during the collaborative time prescribed by the agreement. Despite the anticipation of resistance that one might expect as a reaction to a top-down change, collaboration is one of the most strongly held values in the district.

It may be true that district educators value collaboration in spite of authoritative implementation, but it should be noted the collaboration was not a noticeably strong part of the district prior to the “Professional Learning Communities” reform. The values that have become a strength in the district were probably not going to emerge on their own. Michael Fullan (2001) agrees: “...Moral purpose is worthwhile on just about every meaningful criterion; it may not become activated on its own accord, but it is here in nascent form to be cultivated and activated... Although moral purpose is natural, it will flourish only if leaders cultivate it” (p.27). Though starting with a pre-determined set of values runs counter to identifying and fostering previously existing learning values in the entire organization, communities may be and have been founded on pre-determined values. Through a strong sense of vision and moral commitment, many leaders have identified values and sought to instill those values as core values of a community. The belief and commitment engendered by the values among members of the organization is the factor that determines whether the community will form around such values. In this district, the reluctance of some district educators to commit may lie in the pre-packaged format of the values in book form instead of being seen as ideas generated from the commitment of a visionary leader or leadership team. Nonetheless, examination of this district as a study in communitarian leadership supports the probability that directive action taken at the onset of the reform has contributed to the strong and rapid

development of collaboration and other characteristics as strongly held values in the district. Regardless of the source of the values in this reform effort, people within the organization have found common meaning and belief in several values. Time and focus should reveal the influence of leadership in encouraging the development of “Professional Learning Community” values further.

Midwestern School District has shown development as an educational community. The development of common values and interdependence through collaboration has increased the capacity of the district to work collectively toward common goals as opposed to predominantly isolated work in individual classrooms. Leadership in the district, as seen in the development of core values in the district and through the perceptions of district educators, has shown a strong influence in the development of community. Leaders in the district have intentionally sought to build collaboration in the district by seeking to keep core values at the forefront and have focused the effort of educators working collectively on practices that district educators believe will result in improved student achievement. Communitarian leadership has been effective in achieving initial goals within the widely acknowledged most difficult of school settings, the urban district.

Culture and the Influence of Professional Learning Communities

Midwestern School District, like so many urban school districts, has many characteristics of organizations caught in decline. Many citizens of the city served by the district are entrenched in financial hardship induced by declining industry and suffer from a corresponding lack of hope. Schools are also perceived as a declining feature of the city prompting one city leader to refer to it as "a dead dog." The lack of financial

resources in the schools, which endured many cuts during the study, and the lack of moral support in the area equate to a zero sum environment in the schools. Educators in the district must divide scant resources; support of one program or subject results in fewer resources for other areas of the district. Appreciation from the families the schools serve and the greater citizenry is also infrequent, so programs and schools seek the membership of the most capable students to garner whatever good will is available. Building collective effort and educational community in this type of educational environment is especially demanding.

Complicating matters is a persistent belief among many district educators that students do not have the ability to achieve at high levels. District educators mentioned many factors that interfere with the learning ability of students. Comments included the lack of family resources at home to support learning and a general lack of respect and responsibility among students in the schools. The pessimism related to the ability of students in the district is heightened by increasing demands upon the district in the form of higher standards imposed through state and federal mandates. The doubts that some educators harbored about the ability of the district to achieve its goals for student achievement has turned to resignation in the face of rising and changing standards each year. Not only do some within the district feel that they do not teach students with enough ability to reach high standards, but they sense that they teach in a system where they cannot define success with any degree of precision.

Such doubts do not characterize the entire district. As shown by information collected through a variety of means, there are some within the district who believe in the ability of students to achieve and believe that the district is headed in the right direction

within the framework of the “Professional Learning Communities” initiative. Survey results indicate that many educators agree that all students can learn subject matter in any class with enough time and varied instruction. Several educators interviewed expressed confidence in the reform initiative and added that the district must maintain its present course to achieve district goals. These thoughts do not constitute the prevailing opinion, but they are a starting point from which district educators can build greater optimism in the district. Reversing a negatively charged culture in a cycle of decline is not a task that can be accomplished quickly or easily, but there are indications that the seeds of change have been planted through the developing learning community.

It builds confidence in leaders when they name problems that everyone knows are there and put facts on the table for everyone to see... when they refuse to shift responsibility to some nameless "them." It also helps other people get over their fear of exposure and humiliation to see leaders providing examples of accepting responsibility. (Kanter 2004, p.210)

For Midwestern School District, creating intentional community around common values is beginning to reverse the dispositions and attitudes that affect so many urban districts. The value of continuous improvement has become a strength in the district and may lead to changing perceptions of the learning abilities of students. More members of the district are accepting the responsibility to work together to find ways to increase learning for students rather than shifting the blame to the circumstances from which Midwestern students come. If learning results continue to improve, perceptions of cohesion and optimism may become more positive. As the core values strengthen and feelings of efficacy, cohesion and optimism increase, the power of community will begin to erode the negative culture of this urban district.

Closing Observations and Recommendations

Studying the Midwestern School district as an urban district undergoing communitarian reform inspires certain insights and suggestions for leadership with those insights in mind. The insights into the district are directed toward an interpretation of the attitudes and ideas expressed by members of the organization during the study and how those opinions relate to perceptions of the reform. As a building leader in this district, the suggestions for leaders engaged in communitarian reform are based upon my experience with this district, but they are not necessarily suggestions that have been implemented as of the writing of this document. They are, however, plans that will shape my continuing leadership in the district. In time, the compilation of insights and recommendations from those engaged in communitarian reform in many arenas may be synthesized into a useful framework for improving many school districts.

One startling contradiction in this study is amount of district educators who agreed that adhering to “Professional Learning Community” values will increase student achievement who also expressed low morale and defeatist attitudes in connection to the reform initiative. The discouraging aspect of these perceptions is found in the assumption that feelings of efficacy around one's actions should translate into optimism and positive perceptions of the reform effort that is guiding the district toward its goal. One possible explanation for the seeming contradiction is that there may be a more important goal for many people in the district than raising student achievement. That goal may be maintaining a comfortable status quo or it may be avoiding the daunting task of responding to the challenges of the district. Whatever the reason, members of the district must achieve more commonality regarding the essential goals of the district and

place those goals above all others.

The mention of Professional Learning Community among members of the district inspires varied responses. For a significant segment of district educators, the name of the reform effort brings caustic commentary regarding meetings or other aspects of the reform. Though the study showed widespread agreement with the value of the characteristics of “Professional Learning Communities,” the negative reactions to the initials PLC were common in observations and interviews. Such reactions are likely due in part to lingering memories of several recent reform efforts that have come and gone in the district. Like many districts, this one has changed its focus from one educational trend to another in an effort to improve the district. The membership in this district must reach a point in their perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in which the reform is not seen as merely another educational fad. Consequently, district leaders must maintain focus in the district to reinforce that the initiative is a long-term process.

The implication for leaders in other districts who may undertake a similar reform is to avoid focusing on the framework itself. There are a number of authors advocating for the same or similar values as those advocated by Professional Learning Communities literature, the work of Peter Senge (2000) and learning organizations springs to mind. One conclusion reached from analysis of the study results is that using a pre-packaged framework will inspire resistance within the organization regardless of its effectiveness. However, the values espoused in the framework were well respected. It may be better to build around values developed through leading the organization through a process than to prescribe values within a pre-defined framework like “Professional Learning Communities.” The Dufour books could become a resource for efforts as the initiative

evolves rather than a blueprint for how it should happen. People have seen too many programs and “Professional Learning Communities” may seem too programmatic for an organization that has been the focus of reform for years.

In the Midwestern School District, the option of re-starting by identifying common values is not available. Leaders must consider ways to reverse some of the resistant thinking regarding the initiative. The success that the district is experiencing should go far in changing perceptions if the successes continue. However, leadership in the district continues to try to fit several changes under the umbrella of Professional Learning Communities that each call for additional learning and rethinking ingrained practices of many educators. These initiatives, in addition to facilities and technology changes, present a great deal for already "overwhelmed" educators to handle. The perception among educators revealed in the study that they do not believe they are able to manage all of the changes in the reform initiative is exacerbated by adding more initiatives.

One of the key selling points for the “Professional Learning Communities” framework to teachers is that it is meant to empower teachers to make decisions about their own learning and students' learning in collaboration with one another. To this point, many of the activities of Professional Learning Communities in each building have been undertaken at the direction of building and district leadership. For the reform to achieve its claim of empowerment and to become a self-sustaining community, district leaders will have to relinquish the authoritarian approach to a degree and serve more as providers of those resources educators identify to help them meet their own learning needs and those of their students. While a directive approach has been effective in introducing

several values to the district, values cannot be enforced. Values are self-sustaining through belief and commitment. Leaders in the Midwestern School District must continue to emphasize district values at every turn while allowing members in the community to develop and strengthen the values through their collaborative work. As Chicago Superintendent of Schools, Barbara Eason Watkins, suggests, “Transforming communities and professional environments could not be a top-down command; instead, it had to be embraced and accepted by the entire system” (p.195). If the district is to become a more pure community, leaders in the district will retain an influential role though it becomes less directive.

Leadership with a communitarian focus has resulted in a developing community in the Midwestern School District. Though some may argue that the initiative has been overly top-down in nature, several elements of community have developed strength. Collaboration is a strongly held value in the district as well as continuous improvement and teacher use of data. The directive style of leadership in introducing the reform utilized to date may be contributing to perceptions of cohesion and optimism that are not as strong as common values. Perceptions of efficacy and continued successes in the district will play a role if dubious perceptions of cohesion and optimism are to be reversed. Leaders in the district can be satisfied with the successes experienced by the district as well as the developing community achieving interdependence through collaboration and the strength of common values to guide the community. To build a stronger community, leaders must be willing to become less directive in leading the district and allow the common values in the district to strengthen the ability of each part of the district to lead itself. The characteristics of the urban district existing in this

district have contributed to some challenges in the development of community, but the initiative has taken hold despite those challenges. Some of the potential of communitarian leadership has been realized in the Midwestern School District and the possibility of developing a strong learning community is promising.

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Appendices

Appendix A Survey

Current Position: (circle) **Teacher** **School Administrator** **District Administrator** **Other**

Survey of Organizational Beliefs and Values

The purpose of this survey is to measure the degree to which those within an organization hold certain values and beliefs. The survey is an academic research instrument designed and conducted for the sole purpose of collecting information for a study of educational leadership. To ensure the anonymity of your answers, please do not write your name or school on your survey. Your participation in the survey is greatly appreciated. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Please seal the completed survey in the envelope provide and return to the lead secretary in your building. Results of the survey will be available upon request in August of 2005. If you have questions about the study please contact me at (513) 594 5135 or gwilli2112@yahoo.com or my academic advisor Dr. Raymond Terrell at (513) 529 6826 or terrelr@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship, Miami University at (513) 529-3734 or HumanSubjects@MUOhio.edu.

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Please use the table below to indicate your perceptions with regard to each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Every student is capable of success in every subject.

1 2 3 4 5

Opportunities for collaboration empower teachers to solve problems of teaching practice.

1 2 3 4 5

Collaboration among teachers is essential to improvement in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

If a student is given enough time and varied instruction, that student can master any subject.

1 2 3 4 5

Analyzing and using data has contributed to increases in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

More than half of the people I work with agree to common learning values developed in collaboration with each other.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe that my school district must continually strive to improve.

1 2 3 4 5

The mission, vision and values of our school guide educational decision at my school.

1 2 3 4 5

Teacher use of data is essential for improving student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

The values advocated by Professional Learning Communities support district improvement in achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel a strong sense of belonging to my Professional Learning Community.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel a strong sense of belonging to my school.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel a strong sense of belonging to my school district.

1 2 3 4 5

Focusing on results is essential for improving student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel that I have influence with regard to decisions affecting student learning.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel strongly that our Professional Learning Community will achieve its goals.

1 2 3 4 5

Developing shared vision and mission has contributed to increases in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

Conducting action research has contributed to increases in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

Using action research to determine if teaching practices are working is essential for increasing student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe that Professional Learning Community concepts have drawn my school closer together.

1 2 3 4 5

Collaboration has contributed to increases in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe that intervention strategies are essential for increasing student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe that Professional Learning Community concepts have drawn my school district closer together.

1 2 3 4 5

I believe my school district is improving.

1 2 3 4 5

I am optimistic that my school district will reach its goals guided by Professional Learning Community values.

1 2 3 4 5

Intervening with individual students has contributed to increases in student achievement.

1 2 3 4 5

My school district is a more cohesive community than it has been in years past.

1 2 3 4 5

My school is a more cohesive community than it has been in years past.

1 2 3 4 5

Collaboration is highly valued by leaders in my school district.

1 2 3 4 5

Focusing on results is highly valued by leaders in my school district.

1 2 3 4 5

Using data to increase student achievement is highly valued by leaders in my school district.

1 2 3 4 5

Conducting action research to increase student achievement is highly valued by leaders in my school district.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Dissertation Interview Questions

How has the district changed, if at all, since the introduction of Professional Learning Communities?

Have you noticed changes in the attitudes and beliefs of people in the district since the introduction of Professional Learning Communities?

What do you consider to be the dominant values of our school district?

Have values changed since the introduction of professional learning communities?

Do you think that collaboration is highly valued where you work?

Do you think that using data is highly valued where you work?

Do you think that people adhere to the values and vision that have been created where you work?

Do leaders in the district influence the core values? If so, how?

What leadership practices, if any, have led you to become a more productive member of the educational community or a stronger supporter of building community?

What leadership practices, if any, have had an adverse effect on your participation or support of building community?

Have there been any changes in the way that you work with others since the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

How do you feel about future prospects for the district with Professional Learning Communities as the focus?

Which statement describes your belief best?

"The district will be effective if people are given the opportunity to fulfill their roles using their individual talents and strengths"

"The district will be effective if people work together regularly and combine their talents and strengths"

--Participant may develop his or her own statement--