

**TEACHERWORK:
A JOURNEY TO RECAST THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH
FOR A MIDDLE SCHOOL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF
POWER, POLITICS, AND PERSONALITIES**

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for a Middle School within the Context of Power, Politics, and Personalities**

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to focus on a teacher-led school reform initiative. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach for Early Childhood Education and committed to constructivist teaching and learning, a group of Middle School teachers embarked on a journey to plan a new way of thinking and being in a Middle School. This ethnographic study utilized observations, interviews, participant action research, and a variety of field texts to capture the story of these remarkable teachers.

This case study chronicles the life and work of thirteen teachers, three administrators and two university faculty members as they struggled to make sense of the planning process that was necessary to launch a reform effort. Particular attention was focused on the power, politics, and personalities that both harmonized and conflicted with the work of these reformers.

Analysis revealed a passionate desire on the part of the reformers to change the face of schooling and education for children and for themselves. Conflicting forces in opposition to their best efforts included the lack of adequate time to devote to such a cause, institutional and cultural rituals in the school, and a changing political climate in the town in which the reform was initiated.

Despite the barriers, this group has been able to achieve a solid sense of community and has been able to stand together as an articulate, knowledgeable, savvy group of educators on behalf of improved education for children. Strengthening their power base through collaboration with the administrators at their school has escalated their effort to the implementation stage. Sharing vision and responsibility, their dream is coming true. Based on lessons learned in the journey with the teachers a model for exploration of process of innovation in context is proposed.

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The experiences of working on a Ph.D. and writing a dissertation are ones that I never dreamed would be in my life's path. But like the teachers, whose story is offered in these pages, I was surrounded by extraordinary circumstances, people, and opportunity that propelled me into this amazing journey.

I'll never forget the return flight from Italy in 1997 when Vickie Fu and I sat together and talked for ten hours about the incredible experience that we had just shared in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Before we set foot on land again we had developed a plan for advocating for respectful, joyful education for teachers and children back home. I knew then that in order to follow my passion for teaching and learning that I would need to immerse myself in the process. It's been an incredible ride and I have many, many people to thank.

First, to Vickie, my mentor, I am forever grateful. You've offered wisdom, guidance, and challenge with a generosity of attitude, and with great care and consideration. You've helped me to set my sights high and you've taught me how to stretch for the answers. Our incredible intersubjectivity is something that I will always treasure and it has been the reason that I am now taking these final steps in the process that began on that airplane. We've been through so much since our early days together and we have so many more dreams to catch. Thanks for being patient with me.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

“Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is hope, above all, that gives us strength to live and to continually try new things, even in conditions that seem hopeless.” (Havel, 1993).

The Context

For the past twenty-four months I have worked alongside a group of devoted and forward-thinking teachers at Boone Middle School as they have attempted to re-think the Middle School experience. Their shared goal was to find a way to recast the Reggio Emilia Approach to inform the teaching and learning in their school. The group consisted of thirteen teachers, one administrative assistant, two university support persons (of which I was one), and one parent. While dedicated to their belief that children (and teachers) deserve an educational setting that is respectful, interesting, challenging, and joyful; they have found that the hard part is circumnavigating all the road blocks and barriers in the way of innovation.

“Actually, I’ve thought for quite sometime that there is no way that we can be ready by fall. There are so many hoops . . . our jobs . . . our families . . . the community politics . . . we simply don’t have as much time to devote as we need.”

One teacher finally speaks aloud the sentiment that no one has wanted to admit, but everyone has felt would be inevitable. After a year’s devoted work on a school-restructuring effort, the group of teachers must concede that the road to reform is long and rutted. While they are not giving up, they are finding that they must be willing to adjust their sights and timing while paying heed to the context in which they are working.

I have been completely captured by this experience and by the passion and imagination of the teachers who committed themselves to the effort. My own Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophy and my interest in the possibility of “bottom-up” school reform combined to guarantee that I would be an eager and willing participant in the journey.

A careful review of this two-year inquiry tells the story of the beginning of an innovation and the process that led to it becoming a shared goal for school reform. Careful attention has been given to the context which has affected its growth and development. Personal issues, the leadership in the school, and community politics have each played a role in this complicated and complex process.

The Personal Context

The personal context includes family responsibilities, life changes, dispositions of the members, time and the ability to collaborate. For this group of hardworking teachers, life is a constant juggle. To add to the juggle and challenges, the work and devotion necessary to re-form education at the only Middle School in a highly influential and competitive town is to complicate one’s life enormously. In addition, within a group of

this size it is inevitable that there will be unexpected personal setbacks. During the course of their work together one or more of the group has weathered the death of a family member, an illness of a husband, a mother-in-law who moved in with the family, a miscarriage. Other life-changes have been more joyful such as weddings, pregnancies, and births; but have also brought pause to the process of the group's work. Trying to juggle the responsibilities of teacher, mother, wife, daughter-in-law, grandmother, and reformer is much like "trying to change the tires while driving the car" (Meier, 1995, p.151). The dispositions of these special educators have kept them driving despite the occasional flat tire. They are by their own definition: thick-skinned, passionate, risk-takers. But they are also human, and although extremely talented, they have not yet mastered the ability to increase the numbers of hours in a day. So, time (the lack of) has been another deterrent in the work of this group. In addition to these stumbling blocks, the teachers discovered that they were skillful at cooperation, but that their ability to truly collaborate was not as finely tuned. Viewing the innovation through this complex personal context was an important component of this study.

The Leadership in the School Context

The context of leadership in the school has had a decided impact on our group of reformers. A traditional hierarchy exists in most school systems and it is fairly uncommon for teachers to initiate an educational reform effort. Most restructuring occurs in a "top-down" mode. These teachers have attempted to cross the traditional boundaries in the system and have suggested a "bottom-up" innovation. A careful look at the response from the school's leaders was important, as the status quo in the school had been shaken. At Boone Middle School, the principalship is complex. There is a main principal of the school as well as two assistant principals. For the most part, the Boone Middle School leadership (especially from the head principal) has been open and receptive to the ideas coming from this group, however, the administrators have made it clear from the beginning that they still retained veto power. Sensing that they were treading on fragile ground, the teachers have been cautious and planful about their interactions with the principals.

The principals have expressed a couple of concerns regarding the plans coming from the reform group. The primary concern was how the rest of the faculty might react to this attempt to change the way of schooling and education at Boone. This topic has come up at each meeting with the principals. This careful attention, by the principals, to the dynamics in the school seemed to be both nurturing and stifling. The ambiguity of this behavior was explored more fully as the story unfolded.

The Community Politics Context

Boone has enjoyed a reputation in the county for being innovative and forward-thinking. In the late 1980's Boone was the first junior high in the region to make an effort to adopt a middle school philosophy and to realign some of its practices to mirror the new philosophy. They have been proud of their teaming approach, of their no-bell system, and of their responsive scheduling. In several classrooms, teachers have adopted constructivist approaches with great success. "History Alive" curriculum supplements traditional instruction and hands-on, interactive experiences can be found in many classrooms in the school. In 1998 when the State Standards of Learning (SOLs) were

initiated in Virginia schools Boone was forced to follow the mandate. There were no immediate concerns about this new requirement, but soon the media began telling the story of punitive consequences should a school fail to pass the standardized tests. About the same time, Boone was becoming enthused by a new math curriculum called Core Plus. This integrated system of math promoted a constructivist approach to teaching and learning and it was highly acclaimed by the math teachers at Boone. The Central Office supported the system as did the principals at Boone. So it came as a surprise to teachers and administrators when the school came under siege from discontented community members due to the fact that this nontraditional math curriculum had been adopted at the school. A public war was waged in the newspapers and at School Board meetings. Angry parents voiced concern that their child would not be “ready” for high school with this “watered-down” math curriculum. Parents, fearful for their child’s future, demanded that the school reconsider and reinstate the traditional program. Teachers and principals bore the brunt of this onslaught and reputations were diminished in the community. This shifting context has had a decided impact on the reform effort at Boone and was explored in greater detail in this study.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Travel as a Conduit to Change

After years of hearing and reading about the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, I have had the privilege and pleasure to travel there on three separate occasions. Participation in the formal Study Institutes and living in and among the culture for approximately two weeks during each trip gave me a glimpse into a system of care and education that seemed unsurpassed in other areas of the world. During each trip I would spend considerable time studying and reflecting on what I saw, heard, and felt in the schools and in the city. Each time I was intent upon finding ways to reinvent the approach for the children, teachers and families back home. Some changes have been made back home in the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School where I work, but they have often been cosmetic - like the revamping of the environment. Other changes have been more purposeful and thoughtful - like the attention to the planning and visioning of curriculum, and the crafting of both beautiful and meaningful documentation of the children’s processes and the life in the school. But still a piece seems to be missing. When I read Howard Gardner's (1998) forward in the 2nd edition of The Hundred Languages of Children, I began to have a sense of that missing piece:

"As an American educator, I cannot help but be struck by certain paradoxes. In America we pride ourselves on being focused on children, and yet we do not pay sufficient attention to what they are actually expressing. We call for cooperative learning among children, and yet we rarely have sustained cooperation at the level of teacher and administrator. We call for artistic works, but we rarely fashion environments that can truly support and inspire them. We call for parental involvement, but are loathe to share ownership, responsibility, and credit with parents. We recognize the need for community, but we so often crystallize immediately into interest groups. We hail the discovery method, but we do not have the confidence to allow children to follow their own noses and hunches. We

call for debate, but often spurn it; we call for listening, but we prefer to talk; we are affluent, but we do not safeguard those resources that can allow us to remain so and to foster the affluence of others." (p.xvii)

Gardner has helped me to identify the missing component - true community collaboration. Cooperation, support and trust among a group of people is a rare experience. In our fast-paced society and in our schools, we have little time or patience for sharing ideas, cementing relationships and achieving intersubjectivity. This special, sometimes unspoken, understanding among people who work and/or live closely takes time, energy, commitment, and skill. I for one, have had very few opportunities to practice this skill of being a contributing member of a learning community. As Jon Nimmo (1998) says:

"I do not feel that I really know how to best contribute to my community, collaborate genuinely with colleagues and move through conflicts with a certainty that we will all arrive at a place of better understanding. These understandings are not in my bones, because they have been missing from my cultural experience and education. We must begin to try to model collaboration and community at the adult level."

The people who work in and for the schools in Reggio Emilia together have been able to achieve something extraordinary. Their commitment to children and to one another has enabled them to find ways to overcome adversity and to reach a level of early education that our children in the United States deserve, as well. What would it take to achieve the level of experience that Gardner speaks of? What are the dispositions of the individual members of such a collaborative? What support factors would be necessary?

Sergiovanni (1994) has defined communities as being made up of "relationships of people who work in the same place (community of place), feel a sense of belonging and obligation to one another (community of friendship) and are committed to a common faith or values (community of mind)" (p.63). In this study I have attempted to follow a group of teachers who were struggling to become a viable community based on Sergiovanni's definition.

TIMELINE: The History of the Project

This story really began in May, 1997 after I returned from my second trip to Reggio Emilia, Italy. As always, I had been taken by the concept of collaboration and community that was so evident in their schools. But this time I had to admit that it became clear to me that this feature seemed to be the fundamental premise on which these world-acclaimed schools were built. The idea was played out in all aspects of the school. The buildings were designed to afford opportunity for conversation and meeting by thoughtfully placing a large and open piazza in the entry of the school. Here, I saw parents gathering to chat in the mornings, teachers meeting to collaborate about a lesson and children laughing and playing and working on projects together. The strong bond and relationship was also obvious when you observed the documentation of stories about school events that were artfully and respectfully hung for all to see, revisit, and reflect upon. This form of communication in the schools seemed to serve to inform, to educate, and to build community pride. In addition, curriculum was designed with the use of the "progettazione" which loosely translates to "project" or "to project". Through the school

projects, children, teachers, family members as well as community members all worked together to explore and investigate a concept and then to document the process of coming to understand. In this way the "progettazione" offers the opportunity for all members of the school to work together to visualize and extend an idea. Many other strategies were in place that seemed to work together to create a place where interrelationships were fundamental. And because of this central emphasis, everyone seemed to thrive. Teacher-reported satisfaction was enormously high with the average turnover in teachers occurring every 17 years! Children thrived and looked forward to the interest-based learning that sprang from the projects. And parents felt that they were true partners in their child's education.

I found myself plotting and pondering regarding this collaborative and amiable environment; I felt a strong desire to re-create this feeling back home. A small plan of possibility began to hatch then. Upon returning to Virginia Tech I discovered that the university had just announced that one of its seven missions would now be to create what they were calling "a community of learners". I wasn't sure what that was but I liked the term and what it implied and so I pitched my idea to a couple of colleagues in my department. We took the idea to the Provost and she liked it, too, and so the Great Duck Pond Project was born.

The Great Duck Pond Project

There's a magical duck pond just over the hill from our Lab School on the Virginia Tech campus. It's a place where residents from our small town gather all year round. Children feed the ducks, athletes run by, students study or ice skate, families picnic, and others of us sit and watch the happenings. It is at this special community focal point that the seed for the Reggio Emilia Approach began to grow in our town.

The Great Duck Pond Project became a community project where teachers from preschool, elementary schools, the Boone Middle School, The Boone High School and several university professors came together to think about curriculum. We studied the Reggio Emilia Approach together and began to imagine how we might use the duckpond as the impetus for a large community "progettazione". Everyone committed to the project for one year and launched into various aspects of studying the pond and contributing to the communities' body of knowledge. Soon each of the teachers in our collaborative had the children in their classes working on fascinating and authentic projects that had been inspired by the duckpond and the individual interests of the children.

The following are some examples of some of the projects: The Lab School children chronicled the experience of a female mallard who laid her eggs on their playground. A mixed-age group of elementary school children got excited about the historical significance of the pond and wrote, directed, and starred in a play based on their research. At the Boone Middle School, a group of 6th graders became the self-proclaimed stewards of the pond and dove into environmental projects that were aimed at cleaning up the pond and surrounding areas. The 7th graders decide to write a book of stories about the pond and set up a hot line and a web site where people could share their humorous, romantic and adventurous stories. The Boone High School was also involved with a chemistry class doing advanced water-testing research and a photography class creating a gorgeous video. On campus, an Environmental Art class used the duckpond as

their palette and produced a fascinating display that the town was talking about for months.

About mid-way through our year together, there was another opportunity to visit Reggio Emilia. Because the Middle School teachers, in particular, had been experiencing great success with their new brand of curriculum, two of them asked to join our delegation. And so in January, 1998 we traveled together to Italy for two weeks. This time, as I toured and studied the approach, I looked at it with different eyes. Because of my new liaison with the middle school teachers, I began to think about application for this age group. We spent 14 days together talking and plotting and pondering. It was an incredible experience for me and by the time that we were ready to come home, the teachers were certain that they could make this approach happen at the Boone Middle School.

The teachers had also been inspired by the concept of community that they had seen in the schools in Reggio Emilia. They longed to establish "relationships of respect and care" (Hargraves & Fullen, 1998, p.31) with their students because they realized that this would be the basis for intellectual as well as social development. Smaller class sizes, group project work, and collaborating teachers were pieces of their vision for a restructured system. They were already calling their effort "The Revolution" and were inspired and enthusiastic and couldn't wait to share it with their colleagues.

Once back home, the duckpond group continued to meet and at the close of the school year, the group put together a museum exhibit and a video about the collaborative project. The town's local television station aired the video and the exhibit was displayed at the local Natural History Museum for the summer. The Reggio Emilia Approach was becoming more widely known and understood in the town. The middle school teachers decided to officially launch their "revolution" on the day after school let out for the summer. Their hope was that they would begin to share their understanding with others over the course of the summer and then see what the response was. If there was enough support, they hoped to be able to develop a "school within a school" at Boone. My goal was to follow this group of middle school teachers as they moved through the process of planning for change and curricular revision.

I have attended every meeting of the Revolution group since that first one in June, 1998. I have served as the documentor for the group: keeping notes, photographs and video of the entire process. The teachers in the effort have known of my goals and have "used" me in several capacities. I functioned as the "resident expert on the Reggio approach" and since I was also researching other school-change movements, I was also asked for feedback in this realm. Also, in our many discussions we have shared our disappointment in the current middle school system. My own children were shuffled, labeled, and categorized while at the school. They had to suffer humiliation from teachers who were grumpy and who would have preferred to be elsewhere. The Boone teachers often talked about their love for learning and their discontent with some of the practices that they had seen in public schools. They wanted to be a part of a school where children and teachers learned together and from one another. They wanted a system that would be more responsive to the social and emotional needs of the adolescent. They admitted that

their passion for this movement was inspired by the need for better schools for the kids, but also by their intense desire for their own professional development.

The Purpose of the Project

Educational reform can only be successful when educators understand how change takes place (Fullan & Miles, 1992). This study has endeavored to bring to light the process of change by conducting an ethnographic investigation of the efforts of a group of reformers.

Much has been written in the educational school reform literature about the *implementation* of innovative efforts. I was more interested in what happens *prior* to implementation. This forming and planning stage seemed crucial to the success of any effort because "most reforms foundered on the rocks of flawed implementation" (Cuban, 1988, p.343). There is very little in the school reform literature regarding teacher-led initiatives. My focus was on what it took for these teachers to form, to re-form, to change, to re-invent. Specifically, I wanted to know more about how a group like this came together initially, the dispositions of the members, the problems that arose, the leaders who emerged, the energy and passion that sustained the group, the intersubjectivity that occurred. I was also intrigued by the persons "outside" of the movement and wondered how some teachers ended up "inside" and others did not. In addition, it seemed important to consider the conditions or climate of the school in respect to change. I planned to explore the history of innovation at Boone and how this history had helped to shape the conditions for new initiatives. Each of these areas certainly proved to be influential to the momentum of the reform effort. Other areas that emerged with the ethnographic study, were the strong influence of the personal, leadership, and community contexts.

A Pioneering effort

As far as I know, based on a review of the literature, this is the only Middle School that has embraced the Reggio Emilia approach in the country. There are several elementary schools that have adopted the approach and those efforts are moving forward - some with the assistance of state departments of education mandates and with foundation support for educational reform. Because this is such a pioneering effort, and one of very few initiated by teachers, there has been some notoriety attached. Our colleagues from Reggio Emilia, Italy have been watching our effort carefully and so the pressure to succeed has been there. This additional condition has been noted and explored to determine its impact on the movement.

Questions to Guide the Study

Reflection on the literature and on the evolution of the project allowed a distillation of questions that guided this study. The purpose of the project was to follow (as a participant/researcher) a group of teachers and administrators from the Boone Middle School as they considered a major curricular and philosophical change. Middle school education has often been ignored in the literature. Emphasis tends to be given to the early years of education and then again to the later years. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) called for fundamental changes in middle schools after noting that many adolescents, doubting their abilities and fearing failure, invest less of themselves in academics than is desirable. The curious history of school reform tells a telling tale in which reform advocates in legislative or administrative positions enforce

change. These "top-down" efforts, however, are difficult to implement without strong support from the practitioners (Herd & Sawyers, 1997).

This ethnographic study proposed to follow along as a group of practitioners attempted to change the face of education in their school. Particular emphasis was placed on the formation of this "bottom-up" group. Original questions to guide this study included:

1. Who joins the group and why?
2. What are the dispositions, life experiences and career histories of these members and how do these issues impact their participation in this effort?
3. How do some teachers and administrators end up "inside" and others "outside" the reform movement?
4. Why do the members remain in the group?
5. How does the history of innovation and change at this particular school contribute to the conditions for further innovation?

Additional questions that emerged during the course of this research included:

1. How do the personal life experiences/changes of the members of a reform group impact the work of the entire group?
2. How does a group attain a "community of place, friendship, and mind"? (Sergiovanni, 1994).
3. How does the culture of leadership in a school affect innovation?
4. How does community politics affect innovation?

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to begin to create a conceptual context for this study, it was important to review some of the literature that helped to form a framework. In this section I have highlighted the most relevant literature. For a more detailed review, the reader is referred to Appendix A. The Reggio Emilia Approach was reviewed as it is the premise on which the reform is based. Certainly a strong working knowledge of the principles and philosophy of the approach were necessary to conduct this study.

Next, the School Reform literature was reviewed in order to study the dispositions of prior successful and not-so-successful movements. Embedded in this literature is the strong emphasis on *change* which was also explored thoroughly.

Additionally, I have evaluated the literature surrounding the organization and culture of groups. Systems of democratic collaboration were analyzed in order to determine the emphasis on formation of groups; in particular those who join and those who do not. The fact that this reform group has chosen to call itself a "revolution" has been viewed by some "outside the group" as exclusionary behavior. The term "revolution" may have indicated to some that there are *members* and then there are *outsiders*. This posturing within a small school culture may have been problematic for the effort.

And finally I have reviewed the theoretical concepts of social constructivism and Bronfenbrenner's ecology of developmental processes as I see these notions as having strong ties to this study.

Reggio Emilia

Reggio Emilia is a small city in north, central Italy, where for the past 30 years educators, parents and the citizens of the town have worked together to produce an amiable system of education. These schools have become a "point of reference and a source of inspiration to educators around the world" (Cohen, 1992; Corsaro & Emiliani, 1992; Kamerman & Kahan, 1994; Newsweek: Dec.2, 1991; New, 1993; Pistillo, 1989; Ross, 1982; Saltz, 1976).

What has come to be called the Reggio Emilia Approach has evolved over the last 30 years, beginning when founder, Loris Malaguzzi had a vision for a system of amiable schools. The system is a "way of thinking" (Rinaldi, 1994) about children and education. For American educators who have valued the contributions of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, Bruner, Gardner, Bronfenbrenner and others; the Reggio concepts feel familiar. But the actual practice in the Reggio schools is where the Italians have excelled.

Socially constructed practices

The practices are socially constructed and include a strong system of teacher-child bond called looping where teachers and children remain together for a period of three years. Due to the intimate relationship between teacher and child they are able to offer a rich, exciting and meaningful curriculum based on the child's interests and preferences. The children then take part in exploration and expression which takes shape through a multiple "language" system including words, movement, drawing, painting, building,

sculpting, music, dramatic play and hundreds of others. And then they ultimately work on collaborative projects.

In addition to these curricular innovations, there exists a partnership with families that becomes an intricate system of engagement where families are visible and important components in the school. It is not unusual for parents to serve as viable, elected members of the school's advisory board.

A system of documenting the processes

The school system has also developed a system of representing the processes of learning within the school called *documentation*. This technique has served important functions including providing the children with a concrete and visible memory of what they said and did in order to serve as a jumping-off point for next steps to learning. In addition, documentation is a technique for providing educators with a tool for research and a key to continuous improvement and renewal. And finally, it provides parents and the public with detailed information about what happens in the schools and serves as a means of eliciting their reactions and support. (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998)

A pedagogy of communication and relationships

A strong pedagogy of communication (Spaggiari, 1998) has developed in order to practice this system of socially constructing knowledge. An important emphasis is placed on the ability to dialogue. A safe place to debate promotes the high quality social and educational experience as well as the feelings of attachment and reassurance which are "important factors in the pedagogy of communication" (Spaggiari, 1998).

Carlina Rinaldi (1998) suggests that as adults we need to "initiate and nurture situations that stimulate this kind of learning process, where conflict and negotiation appear as the driving forces for growth". Loris Malaguzzi (1998) has called the system "an education based on interrelationships". He believed that the goal of the school was to create an amiable place "it must embody ways of getting along together and of intensifying relationships among the three central protagonists". He stressed complete attention to the problems of education and of activating participation and research. This Pedagogy of Relationships he believed, would be the tool for a united and conscious group. This tool was very important in order to "feel good about cooperating and to produce, in harmony, a higher level of results" (Rinaldi, 1998).

The Progettazione

In the Reggio schools the technique that is used to allow social constructivist processes to develop is the *progettazione*. Through these group projects, the children, teachers and parents come to discover themselves. A team of co-teachers is the essential premise for any dialectic and is the foundation for any form of collegiality. Philosophically speaking this combines the resources of relativity with plurality of viewpoints where differences of opinions become a resource rather than a limiting factor. (Rankin, 1996).

The link between social and cognitive learning

"Reggio educators believe that cognitive learning and social learning happen simultaneously; one does not happen without the other. Therefore they see learning taking place most effectively in social situations, both for themselves as teachers and for the children." (Rankin, 1996). "This mutuality includes a sense of reciprocity and a sense

of community among participants. In such a collaborative relationship, different partners take the lead at different times and influence each other in a reciprocal process. All the participants are open to something new that might happen. Simultaneously, they all influence the direction and timing of an investigation. Collaboration in this context is seen as a system of social relationships whereby children and adults - including both educators and parents - coordinate their action and restructure their thinking and resources in relation to each other" (Rankin, 1996).

Collaboration among participants depends upon an openness to change and an ability to express an idea and reflect on it to allow its full development. Thus collaboration as a professional practice needs to be analyzed over a period of time. (Rankin, 1996).

Middle School Reform

In the 1960's a reform effort emerged that promoted the replacement of the junior high model with that of a middle school concept. The junior high model had begun in 1909 and was organized "like a little high school in virtually every way" (George, Stevenson, Thomason, Beane, 1992). The junior high was characterized by academic departments, specialized electives, and rigid grouping and promotion standards for students. In 1961 the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development reported that "the junior high school is a hybrid institution, a school with an identity crisis as severe as the identity crisis endured by many of the young students within it" (George, et.al., 1992, p.5).

Responding to this criticism, the middle school reform agenda proposed the establishment of schools in the middle whose purposes and structures were distinctive from that of the high school. The goal of the middle school reform was to establish schools that "are developmentally responsive to the needs of the 10-15 year old learner" (Polite, 1995). The changes that were evidenced from this effort included interdisciplinary teams of teachers instructing a shared group of students, exploratory electives, and less rigid ability grouping of students.

Despite these changes, according to the Carnegie Council's 1989 report the Middle Schools have not been responsive and their still exists a problematic system of educating our adolescents.

The Coalition for Essential Schools

Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools must also be mentioned in this section. The Coalition began in the early 1980's after an in-depth study pointed out obvious inefficiencies in the basic structure of schools. *Horace's Compromise* (1984) was Sizer's first book detailing the concern over the uneven quality of education and offering suggestions for restructuring. The Coalition has a common set of nine principles. They do not offer models or programs to follow, but insist that these systems must arise from the individual community or school attempting to restructure. The general anthem of the Coalition follows:

- ❖ Focus. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well.

- ❖ Simple goals. The school's goal and the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than by "subjects".
- ❖ Universal Goals. The school's goals should be universal, the means to the goals should reflect the individual student.
- ❖ Personalization. Teaching and learning should be personalized and the relationship between teacher and student should be maximized.
- ❖ Student as Worker. The pedagogy of provoking students to learn how to learn and thus to take control of their own learning is essential.
- ❖ Diploma by exhibition.
- ❖ Attitude. The school stresses unanxious expectations, trust, and decency.
- ❖ Staff. Staff expect to be responsible for multiple obligations and feel a sense of commitment to the entire school.
- ❖ Budget. Low staff:student ratios, time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries, an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed traditional schools by more than 10%.

Deborah Meier and Paul Schwatz have been successful in adapting these principles at their Central Park East Secondary School in East Harlem. In addition to the principles noted above, this school has developed habits of mind, work, and heart that emphasize the qualities that seem to define their ideal citizen – empathy and skepticism. Their approach asks each student to consider a situation “from the eyes of another and with the tendency to wonder about the validity of what they encountered” (Meier, 1995, p.30).

The Boone teacher-reform group has embraced the Reggio philosophy and sees strong similarities in the work ofSizer, Meier, and Schwatz. But before they could begin to develop curriculum and reinvent school structure, they first needed to develop a system of being together as a community.

Social Constructivism and The Ecology of Developmental Processes

Social constructivism, for me, means that cognition is a social process - one that happens as we interact with one another, with materials and with the world. The schools of Reggio Emilia embrace this concept as well and take great care to craft experiences that will provoke these types of encounters. When children work together or teachers and children or teachers and teachers in a collaborative manner all parties are changed by the process. This concept of social constructivism is an important one in the framing of this study.

The revolution community spent a great amount of time in dialogue, challenge and debate of their positions as their ideas for the "school within a school" took shape. In addition to its importance in the process of becoming a viable group, it was also an important component in the framing of the new curriculum.

Barbara Rogoff (1998) also suggests that these socially constructed processes and experiences take place on various planes including: personal plane, interpersonal plane, and the community plane. These concepts mesh with Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptualization of the ecological model of human development. In this model he details the interactive impact of four systems on human development -- microsystem

(family, neighborhood, school and church), the mesosystem (relationships among the microsystem), the exosystem (place of employment and school board) and the macrosystem (the interaction and ideology among all the systems) --

In the 1998 revision of the model, Bronfenbrenner with Pamela Morris proposed what is now called the ecology of developmental processes. The four new principle components of this theoretical model are:

Process: the proximal processes and interaction between and among systems over time.

Person: the biophysiological characteristics and dispositions that are reflected in ability, experience, knowledge and skill.

Interaction: includes the hecticness, the instability and the chaos of the time that is being explored.

Time: includes the continuity of process, periodicity, changing expectations across generation, society and development.

In their re-conceptualized model, greater attention is paid to the instability of systems over time. Consideration is given to the influence of personal dispositions, resources, and social, political, and personal demands in shaping development. The effect of interaction of chaos, changing expectations, and instability in one's environment on development is emphasized. This model seems to be a more practical, fluid, individual, and future-oriented framework for understanding developmental processes.

Bronfenbrenner's ecology model of developmental processes is directed to understanding human development in various contexts. It is my contention that Bronfenbrenner's model, still under construction, offers the possibility to be used to study the developmental process of an Innovation. I believe that the model can be reconceptualized and used to explore the development of an Innovation, e.g., the restructuring of education, which is closely aligned with the revolution group's developmental process in this study. In this recast conceptualization, the development of the Innovation will be influenced by proximal interaction among the teachers as they work on this project, over time. This relationship will be affected by the interaction of process, person, interaction, and time in the context of the environment. This model was used as a lens for me to view and make sense of the journey and served as a framework and guide for this study. The proposed model is presented here:

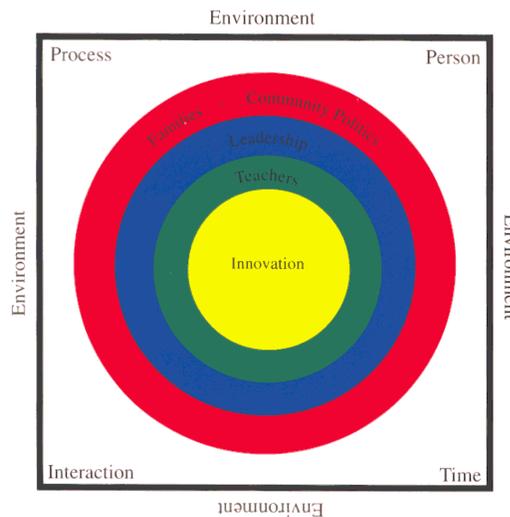


Figure 1. Proposed Model

In my proposed model, Innovation is the creative notion for school reform coming from a group of people within the school. The Innovation would be affected by and would have an effect on the interactions/relationships of teachers and children who would “live with” the Innovation each day. The environment in which this Innovation developed would have a special impact on the group of teachers who “gave birth” to the Innovation, as they feel a sense of propriety. My theory also holds that the leadership in the school [Leadership] (principals, assistant principals) and in the Central Office for the county schools [Community / Family] (superintendent, assistant superintendent) would also have a strong influence on the development of the Innovation; along with the families of the children in the school and interested community members. In short, the development of this Innovation would take place in the context of an environment with dynamic, interactive relationships among and across process, interaction, time, and person that will affect the outcome of the Innovation.

CHAPTER THREE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Determining a method of inquiry and a technique for documentation of the story required a commitment to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of the human experience” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). With enormous respect and a huge curiosity for the work that these teachers were planning to tackle, I signed on as their chief documentor. This chapter includes my thoughts regarding the design of the study. More elaborate discussion can be found in Appendix B.

Ethnography

Ethnography allows the researcher to get "closer to the people studied; to discover the details of their behavior and the innards of their experience" (Finch, 1986; Stacey, 1988). Understanding the work of restructuring in schools demands a rethinking of the relationships between the researchers and the researched (Lieberman, 1995). Getting close enough to discover the “innards” of the people and the change process can only happen if the researcher is there over time. Being involved in the life of the process allows for strong and intimate relationships to grow and allows the researcher to take on the role of the “critical friend” (Lieberman, 1995, p.3). This role can be significant in the life of the reform effort as it allows the researcher to be there, but because they are not doing the work themselves, they have “a measure of distance and time to interpret what they see” (Lieberman, 1995, p.3).

The ethnographic methods which were utilized during the course of the study included the case study and participant action research. Data collection occurred through observations, interviews, and a formal focused-group interview. In these ways a triangulation (Denzin, 1978) of both data sources and methods were used to more fully develop the story of this reform process. This layering of the data should provide the framework for a study with “a convergence of perspectives from various sources” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p.209).

Participant Action Research

Participant Action Research (PAR) implies an effort to understand the role of knowledge as a significant instrument of power and control. Typically, the researcher holds the knowledge and chooses to use the "researched" to further her understanding. In PAR an important starting point is with the lived experiences of the people thus the knowledge and experience of people - often oppressed groups - is directly honored and valued (FalsBorda & Rahamn, 1991).

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) has written eloquently on the topic of portraiture. This blending of science and art is designed to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences”(p.3). The goal is to document a text that is as close as possible to painting the portrait of an experience. Respect for and attention to the context within which the experience is being played out is important to the authenticity of the resulting canvas. By intimately participating with this group of teachers, I hoped to be able to share the ownership of knowledge and to collaborate on how best to proceed. In addition, I hope that the many, many hours of time

spent together and the deep respect and appreciation for their enormous efforts will come through on these pages. Certainly, this PAR has evolved over the course of the timeline of this study. Initially, there was an obvious division between researcher and researched, but as time went on the boundaries blurred as our perspectives merged. Observations and interpretations regarding the evolution of the PAR are included in the next two chapters.

Participants in the Study

The participants were seventeen teachers and three administrators from the Boone Middle School as well as myself and my major professor (who is also a member of the reform effort). Most of the teachers (13) are members of the group that was formed in an effort to re-invent the curriculum and philosophy for the Middle School based on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Nine of the 13 “reformers” completed individual interviews for this study. Several additional teachers (4) from "outside" the reform were interviewed in order to obtain diverse perspectives of the experience.

In order to begin to bring the reader into the story that will soon unfold, I will list here an initial description of the participants. Much greater detail and the true essence of the individuals will unfold in Chapter Four.

Active Revolution Members:

Mandy: 6th grade language arts, social studies teacher and co-leader of the Revolution Group. Mandy is in her late twenties and has taught at the school for five years. She is married and has two young daughters, ages three and six months.

Janis: 7th grade language arts, social studies teacher and co-leader of the Revolution Group. Janis is in her early forties and has taught at the school for six years. She is married and has three children: a son and a daughter who both now live outside the home but in the same hometown, and a daughter who is a junior in high school. During the winter of 1998 her very ill mother-in-law lived in the home until she was moved to a nursing home, where she later died. Her oldest daughter had a very difficult last year in high school with numerous highly volatile events occurring in her life. Janis’ energies have been pulled in multiple directions for the past two years.

Ashley: 7th grade math, science teacher and teaching partner of Janis. She is in her mid thirties and has taught at the school for five years. She is married and has a son who is two and is expecting her second child later this month. Ashley suffered a miscarriage in the fall of 1998.

Daphne: 6th grade special education teacher. She is in her early fifties and has been teaching for almost 30 years. Daphne has also worked in school systems in Ohio, New Jersey, and Kentucky. She was employed in a Kentucky school during the state mandated reform effort in the early 1990’s. Daphne is married and has three children. One is a junior in college, another is a freshman in college and the youngest is a sophomore in high school. Her fragile father-in-law lives in the home with the family.

Mary: 8th grade math, science teacher. She is in her early thirties and has taught at the school for five years. Mary is married and has one child who was born prematurely which was very stressful for her family. During the course of this study, Mary’s husband contracted a rare disease but has now fully recovered. Two family members were tragically killed during the past summer.

Becky: 8th grade math, science teacher. Becky has taught in the school for almost twenty years. She is married and has two children. One is a freshman in college and the other is an eighth grader. Becky is very active professionally, belongs to several professional organizations, is a highly sought-after speaker and trainer, and serves in a leadership capacity in her school and county educational systems.

Gus: 6th grade art teacher. Gus is in his late twenties and has taught at the school for three years. Previous to his employment at Boone, he taught at BHS but found the setting and the administration to be highly traditional and directive. He is married and is a professional musician. In the spring of 1999, his wife suffered a severe broken arm and during the summer of 1999 he worked a second job and cut a new CD with his band.

Felicia: 6th grade language arts, social studies teacher. Felicia is in her early fifties and has worked at the school for twelve years. Previously, she was a first grade teacher for eleven years. She is married and her children are both married and living outside the home. Her elderly stepfather lives in the home. Felicia hosts a tour of Europe each summer for 7th and 8th grade students.

Rita: Administrative Assistant. Rita is in her early forties. She has worked in the school for seven years and is currently taking teacher-certification courses. She has four children. The oldest is a nineteen-year-old daughter who recently was married and gave birth to a child.

Claire: 8th grade language arts, social studies teacher. Claire has been teaching at the school for just four years. She is in her mid forties, is divorced and two daughters (one of whom lives at home).

Eleana: County Gifted Instructor. Eleana has been teaching at the school for almost twenty years. She is in her late forties. She is married and her children are grown and out of the home.

Tina: 6th grade language arts and social studies teacher. Tina has worked at the school for six years. She is in her early forties and she is married and has two children.

Vea: 6th grade special education teacher. She has worked at the school for six years. Vea is in her early forties and she is married, but does not have children.

Administration:

Nick, Principal. He has been in education for almost 30 years, first as a teacher, later as an elementary school principal and then as the principal at Boone since 1989. He is in his mid fifties, is married, has three children and a grandchild. During the past two years, he has weathered several major community debates that have taken their toll on the energies and attitude of this well-liked principal.

Patricia, Assistant Principal. Patricia has been a high school teacher, a curriculum supervisor for the Central Office, a building principal and now an assistant principal at Boone for the last five years. She is married and has two children.

Stan, Assistant Principal. Stan was a social worker before returning to school and then to work as a high school biology teacher. After obtaining a master's degree he came to work as a new Assistant Principal at Boone in 1996. He is married and has three young children.

Non-Involved Faculty:

Lance, 6th grade language arts, social studies teacher. Lance is in his early thirties and has been teaching at Boone for almost ten years. He is married and has two young children. He attended the first few meetings of the Revolution group, but then dropped out.

Herb, 6th grade math, science teacher and teaching partner of Mandy. Herb is in his early fifties and has been teaching for over thirty years. He is single, with no children and devotes countless hours to his teaching. He is also the pool manager at a very popular local pool where he continues his relationships with children and families throughout the summer months. It was Herb's idea to remodel the Big Room. He has attended one or two meetings of the Revolution group, but has expressed frustration with the process of reform.

Irene, 6th grade math, science teacher. Irene is single, in her mid twenties and has taught at the school for three years. She has never attended a meeting of the Revolution movement.

Kim, 6th grade math, science teacher. Kim is single, in her late thirties and has taught at Boone for six years. Before that, she taught in Omaha, Nebraska for 17 years. She attended one or two meetings of the Revolution but expressed dissatisfaction with the attempt.

Confidentiality

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants; the teachers and administrators, and school have been given code names. This effort however, cannot guarantee that persons close to the experience will not see through some of the identifiers. Additional efforts to safeguard the participants and the data are outlined in the Protocol for the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). Informed consent forms were also prepared which served to share the details and purposes of this study with the participants (see Appendix D). Each participant was asked to read and sign the form before beginning the interview process. I also secured an expedited approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E) to conduct this study. The Montgomery County Schools (see Appendix F) suggested further confidentiality guidelines.

Field Texts

As a part of this research I served as the group's documentor and took field notes in a variety of ways. Most of the time I brought my laptop computer to the meetings and typed my account of the happenings as they were occurring. Later, back at home, I would add my own reflections and comments. I would also bring a camera to every meeting and would always try to snap a couple of representational images. On other occasions I brought a video camera and captured the occurrences in this way. Later, I would transcribe the tapes and review them for important content. I also kept copies of every artifact that represented the work of this group which included: meeting-agendas, notices to the participants, birth announcements, baby shower invitations, newspaper articles about building woes and the math curriculum, county SOL policies, and conference programs. All of these field notes were chronologically organized in a three ring binder that I would carry to each meeting. Often the group would need clarification on a detail that had transpired at a previous meeting and my notebook served as the group's photo album and memory.

During the meetings I would observe the various members of the group and would pay special attention to the concepts that were embedded in my original research questions. Therefore, I was watching for any discussion or implication regarding the group make-up. Since I was wondering how some teachers from the school ended up "inside" and others "outside" the movement, I focused on any conversation or other emphasis on this aspect of the experience. As the research evolved and as my theories regarding the development of a grassroots innovation became more elaborate, I then began to purposefully watch for these new considerations. In particular, I became more and more intrigued by the roles of personal life changes, leadership styles in the school, and the community politics and the part that these issues played in the development of an innovation.

Individual Interviews

I interviewed most of the teachers from the reform group as well as other faculty and administrators who were "outside" of the group. Specifically, I interviewed the two teachers who traveled to Reggio Emilia as I was especially interested in knowing more about their personal convictions and passions for this project. I also hoped to gain insights into the "in" and "out" issue. Those two teachers had expressed a strong ownership in this project and had been extremely disappointed on several occasions when their colleagues had not been as enthusiastic. And finally, I hoped to gain some understanding about the history of innovation and change efforts in the school and how these conditions might have helped to shape the current movement. A synopsis of the interviews can be found in Appendix G.

Focus Groups

In the spirit of the Participant Action Research in which a democratic and shared ownership of the research exists, I have also conducted a focus group interview with the "Revolution Group". I believed that after interviewing each member of the group along with others "outside" the group, and after completion of the initial analysis of the data, that my interpretations should be shared with this group in order to elicit their insights. I was hopeful that their group-perspective in response to the interpretations would offer yet another lens for viewing the experience and in this way increase the validity of the study. A detailed discussion and analysis of this experience is included in the next two chapters.

Data Analysis

Throughout the course of the journey, I had been continually revisiting Bronfenbrenner's guiding theory and the original model that helped to frame and guide me in reflecting and making sense of this study (refer to page 27). New and evolving impressions were kept in a research journal and were consulted regularly, but were used at the end of the journey to assist with the analysis and to draw some conclusions about a revised model. More details about this revision are available in Chapter Five. The data that were collected through multiple means as described above were then carefully analyzed using a coding system. Searching for overarching and convergent themes, I methodically read and re-read each entry and assigned a coded tab to categories of information. This classification system was then transferred to individual computer files which then held all data of a like-theme. Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) theory of meaning-making was applied at that point and is elaborated upon in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR THE PORTRAIT OF A REVOLUTION

The story of this revolution, to be told in this chapter, closely follows the journey taken by the teachers. As you will discover, this saga closely resembles a *very* long road trip. There were easy stretches of roadway, dramatic switchbacks, and many detours for the revolutionaries who were aboard this bus to reform. Sometimes, there was a disagreement over who should drive and who should ride shotgun. At other times along the road, the group would sing together and play road games; only to miss their turn and end up in a ditch. You may feel that the story you are about to read is long, tedious, and possibly frustrating; and if that's the case, then this report truly reflects the essence of the experience of those involved.

The goal of this ethnographic re-telling was to be respectful of the teachers involved and the enormous amount of time, effort, dedication, and passion that they dedicated to their cause. There were many times when those on the bus could have "gotten off at the next stop and gone home". But the important piece of this story is that they didn't. They stayed on that rickety bus and weathered every storm that came along. My hope is that their sense of determination and perseverance will come through in these meager pages. An important characteristic of qualitative research is the "presence of voice in the text" (Eisner, 1998, p.36). Therefore the voices of the group have been given a high priority in the retelling of their story. Additionally, I have included throughout this journey my reflections, interpretations and my personal meaning-making of what I observed and experienced.

In qualitative research it is typical to search for themes and organizing ideas in an effort to understand the data. While this technique will certainly be applied during analysis and reported in Chapter Five, I feel that in this particular study the integral concept was the process of the experience and how the process helped to form a new shared understanding and a purpose. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the process and will be told in story-form. The story is organized according to the road map (please see Timeline Insert) and is reported in chronological order with titles that reflect the lived experiences of the revolutionaries at each leg of their journey. The titles of the content are presented here to serve as a guide and to invite you to participate in this adventure.

An Invitation to Reform	May 20, 1998
Bon Voyage: The Journey Begins	June 18 – October 24, 1998
We're Lost: Let's Stop and ask for Directions	October 26 – October 27, 1998
This is the most beautiful scenery	November 12 -January12, 1999
WARNING! Unstable Roads Ahead	January 27 - March 24, 1999
Engine Trouble!	March 30 - April 1, 1999
Out of Gas!	April 2 - May 30, 1999
Pit Crew Assistance Necessary	June 16, 1999
On the Road Again	July 28 – September 1, 1999
Are We There Yet?	September 15, 1999
The Beginning of a New Journey	September 17, - Sept 29, 1999

An ethnographic case study is a continual process and the researcher is along for the ride. While I had chosen a direction for the study, I tried to remain open to the route that would be taken as the study progressed. Carlina Rinaldi (1998) says it beautifully:

".....hold a compass in your hand instead of a fixed train schedule."

With those words in mind, I embarked on a life-changing journey. I hope that these pages can do justice to the experience.

An Invitation to Reform
ARE YOU INTERESTED IN WORKING TOWARD
A "REGGIO INSPIRED" SYSTEM?

This bold question was emblazoned across the top of the flyer that was placed in every mailbox at Boone Middle School on May 20, 1998. Teachers, administrators, janitorial staff, and cafeteria workers were all invited to the First Meeting of the Revolution which was scheduled to be held on the day after school let out for the summer. Janis and Mandy (the two teachers who had traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy in January) were ready to launch their hopeful reform effort by sharing information with their colleagues. They had been inspired by a previous meeting with their principal, Nick Thomas during which he supported their enthusiasm for the Reggio philosophy and suggested that they should go ahead and share their thoughts with other personnel. "When ten people are on board and knocking at my door, I'll call the superintendent of schools and we'll see what we can do about accommodating your ideas", Nick Thomas told the teachers. And so they were ready to pitch their ideas to a gathering of potentially interested colleagues. Because they wanted a strong turnout of committed persons at this first meeting, they used the introductory flyer to describe a possible "Reggio-Inspired System". The flyer went on to read:

This means that you may~

- ❖ Enjoy working collaboratively with students and other adults in a shared space.
- ❖ Encourage students to think about what something is not
- ❖ Encourage students to think about what something could be
- ❖ Encourage students to think about reciprocal relation
- ❖ Help students reframe the mundane and ordinary
- ❖ Emphasize in-depth knowledge of complete systems
- ❖ Model on the adult level the kinds of democratic participation, collaborative learning, and conflict-resolution you are trying to teach students.
- ❖ Allow students to question and analyze each other's work
- ❖ Help students turn differences of opinion into problem-solving opportunities
- ❖ Trust the students to debate among themselves to closure
- ❖ Dispense occasions that challenge students intellectually and emotionally
- ❖ Assume the perspective of a researcher
- ❖ Find in yesterday's notes the problems to pose today
- ❖ Encourage students to work and rework representations of their learning
- ❖ Treat all answers as derivatives of a logic to be understood
- ❖ Allow students slow, unhurried time
- ❖ Learn from students as they try to learn from you
- ❖ Valued long term study projects developed through inquiry and emergent curriculum
- ❖ Understand the role of the environment to learning
- ❖ Welcome and seek community and parent involvement
- ❖ Be extremely flexible and open

Bon Voyage: The Journey Begins

“Education is all about challenging the comforts of familiarity to reach new understandings”

Kimball and Garrison

And so that first meeting of the “revolution group” was held on Thursday, June 18, 1998 in the “Big Room” at the Boone Middle School. This room is unique at the Middle School and is known to be a place where new and different things can happen. Rockets have been launched, huge indoor fish ponds have been built and calves have been nurtured. Besides these amazing additions to the curriculum, there are a couple hundred sixth graders who share the space. The room is very big: roughly 70 feet x 110 feet with a ceiling height of 30 feet. Several years ago one of the 6th grade teachers saw the potential for this space when it was an unused and former canning factory room. He cleaned it out of all of its junk from years gone by, requisitioned some paint for the walls and floors and began to slowly turn the room into a place where kids and adults might have a little more fun than was typical at the Middle School. This seemed to be the perfect place to hold the first meeting of a group that would ultimately need the same brand of vision and sense of innovation if they were to succeed with their own dream for change. In addition, Janis and Mandy were envisioning this space as central to the new program that they were hatching in their minds. In their vision, this Big Room could serve as a meeting place and studio for the Reggio-Inspired Middle School. Their hopes and spirits were high that day as they faced the group for the first time. If all went well, they thought, we could be inhabiting this space and the surrounding classrooms by next Fall (1999) in our re-invented Middle School.

Testing the Waters: June 18, 1998

There were twenty-three people in attendance at that first meeting including teachers, a guidance counselor, an assistant principal, three university faculty, and several community members. Three young children of the middle school teachers were also there. Their presence seemed to remind us all of why we were choosing to spend our summer vacations thinking about school reform.

As everyone got settled around an enormous, plywood table Janis called the meeting to order and asked everyone to introduce themselves.



Figure 2. Testing the Waters

Next, she and Mandy began to share some of the background that had led them to this moment. They had prepared handouts about the Reggio Emilia Approach, another about constructivist teaching and a lengthy reference list of readings. Janis stated that one of the major problems with education today is that there is not enough time to dialogue with colleagues. “We felt that if we could find a way to work collaboratively with the kids that this would provide more opportunity to dialogue,” Mandy elaborated. She shared the vision of having a combined 6th, 7th, and 8th grade school-within-a-school where children kept portfolios that detailed their learning processes. She mentioned project-based curriculum and envisioned that children could work on a project over many years thereby building a depth of knowledge unlike anything that they had probably ever experienced in a more typical school system. Teachers working in teams to mentor and facilitate the investigations would be a strong part of this brave new school.

Reflection: As this introductory discussion was going on, I looked around the large table and tried to gauge the reactions coming from the group. I found it very difficult to predict the attitudes of these people who were primarily people whom I was meeting for the first time at this gathering. I did notice that the teachers seemed to be sitting in a segregated group somewhat removed from the others in attendance. While they appeared to be attentive they were very passive and quiet. Having spent a considerable amount of time with Janis and Mandy during the last year, I knew that they both had a strong sense of humor and a fun-loving attitude about their work and life. I was worried that the silence of the group might be interpreted as disinterest and that this would bother our leaders enormously. They had each confided in me already that they really did not want for this “revolution” to be seen as “their” project. If they were going to do it, they wanted it to be a collaborative experience and one where everyone felt a sense of ownership. Sitting at the front of the group and spouting doctrine was not what they had envisioned for this meeting.

Almost on cue, Janis switched the emphasis to a lighter note and began to discuss the consumption of wine and liqueur in the Italian culture. While visiting in Italy, we had all been surprised to see wine on the teacher’s lunch table in the Reggio schools and to find that walnut liqueur was bottled and sold by one of the schools as a fund-raiser. This topic seemed to perk everyone up as the group started musing about this unusual aspect of the school culture where teachers routinely drank during the day. The group was smiling broadly and good naturedly chuckling about bringing this aspect of Reggio home when the sixth grade art teacher said, “Yea, and in America you drink BEFORE you go to work!”

This humorous moment really seemed to break the ice for the group and people visibly relaxed in their chairs and seemed to open themselves up to what was to come.

Janis and Mandy went on to discuss the elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach while several teachers interjected their comments and suggestions. The formal, planned presentation came to an end and the teachers asked for impressions and/or suggestions of how to proceed at this point. Some of the comments included these:

Lance: The way I see it, this would take the whole summer to prepare. . .”

(His expression and tone led me to believe that he envisioned this to be much more work than he had bargained for.)

Felicia: We'll need to build a collaboration of adults. It will take a whole lot of trust among the teachers to give up some autonomy. "*(I wondered about this statement and what it said about Felicia's style of teaching – was she an independent worker who saw the Reggio approach as meaning she would have to "give up" teaching as she knew it?)*

Gus: Following the lead of the children is a good way to start and then form community by coming up with group ideas. Bringing in other disciplines chips away at the walls.
(Gus's comment seemed to counter Felicia's. While she seemed fearful of the idea of collaboration because she might lose her independence, Gus saw it as an opportunity to break down barriers between teachers.)

At this point in the meeting, the emphasis shifted again as the community members who were in attendance began a lengthy discussion of how to spread the Reggio philosophy out into the community. Economic development issues were discussed as were the possibilities of retreats, foundation funding, and the social problem of opportunity and access to quality care and education. During this phase of the meeting, I watched, as the teachers seemed to retreat into silence once again. Most of their heads were down as they busily studied the papers in front of them. The mothers took this opportunity to direct their attention to their young children and others got up and helped themselves to refreshments. Janis and Mandy obviously noticed that their colleagues were losing attention and in an effort to bring the dialogue back to the home playing field, Mandy suggested: "Don't we need a name for our group?" Immediately, the teachers rose to the occasion and began to suggest several possibilities for names, logos, and T-shirts. A jovial atmosphere was back, but the community members were definitely outside the circle of collegiality and it was their turn to sit quietly and observe.

As the meeting drew to a close, Janis suggested that everyone should get a copy of the 100 Languages of Children and read it immediately. When some teachers asked for more images of the program in action, I volunteered to work with a couple of others to bring slides, videos, and other adaptations to the next meeting which was scheduled for the following month.

Reflection: I left this first meeting with many questions and also with less certainty and hope that the group would successfully attain its goal of opening a school-within-a-school. I wondered what the silent response from the teachers meant? Were they unimpressed with the Reggio Emilia Approach? Or were they uninformed? Or, were they intimidated by those of us who were in attendance from outside the school? I worried about my own research at this point, as well, and felt an ambiguity of conflicts. First, I felt guilty that I had not been open and forthcoming with the group about my intentions to study them at this first gathering (Janis and Mandy understood that this was my intention, but the others remained in the dark). In some ways it felt deceptive to me. Yet, I knew that many ethnographic studies were completed in this fashion. Next, because

I sensed a hesitancy on the part of the teacher-group to commit to the project of restructuring their school, I was concerned that if I told them that in addition to putting themselves on the line to commit to the project that they would also be investigated. I worried that this could become a factor for the teachers to decide against participation in the reform effort. This was not the way that I had imagined the onset of my research. And I must admit that I was already concerned that more action had not been taken toward achieving the goal at this first meeting. I had envisioned that the group would come up with a plan of action and would be ready to “hit the ground running”. I realized that I was not heeding the words of Carlina Rinaldi. I most definitely had a train schedule in my hand and I had to find a way to trade it for a compass.

Pipedreams or Possibilities? July 16, 1998

Several new teachers as well as Nick, the head principal for the school and Stan, an assistant principal attended the second meeting. A school board member was also there. Janis could not attend this meeting, so Mandy took on the leadership role.

Because there were so many new people in attendance at this meeting, Mandy felt compelled to begin the meeting with a synopsis of the Reggio philosophy and a brief description of their thoughts about a new system of middle schooling. She mentioned the possibilities of multiage grouping, embedding the Standards of Learning (SOL) into project work, teams of teachers working with all of the children in the school, representation of knowledge in multiple ways, an emphasis on aesthetics, and the environment as the third teacher. At the close of her very brief comments I noted some dissonance in the group around the table. Some were fidgeting and others were frowning. Finally, someone said that they had not been able to find the book and that she was frustrated about not being more “up to date” on the details. Becky offered to place a large book order and there was discussion about the logistics of writing checks and picking up books when Stan, the assistant principal, said loudly, “So, what you want is three two-person teams that would progress from year to year?” Mandy responded by adding that hopefully there would be more teachers who would share the responsibility of all the children. She also assured him that all of the SOLs would be met and the kids would be ready to take assessment tests at the end of each year. Stan asked if we wanted to target the “at-risk” population because “there is a lot of money out there for that sort of thing”. Mandy responded that we hoped to have a more natural population. At this point, Stan exploded with, “Well! That’s a pipe dream . . . and your idea of all these personnel dollars is too!”

The group sat with stunned faces for an instant before someone asked for a more complete rundown of the principles and ideas coming from Reggio Emilia. Since I had come to this meeting prepared to share this information I began to share some of the details. I talked about the image of the child, collaboration among a community of learners, the rich process of learning that occurs during project work, and the power of documentation as an assessment and advocacy tool. This began a discussion about Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. Becky spoke of a nontraditional project that she had conducted in her classroom last year and that she felt was highly successful. She was able to bring in parents and community members as experts and mentors for student-inspired projects. Student surveys at the end of the year were

resoundingly positive with Felicia wondered aloud about the population question. She expressed a concern that we would not want this alternative school to be exclusive in any way. “We don’t want it to be an in-sey and out-sey thing. But for some parents, they want a traditional approach for their kids. Maybe we could just offer a choice of styles – sort of a cafeteria plan?” Stan responded by saying that he thought it would be very important to bill this as “*an* approach, not *the* approach”.

Stan took the reins again: “In a perfect world what would this look like? How many teachers? How many kids? How much space? I just can’t envision it. What happens when a kid comes to school in the morning? I can’t see it. I need this in writing! I need a schematic!”

Herb joined in the tirade and irritably expressed similar concerns. “I want to see it too. I’m a visual, hands-on person. I can’t sit around and talk, and talk, and talk....I have to see it. I really don’t see how this is any different than what we’ve got already!”

Kim: I don’t see how this is going to work. I think that I already try to do these things in my classroom and this feels threatening! I don’t see how you can planfully make this happen!

Felicia: Well, it can’t happen over night. It will take some time and some effort at planning. That’s why we’re having these meetings, to begin to think about it together. Although, I am concerned about the amount of time that this is going to take. Once school starts, I know I’m going to be swamped. Does anyone else have that concern?”

Becky: We’re built on a team concept here anyway....we’ve got the basic premise in place. I think we can be successful.”

Herb: Well, not all children are long-term project people. I’m not a long-term project person. I lose interest. I can’t imagine how this is going to work. . . 24 kids working on 24 projects is ludicrous!”

Reflection: After this public debate I was very nervous about what would happen next. Not knowing all the teachers well enough at this point, I did not know if this sort of debate was common in their school culture, or if something unique had just occurred. I waited to see what would happen next, although, it took everything I had to remain quiet. I was having an intense desire to jump in and respond to some of the concerns that had been raised by both teachers and assistant principal. Remembering the distracted silence that was the response from the teachers when community members spoke up at the last meeting, I decided to wait and watch for what would come next and it was at this point that the principal spoke up for the first time.

Nick: I’ve tried to do a lot of listening and I’ve watched people. As Herb and several others have said, I feel that we’re doing a lot of this sort of thing at Boone already, but we’re just not naming it. Let’s look at it in reverse. What would we have to change to adopt this approach? We’d have to look at scheduling over three years instead of just one year. Let’s take the teaching out of it for now,

because I agree, there are a lot of good things going on already. Just think about it like this: are you interested in keeping kids for three years and for greater lengths of time during the day? Those are important aspects to be considered for now. Who wants to buy into teaching the same kids for three years? That might be a more common sense way of approaching it. We might be getting some dander uppeople feel threatened and are saying they already are teaching like that. So who is interested in three year looping?

Herb: I'd do it today!

Mandy: Me too.

Felicia: Oh yea

Becky: I'd like to try it. Change is good. I think it would be a good thing for me and if its good for me it would be good for the kids in my classroom.

Mary: Definitely!

Nick: Ok, I'm just trying to identify the concrete things that we would have to change. I'd say that there are a number of other teachers in the building who would be interested, as well. Now, you're talking about 4 people with 50 kids instead of 2 with 50. That's another problem that we have to think about. Let's just identify the problems and start attacking them. We'd have to be real careful to have parents understand that the kid would have the same teacher for three years.

Herb: I'd say that the biggest problem would be social . . . I can just see the kids wanting to hang out in the hall with their friends.

Nick: Or . . . let's look at it as the *opportunity* to hang out with their friends . . . after all that's the most important thing to this age group – friends and phone!

With some of the tension reduced in the room, the teachers moved into a listing of some of the problems that would need to be addressed during this planning phase. Some of the problems listed were:

- ❖ What happens if a kid wants to leave this program midway?
- ❖ What about kids who are moving into the school? Do they have an option to get in?
- ❖ What about when kids graduate from this system and head to the most traditional high school in the county!?

A school board member in attendance responded to the last concern by saying: "It is better to have loved and lost then never to have loved at all."

At this point in the meeting we joined the community group as they arrived and adjourned into a smaller and darker room to view the slides and to discuss the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach. By the end of the slideshow, Herb was ecstatic and had many ideas for projects, environmental changes, and ways to encourage the kids to take on the responsibility of some of the documentation themselves. Several math teachers

mentioned how the new math program that they were learning about this summer would mesh perfectly with a three year looping system.

Reflection: I left this meeting wondering about the dynamics in the school. The obvious difference in style and approach that was displayed by the two principals was surprising to me. Stan's responses to the conversation seemed defensive and power-filled. He blatantly dismissed some of the thinking as "pipe dreams" and then went on to make it clear that the group was going to have to prove their ideas for reform to him. Nick, on the other hand, seemed more interested in ensuring that no teacher would feel diminished by the possibility of a change in the school. Keeping the status quo within the school seemed to be a paramount issue with Nick, yet, he was the one who asked the "who's in? who's out?" question which really served to emphasize the division in the teaching-ranks. While Stan seemed to overtly challenge and undermine the teacher's ideas, Nick tried to find a way to empower the teacher-reformers by suggesting a way to identify the problems and then "find ways to tackle them". I made a note to ask the teachers to fill me in on the details of this new development. I was surprised also by the wide range of opinion that was voiced by the teachers. The fact that they were publicly vocal about their dissention was interesting. I wondered if they had strong philosophical differences with the approach. On the other hand, it almost seemed as if they were interpreting the suggestion of a new way of thinking about teaching and learning to be a negative comment about their own teaching style. This meeting seemed filled with dissonant dynamics between principals and among teachers. And once again, I had not made my research intentions known to the group.

Philosophy and Pregnancy: August 5, 1998

This meeting was held in Mandy's classroom because when we arrived at the Big Room it was filled with loose shelving units that had been scrounged from area businesses for use in the soon-to-be-installed studio. Herb had found these units and had hauled them to the school in his pickup truck. Mandy was excited and enthused about setting up a studio space in the Big Room before school started.



Figures 3 and 4. Studio renovation

She also had other news: she was pregnant and expecting her second child sometime in March. Everyone was thrilled with this declaration and the teachers started to talk about maternity leave and long-term substitutes. Soon, the discussion turned to a recapping of the last meeting. There were some hard feelings being emoted from the group about some of the “egos that were displayed” at the last meeting. Some teachers noted that this is usually a necessary stage for groups to work through and that hopefully we can now all be on the same page. Mandy suggested that since many of the people at the last meeting were asking for a vision of the project that we should focus on this aspect. Janis was back from her family vacation and reclaimed her place at the head of the table. She suggested that we begin by making an agenda for our meeting:

- ❖ Basic philosophical principles of RE
- ❖ Our Vision – what’s it going to look like?

Janis wrote each philosophical element on a sheet of paper that was taped to the wall while the rest of the group discussed what the element would mean for the new school.

1. Collaboration between children and adults; relationships. Also between children and children and adults and adults.
2. Cooperation and community, democratic participation.
3. Child Centered and holistic
4. Long term study projects – emergent curriculum.
5. Documentation and Representation
6. Role of the environment as the “third teacher”
7. Philosophical contributions from Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget
8. Strong parental participation

Other thoughts:

Collaboration and community building-is crucial and was discussed at length and offered as the most important element. All other practices and elements seemed to relate to this central idea including looping, meeting with parents as real partners and also finding ways to really talk with one another... to make it a priority . . . to give the TIME to this very important issue. Then, the conversation once again veered into a discussion about colleagues.

Becky: At the last meeting it took me by surprise that to propose doing something like this suggested that there was something wrong with the way that things were really being done. Some people were really defensive about it . . . I think that some people felt threatened! I think that there is a bridge that needs to be built. I fell far short of helping to smooth things over. What can we do? Some folks think that we’re suggesting that the whole place is broken and needs help.

Mary: A lot of people resist change. It means a lot more work.
Becky: I felt that at the end of the last meeting that we have a long, long way to go. We don’t want to alienate our colleagues.

Patricia: If people are not acknowledged for what they’re already doing, they will splinter. Let’s acknowledge it...as you talk with other teachers we need to make certain that we ensure them that their work is what we’re talking about.

Becky: Some people are worried that they are going to get kicked out of their classroom....that’s the really important issue.”

Lance: Since I’ve been here I’ve been through a major change – a change to teaming concepts. You would have thought that we were asking people to move to the moon. In a lot of ways this is not a large chunk but we’ve got to be really careful. The SOL’s are getting in a lot of people’s way.

Mandy: But, that can be very easily addressed.

Lance: We need to be careful about how we do it.

Mary: Some teachers feel very traditional about teaching ... they like things to remain consistent.

- Vickie:* Could we just choose one project that we want to follow. . . document it very well and see how the SOLs really fit into the project? Use the project to frame our discussion at each meeting. . . focus on one project as a community learning project while the other ones are going on?
- Mandy:* Janis and I talked about a year long project: American History: Man and Nature, Human Injustices. We've talked about using these as a year long project – you couldn't help but bump into the SOLs.
- Janis:* In my vision it's not us who are going to be connected to these SOLs. I see a folder with all the SOLs and the kids are sharing responsibility for checking off the SOLs. I even see a project called "How to Tackle the SOLs Let's spend some time talking about strategies for test taking, too.
- Mandy:* And as adults that's how we all deal with things . . . that's a real world project for them.
- Mary:* When we come to 'vision' on the agenda, can we come up with an ideal – where we want it to be and then work back from there so we know what we need to accomplish? This year we won't be breaking down structure, but how can we get there?
- Becky:* The ideal would be to find a space and craft the space and bring people together to talk and dialogue about this. Also, the possibility of a new school is still something to be thinking about. Even the possibility of piloting the approach – and a team at each grade level that might work on this together. If there was a group of kids who would move through this approach while they are at the middle school and if we could document the process I think it would be a very powerful justifier. For me the last meeting was a very half-empty kind of meeting.”
- Patricia:* There are some people who are really good at seeing the road blocks and helping us to see barriers while we're still at the planning process. A constructivist tearing down – it can be good.
- Mandy:* But, it seemed that some people came not to learn about the project but to tear it down.
- Vickie:* This is usually a symptom of their insecurity. We know that these are some of their concerns. . . from now on when we address these people we need to attend to their concerns.
- Becky:* I don't want to wait three years to say that we want to wait until we've got the perfect set up before we try it.
- Janis:* Our next meeting is scheduled to begin at the museum in ten minutes. Can we quickly consider an agenda for the next meeting?
- Lynn:* Could we put the Documentation-piece on the agenda so that we ensure that we are following the processes of this project well?

Janis: From my conversation with Yvonne (another VA Tech professor who runs an Inquiry Group at Boone), she would like to have this be our inquiry group, we should think about that as well.

Vickie: And, it's probably not too soon to start planning for Lella Gandini's visit.

Reflections: First of all, I must note that this was the third formal meeting of this group and the third time that the philosophical framework of the Reggio Emilia Approach had been discussed. I was beginning to be fearful that the group was spinning its wheels. It also seemed to be the style of this group to fail to address every issue on the agenda. They never did get to the Vision. Could it be that it seemed easier (and less risky) to simply sit and discuss philosophy as opposed to the really innovative work of imagining a new system? Once again, I was aware of anxiousness on my part and a fear that the group was not moving fast enough or with enough conviction. I reminded myself that this was their summer vacation, after all, and that any progress should be viewed as a gift.

After the first meeting of this reform group it became obvious that there appeared to be two factions – one Boone teachers and one community members. While each faction was interested in the same end result – quality care and education for the children in our community – it seemed that it might be more efficient for the groups to meet separately and then share details of their work at other joint meetings. At the second gathering of the reform group, the teachers met alone and then joined the community members for the slideshow. At this third gathering, the teachers met together and then were to join the community members at the Natural History Museum to tour the exhibit and to use the documentation as the impetus for further dialogue between the groups. When four of us from the teacher group arrived at the museum, we found only one community member in attendance. The five of us walked through the exhibit and talked briefly about the documentation and then left. As far as I know, that was the last time that a “community group” met.

Janis's mentioning that Yvonne was interested in having the Inquiry Group join the Reggio group met with silence. I wondered about this and later asked Mandy to give me her opinion of what had transpired. She informed me that the Inquiry Group had acquired an elite status in the school and that some teachers felt left out of the circle. The Inquiry Group is made up of student teachers from VA Tech and their collaborating teachers. This group meets bi-monthly to dialogue and to share readings and classroom experiences. Last year they went on a retreat together to Mt Lake where they presented their year-end projects to one another. Mandy has never been a member of this group, but Janis is one of the original collaborating teacher-members. This distinction in status between Janis and Mandy was noted and tucked away.

Another topic of note during this meeting was certainly the fact that the Standards of Learning (SOL's) were on everyone's minds. The state of Virginia had instituted these Standards of Learning in every public school beginning with the Fall of 1998. Much media-hype surrounded these standards and a wave of near-hysteria was sweeping the state as Superintendents began to hire and fire based on test results. Students were being told that they may be forced to repeat a grade if they failed an SOL test – even if they had

successfully passed the class. There were new warnings in the newspapers on a daily basis. Some of the reform teachers seemed wary, while others seemed confident that a Reggio-inspired school would easily address the criteria of the SOL's.

Finally, I was happy to have been successful at placing a discussion of the documentation of our process on the agenda for the next meeting. I was planning a brief introduction of my research and was hopeful that I would not scare anyone away!

Prom Dresses and More Philosophy: August 31, 1998



Fig 5. Gus' art trailer

This first meeting of the school year was held in Gus's art trailer. The turnout for this afterschool meeting was great with eleven teachers, one assistant principal, and two university representatives on hand. Everyone was in a great mood and seemed to be off to a strong start with the school year. Gus's trailer was beautifully adorned with a variety of interesting memorabilia that represent his many eclectic interests. Posters of rock stars, interesting quotes, wild pottery pieces from past students, and a 1950's prom dress each held a special and prominent place on the walls of his trailer.

He is a very popular teacher at Boone. The kids seem to sense that he has a deep and unconditional respect for them. He understands the painful adolescent stage of development and uses his art classes to help his students work through many of their more difficult dilemmas.

It might also be interesting to note here that there are twelve mobile classrooms at Boone. The school population has grown astronomically in the last several years and an already crowded school was forced to add these temporary classrooms while the School Board debated the issue of whether to build a new school or remodel the existing structure. Public record (Roanoke Times archives) showed that the debate had been ongoing for almost seven years. Most recently the debate had been escalated and most people believed that a decision would be coming soon. Meanwhile, Nick and members of the faculty had been spending many, many hours at School Board meetings. They tried to answer the Boards never ending questions and to encourage the Board to remodel the existing school in a way that would be respectful of the age group that it housed (the building was originally designed as a high school).

Janis was not able to make the meeting so Mandy was ready to lead the group. She mentioned that an agenda had been developed at the last meeting and included a discussion of visioning and documentation. She noted that the group had spent the last three meetings discussing basic philosophy, but there was some consensus that these concepts should be explored in even more depth.

Vickie began by talking a bit about documentation. She noted that documentation provides the depth and breadth of an experience. It is a technique that allows revisiting to be utilized in the learning process. Patricia commented that she saw the benefits of documentation to be threefold: as a means of communication to children and parents, as a reflection tool for the teacher (what do I need to do differently?), and as an advocacy for further efforts. She suggested to teachers who might be currently trying Reggio strategies that they consider translating their efforts into documentation that might encourage or assist others in their new efforts. This was an exciting moment for those of us close to the reform effort as Patricia (one of the assistant principals) had just made it obvious that she was well informed about the Reggio philosophies. Janis and Mandy were regularly passing Reggio – related information to the principals, but up until this point, we really did not know if it was being read.

Because Patricia had just spoken of the benefits of documentation as a research tool, I used this as the opening for finally sharing my research agenda with the group. I briefly explained ethnography and case studies and suggested that I would want to interview everyone at a later date. Everyone politely nodded and smiled as I spoke. Later, Mandy told me that the group really couldn't imagine that they would be worthwhile as the subjects of a study. I was once again struck by the poor image of the teachers and wondered where such a diminished attitude about the profession had originated.

The meeting continued with a discussion on a suggestion that was carried over from the last meeting, "Why don't we follow a project over the course of this year? Use it to inform us of the possible trials and tribulations that might occur once we try to implement the Reggio approach in a more global way at the middle school level?" Several teachers responded to this idea by suggesting that we could look at the assessment issue, the documentation issue, the student-interest issue and more. This seemed to be a very viable next step for this group but before they could plan a strategy for implementation, they began to discuss selling this approach to the public. Gus began speaking about the emphasis on the process as being ultimately the most important component, however, "we've got to figure out how to sell this thing because the people who can stop it are going to ultimately be looking at the product." Patricia chimed in and agreed that "the test scores are going to be the bottom line." "So." said Gus, "how are we going to take this approach and make it understandable?"

Felicia: "This is why we have to talk. We think that we understand each other, but we don't! We have to talk!"

Ashley: "What if a parent comes up and asks about the SATs and college? What do I tell them?"

Reflection: As I watched this interaction within the group I was struck by how quickly the tide turned. It seemed that the group was happily discussing documentation and the idea of studying the process of a project as a group when all of a sudden a nagging doubt was introduced. Within a few minutes everyone was worrying about fallout from parents and school board members. This lack of faith in self and trust in the system seemed very apparent at this moment and I also felt that Patricia had fueled this fire when she told them that the test scores would be the "bottom line". Since I had never worked in a system like this one, it was very difficult for me to understand their perspective. In my

heart, I wanted these teachers to be stronger and more passionate about this cause. I didn't want them to give in to scare tactics so easily and I was disappointed that the idea of following the process of a project had been dropped. Instead, the group decided (at Gus's suggestion) to read the first two chapters of First Steps to Teaching the Reggio Way and to continue our discussion at the next meeting scheduled for September 28.

Jump-Starting the Revolution: September 10, 1998

Janis and Mandy asked Vickie and I to meet with them to discuss the reform effort. They were also disappointed in the slow and painful movement of the group and had hoped that the restructuring effort would have evolved more fully by now. They wanted to collaborate and consider some new direction for the group. We met one evening at a new coffee shop where we thought that we might be able to think about what was happening back at the school during our monthly revolution meetings.

Mandy began by telling us that when they began this process with their colleagues that they had envisioned that the group would gel and the project would take off much like the momentum of the experience that we had shared in Italy. They had hoped that by now that other members of the group would have stepped forward to share the lead. Once again, they insisted that they wanted this project to be one of shared leadership and collaboration.

I asked them if they had heard about the educational reform effort at a local elementary school. Apparently the principal and a group of teachers began studying the Basic School concept and had managed to adopt many of the ideals from this model. Together we wondered if they had needed to seek School Board support to make this change. We also wondered how the principal had rallied the faculty around the effort and whether or not they had implemented in phases. I volunteered to call the principal and ask our questions.

Janis then shared her true feelings about the Basic School movement at this elementary school: "Some people are calling it a charter school and for me 'charter' is a dirty word. It smacks of elitismit's a circumnavigation of the public school system. We don't need to go that route, we're just having trouble knowing where to go with this. What's the next step?"

Mandy agreed with Janis and shared that there were people in the group who still had not done the basic reading about the Reggio Emilia Approach and so "how can we be on the same page?"

Vickie suggested that the group should work together to write a position paper that would denote our shared understanding of the philosophy of our effort. Everyone would have to read supporting literature to complete this task.

After thinking about several other possible scenarios that might serve to "jump-start" the group we hit upon an idea. Could we develop a strong vision of possibility? Could we sketch out what the new school might look like in the end and include all the details like scheduling, timing, assessment, curriculum, grouping, enrollment, etc.? And then, could we try a nominal group process technique where everyone sits and thinks about the vision and then writes down all their concerns, issues, and questions about it? In a process like this, all voices are heard and the experts within the group become more obvious. At the end of the process there is a vote and the areas that need our deepest

consideration and research become the problems that are now projects. Committees are formed around these projects and the members of the committees are responsible for reporting back to the whole group with their progress.

Janis and Mandy immediately began making a long list of things that they would need to accomplish by the next meeting if we were going to be ready to try this nominal process. The list read as follows:

- ❖ We'll need a concrete vision
- ❖ We'll also want a philosophical statement that flows through everything that we do.
- ❖ We should put the vision and the philosophy on a chart.
- ❖ We should make up a sample SOL check sheet .
- ❖ We should take one of the theme areas and develop it for the meeting.
- ❖ We should make a map of the east wing and show a visual of what we are planning to do.

There was then some discussion of *where* this meeting should take place. Vickie suggested that this important meeting would take on a greater emphasis if it was held *away* from the school in an alternative location. Janis and Mandy debated about whether or not their colleagues would attend such a meeting. They mentioned several issues that might stand in the way including childcare, soccer practice and girl's basketball games. Finally they decided to simply ask the group for feedback on time and location of this important organizational meeting. Before we left the coffee shop we decided to call the next meeting the "Float the Vision" meeting. We were all very excited about the possibilities and were really looking forward to September 28.

Reflection: This was a very productive meeting that we all enjoyed very much. There was a spirit of true revolution in the air as we sat together in a smoky coffeehouse and plotted the restructuring of the middle school. My spirits were high after this meeting and I felt a new sense of hope. It was interesting that Janis and Mandy had come to us (Vickie and I) for assistance. While I knew that our relationship was grounded in a strong sense of friendship and respect, it had felt to me as though we were outsiders during the revolution meetings. Because we were not living the same experience in the school, we could not possibly have the same perspective as the teachers. This was the first time that our alternative perspective was asked for and it made me feel more connected to the movement.

Janis and Mandy had made a very long "to-do" list during this meeting and as it turned out it was a bit optimistic. Janis's daughter was a basketball player on the high school team and the season had begun. Janis was constantly car-pooling and attending games during those next two weeks. In addition, her other daughter was having some personal difficulties and Janis was spending more and more time working on this. To complicate things a bit more, Janis's teaching partner, Ashley was newly pregnant and was having a few complications with the pregnancy and Janis was needed to take on some additional duties at school. Meanwhile, Mandy's pregnancy was progressing well, but being a pregnant mother of a two-year-old was taking its own toll. After very busy days at school, and even busier ones at home, it was very difficult to get motivated to prepare for an upcoming meeting with a group of colleagues who were being viewed as

non-contributors at this point. And so the September 28th meeting was not the “Float the Vision” meeting that was hoped for. Instead Janis and Mandy decided to use that time to work on their list of things that they hoped to accomplish before the meeting.

Juggling Home-School-Reform: September 28, 1998

This meeting was held in Janis’s 7th grade classroom on the first floor of the Boone Middle School. Her room is rectangular in shape with a full bank of windows along one of the long walls. Desks are grouped into clusters and there is evidence of the children’s work on all the walls. Motivational thoughts and quotes are everywhere as are books and more books. On one of the short cinderblock walls, Janis has encouraged each class member to leave their mark by painting one of the cinderblock squares. A quilt-like effect that represents several years of kids dominates and adds color to the room. Each time I enter the room, I look for my own daughter’s square and smile. I am so thankful that she had the opportunity to learn with Janis and Ashley during her seventh grade year.



Figure 6. Janis’s classroom wall

On this day, Janis and Mandy were there and were trying to think about how to develop the visuals for the Float the Vision meeting which was now been rescheduled for October 26th. Vickie came in and asked to help and everyone got down to business. Amid interruptions from the intercom and from children who “forgot a book” or who just stopped by to say “hi”, we worked to develop a concise plan. As we worked we talked about the reform movement and the teachers vented a bit about their colleagues. When the suggestion was made that we might need to review the basic Reggio principles at the next meeting in order to bring the teachers to a level of understanding about the REA, Janis firmly said that she did not want to spend more time “on them” and that they had the book and the articles – “they can read!” Janis then went on to say that if they didn’t read then “I don’t want them”.

Finally, Mandy and Janis decided to use the flip charts that they had already developed along with another list that was completed at one of the first meetings. Mandy needed to leave to pick up her child and the meeting was over.

Reflection: I was starting to feel sorry for Janis and Mandy during this period. They were both working so hard on behalf of the movement that they both believed in, but I was wondering what was keeping them motivated. Obviously, Janis was beginning to become irritated with her colleagues and their lack of effort. Because I was keeping such detailed fieldnotes of every interaction, it was also easy for me to see that lots of plans were being made but very little action was taken. I was worried about the reform and even more worried about my friends, Janis and Mandy. Although they had never said it, sometimes I wondered if they were just plugging away at this effort for my sake. Did they feel responsible for the development of my research?

Bubbly Email: October 23, 1998

I received the following email from Mandy today:

“I am so excited I feel like I am going to bubble over! Janis and I met for a few hours today and got soooooo much work done. We have everything figured out, typed up, and copied. We are going to get journals and glue everything in them before Monday night. Our “Floating the Vision (working piece 10/26/98)” sheet is soooooo cool. I wish that I could celebrate! The thing is, it is not hard work (so far), everything we are doing is fun. I am really, really, really, excited! I can’t wait till Monday. Have a good weekend! Sara and I are meeting to paint at 10:00 tomorrow – if you are in the neighborhood, stop by. Love, Mandy”

A Face Lift for the Big Room: October 24, 1998

I went by the middle school on Saturday morning to find Mandy and a parent, Sara, hard at work. They were painting and moving shelves, and rearranging the studio in preparation for Lella’s visit. The enthusiasm in the room was contagious and I left feeling very positive about the recent tangible evidence of growth and change. It seemed to me at the time that Janis and Mandy seemed to work well when the adrenaline kicked in just before a major hurdle was about to be attempted. In recent days I had witnessed an intensity of effort inspired by the upcoming Float the Vision meeting and Lella Gandini’s visit to the school.



Figure 7. Face lift for the Big Room

We're Lost, Let's Stop and Ask for Directions

"If you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got".

Laurence Miller

Floating a Vision: October 26, 1998

The big day was finally upon the group and everyone was scheduled to meet at Mandy's mother's home at 5:30 p.m. Mandy and Janis had purposefully chosen this location because Mandy's mother was out of town and her comfortable home with an enormous dining room table was available for our use. The group slowly arrived and milled around admiring the art work on the walls and worked to coordinate the ordering of pizza. There was a lot of talk about who was not in attendance. Every member of the group had received multiple invitations to this pivotal meeting and Janis and Mandy were obviously irritated that so few teachers were in attendance. Finally, we all gathered around the large table and got ready to begin. Janis called the meeting to order and Rita (an administrative assistant who had attended almost every meeting) spoke up and related that she had mentioned this meeting to Nick. His response was "Well, how do they think they are going to do that for 900 kids?" We all sat in amazement for a moment as we considered Nick's comment. Obviously, he was misinformed about our intentions as the reform effort was being geared for a small segment of the total school population. But the other, perhaps more important issue, was the tone that seemed to come through in Nick's retort. This group had always considered him to be the most supportive of all the administrators and they worried that perhaps he had changed his mind about this effort. Rita related that Nick had been under enormous stress lately with the ongoing building debate. He was attending three or four evening meetings a week but still seemed to be the first person to arrive at school each morning. Burning the candle at both ends seemed to be taking its toll. Just as some of the group began to consider whether or not we should even have this meeting, Vickie spoke up. She suggested that we merely think of our project as a demonstration program and that after tonight Janis and Mandy should make an appointment with Nick to fill him in on the progress of the project. Perhaps Nick is feeling "out of the loop" and needs more regular feedback in order to feel a sense of perspective.

Janis began the meeting by mentioning that Lella Gandini would be speaking publicly at VA Tech on November 11th and 12th and would then meet with this group in the Big Room at 3:00 p.m. on the 12th. Several of the teachers mentioned that that was the day that flu shots were being offered to all county school teachers and that they may be late because they would have to run over to the High School for their shot before the meeting. Other teachers wanted to know *who* Lella Gandini was and Janis (with obvious irritation) explained that she was the author of their book.

After this shaky beginning to the meeting, Janis and Mandy explained the idea behind the "Float the Vision" process and asked for lots of feedback and good discussion around each of the issues that would be presented. They explained that it was their hope that we would find a way through this process to form committees to work on our problem areas. The meeting progressed with good dialogue around the issues. Some of the considerations included:

- ❖ We will need research and documentation about previous efforts.

- ❖ We will need to be fairly consistent about our understanding.
- ❖ We need to get a list of the hallmarks of excellence from the Central Office and make comparisons to our plans.
- ❖ We need to write a position paper on where we are going and on what theories are work is based.
- ❖ We need to talk about qualitative and quantitative assessment of this project.
- ❖ We need to plan an assessment system that will be accountable to the state regulations but not compromise our own philosophy.
- ❖ We need to consider possible fall-out from parents and other community members.
- ❖ We need to figure out how to structure the long-term study projects
- ❖ We need to consider multi-aged grouping.
- ❖ We need to work on scheduling and consider electives and advisory periods.
- ❖ We need to find ways to develop collaborative partnerships with families.
- ❖ We need to get assistance from the main office at the school– we will want a guidance counselor, an administrative assistant, a special education teacher, and an art teacher.
- ❖ We need to have space in the school that allows everyone to be in close proximity. While the east wing is ideal, we could consider other options.
- ❖ We need to do this work without alienating our colleagues.
- ❖ We need to consider high school credit courses.
- ❖ We need to consider how to build our enrollment: voluntary vs. assigned
- ❖ We need to build-in regular professional development time and daily collaborative planning time.
- ❖ We need to find additional funds to purchase supplies, extra personnel, and such.

At the end of meeting, the group realized that they had been very productive and that they had identified eight committees. Daphne wondered if the next step might be to go to Nick with this new plan and ask him if he is willing to move forward with us. Others in the group wanted to have a firm commitment from all members of the group to work on these next steps. A plan was developed for how we would approach those teachers who had not been in attendance. Emmy suggested that our question to them could be worded: “Help me understand what happened because this was a really important meeting and we really needed you. Are you a resource for this group that can make the time commitment that is necessary?” Janis said that she might rephrase it to sound more like: “Help me understand before I tell you to shit or get off the pot!”

The group planned to meet again on November 12th in the Big Room for Lella’s visit and then again on November 23rd at 3:00 p.m. in Janis’s room.

Committee Announcements: October 27, 1998

By the next day, there was a flyer in everyone’s mailbox announcing the organization and membership of committees. It read:

Assessment: Eleana, Felicia, Gus

Community Out-Reach/Public Relations: Mandy, Tina

Community / Parental Involvement: Gus, Becky, Mandy, Tina

Supporting Theories: Daphne, Felicia, Janis, Becky

Fundraising / Professional Development: Lynn, Vickie
Scheduling / Student Enrollment: Rita, Ashley, Mary, Daphne
Physical Plant Needs: Rita, Ashley
Advisory / Program Development / Curriculum / SOLs: Mary, Ann, Eleana, and Janis

The next group meeting scheduled on Monday, November 23 at 3:00 had been designated a committee meeting time. “Please feel free to meet at that time or schedule another meeting time. Let’s get together on Monday, December 7th and discuss the progress of our committees (share plans, goals. . .)” the flyer read.

Reflection: As I reviewed my field notes, from this meeting, I found myself wondering about several aspects. It seemed to me that almost every meeting began with a list of unanswerable problems or dilemmas. I wondered why the group functioned in this manner. Each time this negative tone was introduced it seemed to put a damper on the spirit of the gathering and served to stall the forward motion of the reform effort. I wondered if the teachers somehow needed to list these problems because they doubted the possibility of success and needed the list in order to keep from feeling like failures. On another note, I wondered about the low turnout at this meeting. Both Janis and Mandy had stressed to their colleagues the importance of this particular meeting, but still the group was relatively small. Could it have been that holding a meeting in an unfamiliar location caused people to bow out? Or, because this meeting was going to require a lot of work, did some fail to show? Janis seemed to be having a very difficult time making allowances for those who attended irregularly. It seemed that leading a reform effort was taking its toll on our leaders. They were certainly expected to coordinate and organize each meeting and they were obviously juggling their own share of additional responsibilities at home and school. I wondered how long they would be able to hold out before sheer exhaustion would set in. I wondered if they might consider sharing the load with their colleagues. I wanted to suggest that they consider lightening their load but in my position as researcher, I felt that I should wait and watch and learn and that’s what I did.

This is the most beautiful scenery we've seen so far!
"Life loves to be taken by the lapel and told, "I'm with you kid. Let's go!"
Maya Angelou

"You have provided fantastic hope for me": November 12, 1998

Vickie and I escorted Lella Gandini to Boone Middle School where we found the Big Room absolutely glowing! The one-hundred-plus orchid plants that hung from pots in the large bank of windows were beginning to bloom, the fish pond filter gurgled gently in the background, and our large plywood table was covered with a table-cloth and child-made centerpieces. The enormous and blooming jade plant stood majestically on a large table in the room and was surrounded by pumpkins in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Lella took one look at the space and said, "Oh my, this is a surprise. From the outside of the building I never would have guessed that I would find such a space inside". She proceeded to wander all around the room stopping and touching and admiring many aspects. When she entered Mandy's classroom, which is adjacent to the Big Room, she took another breath.



Figure 8. Mandy's aesthetic display

Suspended from the ceiling were hundreds of origami swans that had been crafted by the children over the years. These swans were subtly lit by the soft glow of lamps placed here and there in her room. Small groupings of tables included centerpieces and the typical bulletin boards had been transformed into gorgeous and respectful documentation panels that boasted the process of a project. Mandy had confided in me that she was really nervous about having Lella in her classroom: "It's like if Dolly Parton was to walk in one day!"



Figure 9. Lella Gandini visits in Mandy's classroom

After this leisurely tour around the space and some casual introductions of the teachers who had joined us, we all sat down around the lovely table and began our conversation. Lella began by saying: "I am very impressed by the space and the energy that you are putting into this project. I am interested in hearing from you what aspects of Reggio you are finding appropriate for this age group. Children of this age sometimes have a very difficult time and sometimes are exhilarated by life, so there are these discontinuities that are very interesting but also very challenging."

Janis and Mandy then began to tell the story of their efforts beginning with the Duck Pond Project and the trip to Italy. Janis emphasized that the group had been meeting for some time now and had spent most of that time discussing philosophy. Lella must have sensed Janis's frustration and replied, "That is not a waste of time, because if you do not have a shared language or idea it is very difficult to move together." Janis agreed with Lella and added that when we meet with the Superintendent of Schools and with the School Board that we will need to be talking their language as well. Gus quipped, "That's what we call the 101st language!" Everyone roared at that joke and the group seemed thankful that once again Gus had served as the icebreaker.

During the rest of the meeting with Lella she shared stories of other groups who have tried to promote change. In Ohio the Jennings Project began as a top-down state department mandate. Lella said that she was not very enthusiastic about this form of reform and noted that it had been a very, very difficult process. She also spoke of a public elementary school in Winetka where teacher-interest and supportive administration have coupled to promote constructivist classrooms. She was extremely interested in our grassroots effort and suggested that "When you are not certain what work to do next, pull up your sleeves and work together on a manual project. This is a way to build solidarity. So, your idea of forming committees to explore possibilities is a good one." The remainder of the meeting was spent in thinking about publicizing this effort by writing an article for *Innovations* (the newsletter for Reggio Emilia activities in the United States) and by presenting at the next NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) conference. The teachers seemed surprised that Lella would suggest such a public statement by a group that is only beginning to make progress. But Lella was adamant that we ensure that this entire process be documented as it may assist others whose struggle would come after ours. At the end of the meeting, Lella said, "You have provided fantastic hope for me." This statement was very powerful and as I looked around the table, I could tell that the teachers of the revolution were very touched by the sentiment. Many eyes filled with tears and there were smiles on every face.

Reflection: It was especially nice to see how honored and grateful the group was to have Lella in their space. Although, I had wondered in the past about the level of their commitment, as I watched their response to Lella's words I had to admit that this event seemed to mean quite a lot to them. Also, the behind the scenes attention to detail in the environment was quite evident. Mandy and the kids in her class had taken great care to set up the space in a warm and welcoming way that really set the stage for the important interactions. It would also be important to note here that the administrators did not attend any of the functions or events during Lella's visit to Blacksburg. The Superintendent of Schools attended a dinner at Vickie's house in honor of Lella. He

expressed an avid interest in the Reggio Emilia Approach and was happy to hear that some teachers were working to find a way to incorporate the philosophy at the school.

Tough Times for the Revolution: The last half of the month of November, 1998.

Mandy and Janis tried repeatedly to make an appointment with Nick by placing notes in his mailbox. He never responded to the notes and we were also concerned that he had not attended any of the events during Lella's visit. We were all beginning to fear the worse – that he had lost interest and support for our group. Meanwhile, Ashley had a miscarriage and Janis's daughter was in a fairly serious car accident. These life changes had a strong impact on the group as the bond between members had definitely deepened and when one member was hurting it seemed to have a ripple effect. Also, since Janis seemed to be one of the "leaders de facto," and since she was tied up with other concerns, the revolution seemed to be placed on hold.

A New Base of Operations: December 15, 1998

The group finally came back together in mid December and met for the first time at a coffee shop called the Easy Chair. This comfortable establishment has small meeting rooms with an odd assortment of furniture including funky sofas and end tables, interesting lamps and art-work. They serve a variety of coffee drinks and some light sandwiches and pastries and the teachers immediately felt at home here. The change in venue came with a change in time of the day for our meetings. The teachers had decided that not only did they need to remove themselves from the school setting, but they also wanted to meet in the evening at 7:00 p.m. which would give them a break between school and revolution activities.

At this first meeting in our new location, there seemed to be an air of celebration. School was almost out for the winter holidays and people were feeling festive. There was a lot of talk of plans for the holiday season among the group before the meeting finally got started. I began by relaying a conversation that I had happened to have with Nick just a few days before. My godson who has Down's Syndrome and is in the 8th grade at Boone had a special education meeting called a MAP. During this process, all important members of the child's life come together to celebrate the child and to share their hopes and dreams for his future. They also create an action plan for attaining the dreams. Nick and I were both at the meeting and during a break in the proceedings, I had a chance to sit with him and chat. He looked extremely tired and when I commented on it, he began to tell me about the very overwhelming and consuming work of advocating for a decent building for the middle school. He also said that he had been especially disappointed that he had not been more available to attend the Reggio meetings. I told him about the meeting with Lella and how impressed she had been with his teachers and the good work of the group. He seemed happy to hear that and then related that he was also sorry that he hadn't been able to meet with Janis and Mandy, but that he was so happy that they continued to keep him up to date by placing notes in his mailbox. Then he said that it was his plan to meet with them before the holidays.

The teachers were happy to hear this news, because they had really begun to think that he was avoiding them. Janis and Mandy vowed to try to get another appointment with him as soon as possible.

The meeting went on to include reports from several of the committees who had already met and had prepared written reports that were created to be glued into the Revolution Journals that had been given to us at the Float the Vision Meeting. The Supporting Theories Committee reported that they had brainstormed a list of theorists and authors whose philosophies they wanted to include in a position paper that they intended to write right away. Each member of the committee decided to focus on one theorist and to then get together and write the paper. Janis took Dewey, Felicia took Vygotsky, Becky would read Piaget, and Daphne got Bruner.

Before the next report, there was some discussion of the building dilemma. These teachers are very much in favor of remodeling their existing building because they are fearful of getting a building that would never include a space like the Big Room. Gus reported that the existing building needs help quickly as the furnace is in disrepair and that a kid had slipped on the steps of one of the trailers and broken a leg last week. The mobile unit solution to overcrowding is especially difficult to handle during the winter months. The trailers do not have running water or bathroom facilities, so the kids must traipse back and forth between main building and trailers in all sorts of weather.

Next the Scheduling and Enrollment Considerations committee gave their report. They suggested a multi-aged grouping but were stuck on the dilemma of whether a child should opt in or not. Their concern was that the school might be seen as elitist if opt-in was the only enrollment option. They also had explored the issues of planning periods, special education students, heterogeneous balance, master scheduling, group lunches, and high school credit. This committee decided that they had a way to go before they would be comfortable with pitching their ideas to the administration, but they vowed to continue to work toward this goal.

The Community and Parental Involvement Committee reported next. They suggested holding informational meetings for the community and preparing an information packet. They hoped to find a way to bring parents together to discuss the individual dreams that they had for their own children and the collective dreams that they had for the children of the community. They also suggested that we find many ways to involve parents in our school and that we create a web page that links to Blacksburg's home page.

Gus then offered some initial considerations from the Assessment and SOL committee. He thought that surely there would be a way for the kids to get involved in the documentation of their own processes. His ideas were that there would be multiple forms of documentation. He spoke at length of his idea of video portfolios which would capture snippets of the child describing an understanding or demonstrating an accomplishment. He envisioned that the video camera and stage would be a permanent fixture in the Big Room and whenever a kid was ready to add to their portfolio they could simply come up to the stage and showoff. The group loved this idea and it launched much more discussion about the possibilities that could be realities in our new Reggio-inspired school. The inevitable topic of timing came up and some teachers emphasized that we should not rush the process and "risk falling on our faces." "We've got to have all our ducks in a row before we go to Nick or the Superintendent or the School Board," others said. And finally Janis made the definitive statement: "Actually, I've thought for quite

some time that there is no way that we can be ready by Fall. There are so many hoops. . . our jobs, our families, the community politics. We simply don't have as much time to devote as we need". Several teachers suggested alternative plans based on finding more time to work. Mary wondered if we might be able to use the staff development days that were coming up in January as revolution days instead. The group then decided to make a list of questions for Nick in hopes that Mandy and Janis would be successful in meeting with him soon. They wanted a discussion about:

- ❖ Money (could they have some for books),
- ❖ Staff development days,
- ❖ Recruitment of parents
- ❖ Could the teachers have conference leave to visit other nontraditional schools in the state?
- ❖ Scheduling a meeting with the superintendent in March?

After this very productive meeting, the teachers decided to begin meeting more regularly and committed to every other Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the same location.

Reflection: This was a very productive meeting with everyone contributing and showing obvious attention, commitment, and responsibility to their committee work. It seemed that the small groups worked more efficiently than the large group. I wondered why Janis felt that the reform could not be ready to launch by fall, 1999? Her emotionally challenging last few months may have taken a toll. Was she trying to be more available at home, therefore she was trying to minimize her commitments outside the home? I wondered why the group never had a dialogue about these kinds of major decisions? I decided that I would try to uncover some of these issues when I conducted my individual interviews.

Position Paper gets Priority Status: January 12, 1999

The group met at the Easy Chair and got right down to business (after ordering assorted coffee drinks). Janis and Mandy reported on their recent meeting with Nick. They said that he was "supportive, laid back, and easy-going." He suggested that they continue to work on their position paper and once it was complete that they would have a 'casual meeting" with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Schools. He suggested that the paper be a philosophical paper with an attached "obstacle and solution" section. Janis and Mandy reported that he said, "I'm sure that there will not be an obstacle that we can't deal with." He also said that it would be fine to begin to recruit parents and that it would be fine to interview with *Innovations*. He suggested that the group give him a list of books that they would like for their professional library and that he would go to "Nina" to get them. He also suggested that the group may want to bring up the Revolution work to the Self Study Committee. Becky remarked that we had identified a need that hadn't been met in the school and that working toward meeting the need is part of the school improvement process. They then discussed how this might be an opportunity to keep everyone informed by presenting information at the site based meetings.

Felicia suggested that there are many ways and many times to ask people to join. It's a journey that we're all on and someone should stand up and keep people informed and we should continue to invite others all the time. Changing the subject a bit, she suggested that one thing that we could do would be to select a color that signifies who we

are and use that color in all of our correspondence. That way, whenever they see this color in their mailboxes they'll realize that it's another note from us.

The discussion then turned to what color would be best. Several were mentioned, but the group chose RED as it is "the color of revolution and Reggio and it matches if any blood is spilled." Again, there was lots of laughter within the group. Rita said that she could help with getting out any messages since she is right there in the office all the time.

Felicia repeated that it is important that everyone understands that they can join at any time. Mandy qualified this by saying that they should get an information packet first - "you will be quizzed!" she joked.

Mary asked: "At some point shouldn't we address the whole faculty and fill everyone in?" Others said yes, but suggested that we wait until after the position paper was written.

Vickie asked for the floor and said that she wanted to talk with the group about some "serious school reform funding." She suggested that once we have a position paper and a literature review that we should include an evaluation piece. She told the group that the proposal regulations are coming out at the end of February or in early March and that she would keep them posted. "It would be fun to think about how to spend \$125,000."

Everyone chimed in on ideas for the money and that included salaries for a studio teacher, a professional development trip to Italy, a way to lower the ratios, environmental changes.

Janis said that she just didn't feel like we have any time to work on the program development, curriculum, SOLS until the position paper was done. Mary noted that the scheduling and student enrollment work still needed to be developed to go with the report to Nick. Mandy suggested that perhaps we should divide into two groups: one that would write the position paper and one that looked at obstacles and solutions. Janis thought that this sounded reasonable and asked to see a position paper as a model of the structure that was needed. Vickie talked about what a typical paper looks like including a section on theory, one on the literature and one on why you want to do this. Mandy reminded us that Nick said that he wanted a "user-friendly" portion to the paper.

Daphne suggested: "Why don't we get together on a Saturday, divide up the tasks and get it done?" She suggested that they go to the school - she would bring the coffee - and get it done! Everyone agreed that there were too many interruptions during the day at school to work effectively and that after school they were all so exhausted. Saturday morning seemed a perfect solution.

Mandy spoke up about this arrangement and said that she needed to reserve her precious weekend time for her young daughter. Others expressed understanding and then tried to consider other times to meet. Finally, Felicia, Becky, and Janis realized that they should meet together first in order to write the philosophical section of the position paper and then the rest of the gang could coordinate other times to work on the practical piece (obstacles and solutions). Finally Janis, Becky and Felicia decided that they would meet at 10:00 a.m. on January 16th at Felicia's house to work on the philosophy statement.

Reflection: It was very heartening and spirits were noticeably high upon hearing the report from the meeting with Nick. It was especially encouraging that he had suggested sharing the ideas with others including parents and the rest of the faculty. I found it

intriguing that even with Nick's blessing that the group was still not ready to share their work with their colleagues and again decided to put it off until they had the position paper written. Perhaps the fact that they were having such difficulty with writing this document contributed to their self-doubt. It seemed very important to them that they not risk embarrassment in front of their other colleagues at school. I wondered why this would be the case unless there was not an attitude of inquiry and reflection among the full faculty. Was it somehow considered a weakness to be mid-stream in a change effort? Wasn't the process of evolving a valuable thing? Or, was this group fearful of shaking up the status quo in the school? I was coming to understand that it was the school-culture to "play nice". It seemed that the administrators and the faculty valued this comfort zone and worked to ensure that the school functioned within it at all times. I wondered if a reform effort could ever be successful with such a strong priority in this school. Reform was inevitably going to bring dissonance and it would be through this disequilibrium that change would result. But if the school didn't value a little rocking of the boat, then the change would never happen. I thought that it was interesting that the group decided that they needed a designating color. Like team colors, this artifact of the group seemed to bind them together and at the same time set them apart from others. This was an interesting observation considering my interpretation of their school culture.

Vickie was especially helpful at this meeting as she talked with the group about funding possibilities. Her role as university supporter was greatly appreciated by this group. They valued her input and were honored to have her in their ranks. However, I had the feeling that they did not feel worthy of her attention.

WARNING! Unstable Roads Ahead!
“The urgent is the enemy of the important”
Lou Middleman

A Community of Friendship: January 27, 1999

The meeting began with a group effort around putting together wedding shower invitations for Rita's daughter. This group was trying to support their colleague, Rita, during this somewhat trying time. Apparently Rita's daughter had been seeing someone that no one quite approved of and now they are expecting a child. The daughter was just 19 and this was not the best of circumstances, but everyone was trying to put the best face on the situation and move on. So, several of the teachers from the revolution group had offered to throw a shower for her. There was lots of discussion about the invitations, the food to be served at the shower and the decorations. Rita came in a little late to discover this work in progress and seemed touched and pleased.

The business portion of the meeting began with Rita and Mandy presenting their work on "Obstacles and Solutions for a Reggio-Inspired Middle School." They had carefully thought through the question of scheduling with a special concern for the rest of the school community. Because Rita's job at the Middle School is to develop the Master Schedule each year, she is the perfect person to have on this committee.

Rita spoke about the difficulty in "fitting our ideas into the existing structure." She struggled with trying to "think out of the box" and said that her recommendation would be that we try to consider using a conforming schedule for the first year and then try to break away a bit more each year thereafter. The schedule that they presented required the 6th and 7th grade kids to be separated for the beginning of each day. In order to fit in Band, electives, PE and Advisory/Flex; they felt that these "extras" must come early in the day. Apparently band is only taught to 6th graders during 1st period, and the group did not want the Reggio 6th graders to lose out on that opportunity. The good part about this system was that it would allow all the Reggio teachers to meet as a group and to collaborate from 7:50 to 9:43 a.m. each day. This time would certainly be invaluable to keeping this program afloat. Then the "heart of the day" would begin at 9:47 a.m. with the first theme study. "Theme Study" is the term that the group had begun to use when talking about the projects. Following the first theme study, all the kids would go to lunch at the same time and then return for the 2nd theme study of the day. The day would conclude with skills workshops which they see as the opportunity to have instruction on math techniques, film developing, computer skills, etc. Mandy and Mary had talked about the theme studies and suggested that they would incorporate the four core subjects. There was lots of discussion about Latin, upper level math studies, band, PE, and high school credit courses. Figuring out how to include all of these aspects would be a challenging necessity before they could implement their vision.

A discussion of the new Math program ensued. The math teachers who are also members of this revolution group have been very happy with the new program. The program, called Core Plus, allows for math to be taught experientially and across time rather than as it is currently taught in unrelated sequences. Mary noted that a lot of

parents had come to the math meeting and were not happy with the new program. The parents were asking to see much more skill and drill traditional math experiences.

Next, Vickie and I presented the work from the Fund Raising and Professional Development Committee. We had developed a list of possible funders and stated that we would be willing to help with the grant proposal writing after the position paper was completed. We also had a timeline for professional development which included upcoming conferences and opportunities to present the work as a group.

Next, Daphne brought up the topic of timeline for this project. Janis said that it was a question of “pessimism versus realism.” She felt that in order to get approval from the school board to try this project that it would be a difficult process. “We have no reason to think that this process would be a speedy one, based on the recent work of the board” (here she was referring to the slow movement regarding building decisions). Some of the other teachers wondered if the School Board must approve this project or was it enough to get approval from Nick, and the Superintendents? No one really knew the answer to this question although we knew that another principal had begun a school reform effort at a local elementary school.

Janis then went on to talk about getting the proposal to Nick and then having the information meeting with the Superintendents. “This process can not be rushed. It probably won't happen until next fall.”

I looked around at the group to try and determine how my comrades were accepting this information from Janis. I, for one, was disappointed and felt that with some extra effort and commitment that we could succeed in being ready to launch the school by Fall of 1999. None of the other teachers said anything in opposition to Janis's declaration instead they just pitched in and tried to help Janis conceptualize her position paper. She was trying to look at the works of Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey and their emphasis on the Reggio Emilia Approach. We carefully walked through the 14 principles of RE and blended them with the guiding principles (which had been developed at the first couple of meetings).

The group decided that the next meeting would be on February 11th. Janis and her committee would continue to hammer out the position paper and Mandy and her committee would continue to work on the practical accompaniment.

Reflection: It was very touching to see the group rallying around one of its members as they collaborated on the baby shower. I felt that a “true community of friendship” (Sergiovanni, 1994) had been achieved with this group. They really cared about each other and felt an obligation to one another.

It was exciting to see that the Obstacles and Solutions committee had met and had some considerations for the full group to attend to. Although we had been told that the Position Paper group was going to meet together on January 16th to write, no one even asked about the status of the paper. They simply politely assisted Janis as she began to conceptualize the paper during this meeting. When the timeline was mentioned and Janis once again spoke up about extending the implementation date I wondered if the burden of the position paper was weighing heavily and therefore causing her to feel anxious about being prepared? If writing a paper took this much time, how long would it take to plan all the details of a school and a new curriculum?

“We can’t risk falling on our faces”: February 22, 1999

I met with Janis and Mandy at the Easy Chair before the rest of the group arrived to talk about the possibility of trying a Pilot Study at the Middle School in the Fall. Since it did not look like the group would be ready to "take the plunge" in the Fall and embark on the full "School within a school," we wanted to explore the possibility of trying a smaller pilot. I went into this meeting feeling like this was something that was do-able. I envisioned one two-teacher team from each grade level setting up "shop" over in the East Wing and beginning to work on a Reggio-like programming. When our conversation began, I expressed my vision and asked for their reactions. Mandy seemed to look to Janis for a response and I had the impression that they may have discussed this among themselves previously. Janis was adamant that there was not enough time to "get it together." She insisted that she did not want to take the chance that they would "fall on their faces" that first year and then lose the opportunity to try it as a full group the next year. She also talked strongly about the amount of work that it would take to develop the strong Theme Studies that they would want to have in place and that time was simply running out to get that work accomplished.

Reflections: I could not help but be somewhat disappointed that Janis and Mandy were not willing to give the Pilot idea a chance. In my mind, it would have been a perfect way to engender support for the next year, to work out some of the kinks that are bound to come up, and to do it without all the pressure of the full-blown School within a School. I had to remind myself that they knew the system best and that there were probably many political and social ramifications of trying something like this. A couple of problems that would come up immediately with a pilot attempt would be that some teachers in the East Wing would have to be displaced (physically). Teachers who have what appears to be "squatters rights" to their classroom space would be asked to move over to the main building in order to accommodate the pilot project. Perhaps Janis and Mandy were not ready to tackle the resistance that would be bound to come up. Also, how would the 7th and 8th grade kids react to such a transformation? It might not be "cool" as a 7th or 8th grader to be housed in what has historically been known as the 6th grade wing. More resistance from kids and their parents might be hard to take.

One other impression that I kept getting was that the work seems to move so slowly. The position paper had been on the docket for months at this point. Several meetings had been planned to work on it, but they seem to get cancelled when the members had scheduling conflicts. These teachers had so much to do to keep up with their regular teaching responsibilities and to add this huge project meant that it would probably inch along.

I was reminded of a book that I had read recently called Racing with the Clock: Making Time for Teaching and Learning in School Reform. In this book, Adelman (1997) states: "Indeed, based on our continuing exploration of the uses of time for teaching and learning, we are prepared to assert that any hope of systemic improvement of education in the United States is inextricably linked to the generosity with which teachers contribute the resource over which they have the most control - their time." (p.1). Another author, Andy Hargreaves (1995), stated in his book Changing Teachers,

Changing Times that “scarcity of time makes it difficult to plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the effort. . . . How much time teachers get. . . is a vital issue for matters of change, improvements, and professional development” (p.15).

I was realizing that I needed to re-think my position as participant-researcher. By making a suggestion to the group that they move forward at a pace that was faster than they were comfortable with, I was not being sensitive to their concerns and was trying to lead rather than walk alongside. My own personal style is to roll up my sleeves and jump in with both feet when I am passionate about a project. This time I was being forced to work at a pace that was uncomfortable for me because it was being controlled by outside forces. I needed to slow down, find the pace of the group and let the process unfold according to their own timeline. As Eugene V. Debs said about another revolutionary dream, “I would not lead you to the promised land, because if I could lead you there, so others could lead you back” (In Meier, 1995, p.146). I really had very little understanding of how difficult this work might be for those who were trying to “change the tires and drive the car at the same time” (Meier, 1995, p. 151). I wondered if in my position I could play “pit crew” and be more assistance to the group in that way?

Joyful Learning: March 15, 1999

The Superintendent of Schools for the County announced in a county-wide training on assessment “We cannot let the SOLs interfere with the Joy of Learning.” This was a very powerful statement and important to the Revolution group as “Nothing Without Joy” is the motto of the schools in Reggio Emilia.

More Setbacks: March 20, 1999

Gus’s wife severely breaks her arm and he must bow out of any extra work in order to care for her at home.

Just Do It! March 23, 1999

The group was slow in arriving and settling down for the meeting tonight at the Easy Chair. It had been a month since our last gathering as another meeting time had been cancelled due to scheduling conflicts. Mary and I arrived around 7:00 and found our regular room darkened and wondered if we had missed a message that the meeting had been cancelled. While we waited we talked about her baby, Anna, and all that is transpiring with her. Mary re-counted the story of Anna's premature birth about a year ago and talked in detail about the doctors and nurses who had assisted her through the trial of this unusual birth. After we had talked for about ten minutes, we decided to take it upon ourselves to ready "our room" for the meeting that we hoped was going to occur. It was interesting that until then we had just stood there waiting - not taking action - as the usual leadership was not in place and we were in foreign waters.

Once the room was open, lights on and tables and chairs arranged, Mandy came in with baby Winona. . . her first revolution meeting! Winona was born the day after our last formal gathering of this group so it was exciting to have her with us at this meeting. Mary reached out and grabbed Winona from Mandy and proceeded to hold her and talk to her through most of the rest of the meeting until the baby needed to eat at which point she was passed back to "La Mama.” (The Revolutionaries tend to speak Italian whenever possible. . . knowing very few words they make the most of their limited vocabulary and use it with great pleasure!)

Vickie arrived with a large purple and icy drink in hand and immediately asked about the agenda. We all looked at one another and all commented that we were waiting for Janis to arrive. Daphne came in with a terrible cough and talked about how everyone at school had been sick and that Nick was home with a fever and even more serious symptoms.

Finally, Mandy asked what time it was and when we realized that we had been waiting for Janis for about half an hour, we felt silly and started the meeting on our own. Mandy began by asking Daphne if their Position Paper committee had met and worked on the paper. “No,” Daphne told us, “Janis said that was going to be her main focus tonight.” We all looked at each other silently.

Finally, Mandy bravely stated: “I’ve been thinking that when we were all talking about philosophy that it was all going well and now we’ve slowed down.” Vickie spoke up and said: “If I was the Superintendent and asked you guys ‘Why this revolution? . . . What is it that you all want?’ Is that a good question to ask?” Daphne agreed that it was a great question and should be the focus of the position paper. Then she asked the group: “The outline that we worked on was thorough...why is it taking so long to do this?”

Vickie countered with: “Why are you guys into this?”

Daphne responded: “It’s for the students. They need an environment that is conducive to their needs. How can we assist them in meeting those needs when they are moving around building to building...team to team all day long? I’m an adult and that’s hard for me...so I think it’s hard for kids to come out of an elementary school environment and into something crazy like we’ve got at the Middle School level. We could certainly be more responsive to them – to their personalities and their development and their learning interests if we tried to think about schooling in different ways.”

Mandy agreed and said, “And, it would be more respectful of the child.”

Mandy and others began to get riled up about the position paper: “We need to get the position paper written...it was ready before Christmas and. . .”

Daphne looked at her revolution notebook and said, “When we met on January 27th I wrote down ‘FOCUS! and write the position paper! ‘ We’re stuck... we need to move...we are really stuck!”

Mandy agreed and said: “We just need to find the time to meet.”

Daphne read some more from her notebook: “February 4th Susan’s room - February 11th Nianne’s house – February 22nd - everything kept getting cancelled. We wanted to have it done by the VAECE conference date (March 11th). . . that was one of our goals. . .”

Vickie said, “You all know it - you just have to do it. Start with a problem statement and then what it is like. . . why is it different?. . . why do you want to try it?”

Mary and Daphne moved to sit beside each other and were furiously writing notes, making charts, and planning how to get everyone’s input. Vickie suggested that they just get the draft together and not worry about how good it looked. “Just get it down on paper,” she said.

The teachers developed a plan for receiving input from those teachers who were not in attendance at this meeting. They felt compelled to have all voices included in the

drafting of this important document. So together they developed a short survey that they planned to distribute on the following day.

Mandy mentioned that since she is home on maternity leave now that she would be happy to take a stab at writing a first draft once the surveys come back. “Yes”, said Daphne, “That would be great because we've been spinning for a long time.”

There ensued lots of discussion about when to hold the next meeting. Finally it was decided to meet one week from today. Mary promised to put the survey on red paper and into each mailbox by the next day.

The group then began to talk about what a tough few weeks it had been at school with parent conferences and report cards. Daphne talked awhile about her father-in-law who lived with them: “He was sick all night the other night. . . may need full time care soon forgets to take his naps during the day while we're gone. . . we've looked at Warm Hearth but we're not ready. . . he still recognizes us. . . he still has so many pleasures. . . he loves to eat. . . and we can still provide it. . . he loves his ham and eggs on the weekends. . . that's our goal - to keep him comfortable and happy for as long as we can.”

Some good news was shared with the group: Ashley was pregnant again and expecting at the end of September!

As we were leaving I commented to Daphne “Wow! We were on a roll tonight!”

“I hope so,” she replied, “I hope we're out of our rut!”

Reflection: It seemed obvious that the dynamics of the group were quite different tonight. This group, with Vickie's generous contribution and support was ready to move forward. Although the group was small it was powerful and passionate. Mandy's loyal participation even after having just given birth was inspiring to everyone and touching. We all left this meeting with high hopes for what we were about to accomplish!

On one other note, I was pleased to hear Daphne's response to Vickie's question: “Why do you want to do this?” The response had the student at the center and continuing to drive the restructuring effort, even during the apparent slump in the group's commitment.

Next day:

Mary typed up the survey and put a copy in each Revolutionary's school mailbox by the next day. Later in the week I got a phone call from Mandy. She was very upset and related that there had been a change in plans at the school. Janis had told a couple of people that “Nothing can be done on the position paper until this summer.” This statement seemed to astonish Mandy as it was in complete opposition from the decision of the group. Mandy mentioned again that she was ready and willing to help especially now that she had some extra time since she was on maternity leave.

Reflection: It seemed that there was some strong dissent in the ranks. Not being a member of the school's faculty, it was difficult to tell how this was all playing out in the school. From previous experience, it did not seem that the group cared for discussing sensitive issues during their meetings. I made another note to try to talk with them individually about this change in focus when I conducted my interviews.

Engine Trouble!

“Conflict is an essential element, in our view. Conflict transforms the relationships a child has with peers. Opposition, negotiation, taking the other’s point of view, and reformulating an initial premise are the dynamics of a cognitive processes”

Carlina Rinaldi

A U-turn for the Revolution: March 30, 1999

While most people were still milling around and getting settled . . . Mandy said to me: “I hate being on leave and not knowing what's going on . . . I hate being out of the loop . . . I don't know who's coming tonight . . . usually I touch base with everyone at school on the day of a meeting.”

Janis took a position at the head of the table and pulled out a notebook with summaries from Internet searches. She then made a loud statement, “I think we ought to have a big, huge binder and start putting research in there. We're gonna need everything we can get our hands on to make the case solid. There's research like crazy that supports it...here read some of this.” She passes papers over to Mandy and the two of them were conversing now mostly privately.

Mandy: “I know. . . I support it. . . I'm just saying that I'm at home and have nothing to do and I could help out. . . I'm getting panicky. Its April and we're not any further along than we were in the fall. . . ”

Janis: “ We're going to have to go at the pace that the group wants it to go at. Because lets face it . . . who is this for? We need to be with the kids now and in the classroom. We're going to risk failing . . . We don't want a drive-by reform. What we're talking about doing here . . . we better have every duck in a row. We have to respect people's time . . . ”

Mandy: “I understand that . . . we need to be respectful . . . I know that all the energy is in the classroom now . . . but should we just stop the group until the summer?”

Janis: “No, but not everyone is going to be agreeable to meeting all the time. It needs to be a comfortable pace to work from. For instance, we only received four responses to our survey.”

As I watched this scene unfold I realized that Janis had skillfully shifted the emphasis from the last meeting in which the group wholeheartedly committed to moving forward - to "getting out of the rut" by insisting that there are these "forces" that are waiting in the wings to take them down. It almost felt as if Janis seemed to have some inside information about the group's feeling on the timeline for this project. Her information, however, is in opposition to the expressed feelings of the group from the last meeting. I was very worried about these two friends who had started this adventure together. Were they at crossroads?

Mary spoke up at this point and said, “I'd like to be involved in making it happen now but . . . I feel like I don't have enough time to do the reading that I need to do . . . I'm really strung out.”

Janis nodded and agreed. “That’s what it comes down to basically.”

Mary: I've got quizzes to grade . . .

Janis: If all the work takes place while we're in the school then we've lost sight of what its all about.

Ashley: Do we have a deadline for this position paper?

Mandy: February or March was what we were shooting for.

Janis: Why?

Mandy: In order to move forward – remember? We felt that we needed the position paper. There was also some grant money available and we needed the paper to support a proposal. Plus Nick asked for it and it will legitimize our effort with him if we accomplish this goal.

Mandy tried to convince Janis of the importance of the document.

Reflection: This beginning discussion of time and conflicting priorities was interesting and repetitive. I was especially surprised to once again hear the questions about the importance of the position statement. It was beginning to seem to me that the dedication and commitment to the project was waning. Or could it be that it was difficult for teachers to think about change in this way because they had never had the opportunity to make significant change in their school before? Was this boundary crossing making them uncomfortable? Was time the real enemy of our revolutionaries?

Ashley spoke up again and said exactly what was said last week: “It seems like everything was moving along fine until we needed to get the position paper written and then we hit the wall.”

Mary replied: “Sometimes just getting started is such a commitment and I'm starting to get worried about these SOL tests coming up.”

Ashley asked, “So what if Mandy can start writing now . . . just to get started . . . wouldn't that be a good thing?”

Mandy agreed and adds: “Then we can add the middle school research later on . . .”

“You know,” said Mary, “With all this stuff going on with the math in the middle schools . . . so many people in this town are deep in the traditional form of teaching math. The teachers presenting the concepts at our last parent meeting did not even get to finish their presentation. A Tech professor and others who do not even have children in the school interrupted the presentation. There are so many people out there who are so opposed to anything different. I'm almost afraid to try something innovative. There are a lot of vocal people in Blacksburg who are really upset. Even my babysitter told me about the rumors that she had heard about the meeting. People are saying that if the middle school teaches that way that they say that the kids will they will not be accepted at Tech. A math professor actually got up and said that !”

Lynn: Was Nick at that meeting?”

Mary: Yes, and he had to get up and say that the intent was not to let one person dominate . . . it was to let parents know what was going on, and then he asked him to sit down so that the teachers could proceed . . .

Janis: I heard that then he tracked him down after the meeting and told him that he didn't appreciate it. Apparently the tech professor said

that he was contacted by the high school math teachers who told him to come to the meeting and offer his perspective.

Mary: They started the meeting with parents totally engaged and happy and doing math on the floor and all of a sudden this Tech professor gets up and starts shooting it down and then all the parents got turned off immediately.

Ashley: I wish that we could already show the success of the math program and of the Reggio-based program so that more people would buy in.”

Mary: All you have to say to a parent is that your child will not be ready for the next step and that scares them to death. So that’s another thing we’re dealing with at the Middle School. Our algebra teachers really liked this math program. Its contextual-based, ties ideas together . . . but this Tech Professor shut it down.

At this point Janis hands some papers to Mandy and said, ”Here is some more information from the National Middle School Association. It’s about what current research says about the Middle School. This is what’s missing from our work on Reggio.”

Mandy said, “This is a Position Paper from the National Middle School Association - we can quote straight from this.”

Janis clarified, “This is *current* research.”

Janis went on talking about all the books that we need to read and be prepared to cite. “What it makes me see is that we’ve got a long way to go, baby.” Then she said: “I think we ought to start working on SOLs and curriculum . . .we could bring the SOLs and cut and paste and put together possibilities. This stuff can be going on during all the philosophy building too. We also need a notebook that supports the work we’re doing. Anything we come across . . . put it in my box and I’ll put it in the notebook.”

Mandy asked: “So are you saying that our next meeting is going to be our first SOL workshop?”

Reflection: I found it to be very interesting that no one really spoke up and explained to Janis that the group had moved on without her last week. Social graces and cultural politeness did not seem to allow it. We all just sat there and listened to Janis’s new plan for the group. I wondered why she felt that the group had time to think about curriculum but not the position paper? Perhaps curriculum is more of a natural realm for her whereas thinking philosophically seems to be pushing the boundaries of the typical teacher plane.

I have also noticed that each time the group comes up against a tough issue, that they seem to sidetrack the discussion and spend time talking about peripheral agendas that prevent them from focusing on the tough issue. This distraction technique seemed to be a defense mechanism. Did Mary bring up the Math problem in the community to warn the group of another impending predator of this work? On the other hand the public math debate sounded ominous and I could imagine that teachers and administrators might begin to shy away from trying innovations that might draw more criticism from the community.

Ted Sizer (1992) expounds on one of the “treaties” made in schools in which the players make the compromise to “get along” no matter what. He has chronicled efforts to change and the usual failure of those attempts:

“Don’t change it. Don’t put my offspring at any risk of not graduating with their classes. Don’t make my child a guinea pig. Don’t upset the fragile compromises that I have already made” (p.viii).

Tradition is hard to change.

An Attempt to Reclaim the Driver’s Seat: March 31, 1999

By 2:00 p.m. today, Mandy had already written the rough draft of the position paper using all the input from the group. She had also copied it and put it in each person's mailbox. She called me to let me know that she had her mother (who is a professional writer) help her with some of the wording, but that it had not been that difficult a task once she got started. She was feeling pleased with herself but extremely worried about how it would be perceived by the rest of the group. She promised to bring a copy to me on Thursday.

Paranoia: April 1, 1999

Mandy came by the Lab School and brought the copy of the new position paper draft. She was anxious to have me read it and begged for "honest feedback!" I called her later and let her know that I thought she had done a thorough and admirable job. The problem was well stated, the reasons for wanting to try this approach were delineated and the supporting theorists were considered. The attached plan for implementation would be a perfect companion piece to this statement. She was really thrilled for any feedback at all as she had not heard from a single person at the school and was feeling "paranoid." Mandy’s sense of being out of the loop was a difficult position for her.

Out of Gas!

"We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope."

Martin Luther King

Peripheral Battles take their Toll: April 2, 1999

The math debate aired in the newspaper over the course of the next several months. A total of seven articles were written about the public outcry against this nontraditional style of teaching and learning. Our revolutionaries watched and listened and grew fearful of the backlash that seems inevitable for their new enterprise.

School Board Backs Down to Parents: April 10, 1999

The School Board decided to move slowly on the decision of implementing the Core Plus Curriculum ensuring that a combination of traditional and experiential math would be offered.

Blending SOLs with a Reggio-Inspired Curriculum: April 12, 1999

The group began to gather at 7:00 p.m. They ordered food and drink and began to sit and chat. The video camera was set up, also computer and still camera. The teachers each brought copies of their SOLs and the plan was to consider themes and connect them to the SOLs. Sara, an interested parent who had assisted with the Big Room remodeling was in attendance as well.

Ashley stood in front of the camera and gave a profile shot and announced today's date and the due date of her baby – September 30th !

I told the group: "I'm going to video tape this meeting because it seems to have the potential to be so important - this is the main question that teachers ask when wondering how to implement Reggio in a public school setting - 'but what about the SOLs?'" Everyone nodded and agreed.

There was lots of chatting among small groups and then Mandy announced to the group, "Don't worry about having copies of the SOLs with you Janis is bringing copies of everything." But at 7:30 p.m. Janis had not yet arrived. We were all wondering how to proceed when one of the waitresses brought a remote phone in and handed it to Mandy. Janis was on the phone asking if we had all the SOLs with us. Mandy talked with her and then reported to the group:

"Janis is not going to make it to the meeting and asked that Mary bring any important stuff to her tomorrow." With that pronouncement the group got down to work. Vickie went off to make copies of all the SOLs for everyone and the rest of the teachers began to talk about the strategy for attacking this activity.

Mandy told the group: "What I thought is that we'd write the theme on the top of this paper and then lump all the SOLs around it."

As the teachers worked, I documented this conversation about the SOLs and a Reggio-inspired curriculum:

Eleana: It really isn't that difficult to blend or embed the sols into what you teach and still have good creative lessons, but some teachers just freak.

Lynn: Why do they freak?

Mandy: Because they break it down and say “I have to teach 6.1 today”, instead of seeing how it fits with the others.

Eleana: If you just teach it or cover it, they're not going to remember it anyway.

Sara: So its not so much the SOLs as it is the *testing* that is restrictive?

Mandy: The students are going to remember the information presented to them in this manner much better than if you just cover the requirements.

Sara: Oh I agree.

Eleana: it is hard to teach all the things that Constantinople stood for, but you've got to hook them or they're not going to remember all of it for three years down the road (until they are tested). They have to make an emotional connection or they are not going to remember.

Sara: Just think of all those tests that we took. I'd don't remember a thing from all that - nothing

Lynn: So how do you hook them?

Donna: By making that emotional connection.

Lynn: And how do you do that?

Donna: By personalizing it.

Lynn: So . . . by individualizing the curriculum?

Donna: That and that they take an active role in their learning . . .

Lynn: So do you think that a project approach like this where everybody takes a piece that most interests them . . . ?

Donna: Yea that could be the answer and then if they help each other share the information if becomes even more solidified.

As the teachers cut, pasted, and designed curriculum they chatted among themselves:

Mandy told about how she would be returning to school for the last week of school. The others said that that would be great for the kids

Mary talked about her husband. "He woke up on Saturday and said that his face hurt and now he's got palsy. She was extremely fearful about his unusual condition.



Figure 10: Mary blends SOLs and Reggio

Reflection: By the end of this evening the teachers had convinced themselves and knew that they could convince others that the SOLs easily fit into any Theme Study. They were pleasantly surprised that the exercise had been so easy and were happy to note that they would be able to build a curriculum that was supported by the SOLs. They would not need to rely on the SOLs to fuel the curriculum as they had once believed. On one other note, I did not hear anyone mention the draft of the position paper that Mandy had completed the week before.

Middle School Gets Leftovers: April 18, 1999

The School Board rejected all plans for building a new Middle School in the town and decided instead to build a new High School. The existing High School would be remodeled for a Middle School. This left Boone wondering what it meant for their building and their program as they knew it. They felt that the High School was not environmentally conducive to a Middle School population. There are no windows in the building and the walls between rooms are paper-thin. The teachers and administrators once again felt “caught in the middle” and handed the leftovers.

Tragedy: April 20, 1999

The tragedy at Littleton, Colorado occurred on this date and shook every educator to his or her core. Our revolution seemed even more necessary than ever. We agreed that we must find a way to ensure that every child has a relationship with a teacher at school. Smaller more intimate schools seemed a necessity.

“I’m a firm believer in the passion of teachers:” May 11, 1999

I interviewed Nick Thomas, principal of Boone on this date. Once the interview was complete, he gave me permission to distribute it to each of the members of the Reggio group. I was inspired by his history of innovation and change and his attitude about leadership and teacher passion and I knew that the Reggio group would be as well.

Regarding the possibility of a Reggio-inspired school within a school at Boone he said: “When you’ve got a staff that is committed and when you’ve got people excited about teaching in this way – then it’s going to work! I am a firm believer in the passion of teachers. I think that the Reggio approach is right down our alley. Like all change it takes time. I think that the bottom line is that its good for kids – and it is something that is exciting to kids.”

As an administrator he felt that he should “stay out of the way and not be a road block . . . but be there to support and be there for when teachers needed support, money, help, time, or whatever – to facilitate. The administrators could help by handling some of the details.”

When I asked him what the next steps should be for this group he said, “I think that they should continue what they are doing now – developing a position paper. I think that just like we did with the math, you have to get grounded in your beliefs and you’ve got to really know what you believe. Then, there would always be an option for a couple of people or a team to try it and see how it works as an alternative.”

Reflection: These positive and encouraging words from the principal were shared with the group right away. Each member noted Nick’s style of participatory-leadership and everyone felt supported in their continuing efforts.

The Month of May

I spent this month interviewing sixteen members of the Boone faculty. My purpose for interviewing these teachers and administrators was to ascertain additional information about their personal motivation regarding the reform effort, their impressions of the climate in the school pertaining to change and innovation, and their perceptions of the possibility for success. Included in Appendix G is a synopsis of the responses from the participants.

Pit Crew Assistance Necessary
“Documentation is an Act of Love”
Carlina Rinaldi

Focus Group Meeting: June 16, 1999

After completing all of the interviews, I noticed that my relationship with each of the teachers seemed to deepen. The hour and a half to two hours that we spent alone thinking together and pondering about this process served to move me into a more intimate place within the group. After listening to their life histories and hearing their hopes and dreams for the children at the Boone, I felt more of an obligation and commitment to them as human beings and as teachers. And so, a true sense of reciprocity was in the air when I began to design the Focus Group meeting. I now realized that although I had from the onset of this study considered it to be an example of Participant Action Research, I now understood that it had only just taken on that quality. Previously, I believe that I tended to take notes, pass judgements, and keep them to myself. Now, I wanted to rectify this situation by crafting a democratic focus group experience that might give something back to the teachers and their effort.

Remembering the MAP meeting that I had attended in early December for my godson, I considered the possibility of leading a similar meeting for the revolution group. Instead of focusing on an individual child, this MAP would be an opportunity to get an “up close and personal” look at the revolution, based on the words and sentiments that had been expressed during the interview process. After coding and organizing the information from the interviews, I created a huge wall map that represented the identity of the innovation. It included detailed information on the individual members of the group, their impressions of the leadership in the school, their hopes and dreams for the reform effort, the aspects of Reggio Emilia that most appealed to them, the roadblocks that they perceived, and finally an action plan for success. Of course, everyone was invited to participate. The date and time for the meeting had been chosen at the previous meeting and so on June 16, 1999 the group arrived at the Easy Chair to find a MAP of their process gracing the wall of their favorite coffee house. The teachers took a look at the MAP and seemed very excited to see such a representation of their last year’s effort.



Figure 11. Signing in at the Focus Group Meeting

I called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending and then listed the goals for this meeting:

1. To celebrate the first year of work on the Reggio Revolution.
2. Hopefully, to propel us into the next wave of effort.
3. To review the information that came from the interviews and to ask for clarifications, additions, and revisions to the information.

I explained my research process that included ethnography, participant action research, interviews, and now this focus group. I suggested that Participant Action Research was about gathering data and then giving it back to the group in hopes that the group could then use the information to grow, change, move, and evolve. The group was silent as they stared intently at the wall.

Since Daphne is a special education teacher and she has an intimate knowledge of this technique I asked her to describe the MAP process, Daphne explained that the MAP process stood for “ Making Action Plans” or “McGill Action Plans” for the originators of the technique. In the state of Vermont it is done for all special education students and for all high school students. The five parts of the typical MAP include;

1. your history
2. your dreams
3. your fears
4. your characteristics
5. your current and future needs

Daphne noted that these categories seemed to be evident on the MAP on the wall. Daphne also talked about the typical roles that are played in a MAP meeting. One that she felt that our group needed was a “timekeeper”. This person would help us to keep on task and move on if we got stuck on an issue. Tina volunteered to serve in this capacity.

Once we were organized I also suggested an additional goal for the evening which was inspired by having listened to all of their concerns during the interview process. I suggested that we try to ensure that all voices be heard tonight. I asked that if they felt comfortable, that they should really try to set a personal goal that they would not leave the meeting wishing that they had said something that was on their mind. “This revolution has been hard work and there have been times when some of us have felt uncomfortable. So, getting those concerns out in the open can help the group to move forward, because we can deal with the problems up front instead of having them burn and fester and possibly cause resentment later on. Let’s be open and honest, but also kind and caring”, I suggested.

The other important thing about this focus group was that the information came from initial interviews with teachers and administrators. All information that would be shared, however, would be anonymous. No names would be used, except for Nick Thomas’s name because he gave this permission.

Individual interviews are very intimate and helpful, but sometimes a group situation will allow people to think beyond their original, solitary ideas. I asked them to use this opportunity to think beyond what was on the wall and come up with additional

thoughts. The MAP included many blank spaces that begged to be filled with new considerations.

We began by reviewing the innovations at Boone. Some of the memories that had come from the interviews included:

- ❖ Moving to the Middle School concept in the late 80's
- ❖ Team approach
- ❖ schedule changes
- ❖ bells ringing
- ❖ chaos, confusion for kids
- ❖ tracking
- ❖ homogeneous grouping to heterogeneous
- ❖ inclusion
- ❖ advisory
- ❖ a desire to bring a sense of smallness in a large multi-building campus

Daphne: It's a wonder we survived all that!

Lynn: Yes, and as I understand it, this all happened within a year's time period. The Vanguard commission came to the school and noted that the school was not functioning as a middle school. There was a stunned response initially. The current principal's technique was to have everyone sit on a committee to investigate change. They formed committees to study issues and report back.

Eleana: We were also told that if we didn't like these new ideas that we could leave.

Lynn: Yes, some teachers left – realized that they needed more of a secondary experience and went to the high school. Other teachers said "sure sure sure" and then closed their doors.

Felicia: . . . and said, "this too will pass"

(Laughter)

Eleana: They're still waiting for it to be over!

(Laughter)

Lynn: Someone told me that these teachers thought of themselves as "the masters of their own universe". Meanwhile there were a lot of parents who were concerned saying "You mean you're going to use my child as a guinea pig?" And so there were a lot of parent meetings during that time to articulate to parents just what was happening. It was a crazy, exciting, dynamic time. Even the people who were very much in favor of this change said that it was a very scary time. The issue of where everyone would be housed was one of the more difficult problems. People were very concerned about losing their classroom space and this set up a wave of near-hysteria. Squatter's rights seemed to be the unspoken rule of the day. The people who sat on those committees are still, even now, considered the experts on those issues.

Other changes in the school over the years:

- ❖ Passport literacy test – came and went
- ❖ Sols
- ❖ Math program

I read this quote from Nick Thomas on the math program:

“We can’t be embarrassed to say that 3 years ago we as a staff felt that the traditional way of teaching math was the right way. We have to be willing as a staff to grow and change”

All: OOOooo. That’s so nice. That’s his attitude about change!

Lynn: Are there any other changes that should be listed here in your history?

Daphne: Well, when that principal left the school and when Nick came and some of us felt shaky about that because we were worried that all the work would slide back. But Nick, even though he had a different style, kept things going.

Felicia: I’d just say that that was a point when I started seeing VA Tech and Radford University as welcomed members of our school community. When I came in 1987 the feeling was not one of cooperation – and so it started with those people telling us that we could be a much better school. It started a willingness to collaborate.

About Nick’s leadership style:

- ❖ He supports his teachers 100%.
- ❖ He’s a good honest person.
- ❖ He lets us expand and try new things.
- ❖ He’s a smart cookie and a people person.
- ❖ He listens to anyone who wants to talk.
- ❖ He begs for feedback.
- ❖ He wants the staff to be the spearheaders.
- ❖ No matter what happens today, tomorrow he’ll start fresh.
- ❖ He’s open to change.
- ❖ We all trust him.
- ❖ He treats us like professionals.
- ❖ The bottom line is if its good for kids, Nick will support it.

Lynn: Does he go around saying that wherever he goes? Because everyone says that.

ALL: No, no . . . he is about what’s good for kids, but he doesn’t go around promoting himself. He doesn’t have an ego about it.”

Lynn: It has seemed in these meetings that you have seemed almost a little fearful of being willing to take these ideas to the administration at BOONE. We’ve really felt like we’ve needed to have all our ducks in a row, to be prepared. Some concern that if we don’t do it right the first time that we might not get another chance. And if you read his interview, you saw that he said “I’ll take care of the scheduling and that sort of thing . . . and you all know the Reggio concepts and how you want to implement it.

- Janis:* That's where this was enlightening, because when we went to him in the beginning, it was about "well if you get 10 teachers together knock on my door and I'll call the Superintendent over." It was about us presenting all this to the school board and to the Superintendent – not to Nick. I wouldn't be fearful to talk to Nick about anything. It was about it you call the Superintendent and the School Board over you'd better have your ducks in a row.
- Lynn:* It seems from his interview that he has definitely shifted his thinking on how things will happen – and he sees it as a site-based decision now.
- Daphne:* Maybe its because he knows the Superintendent better now.
- Janis:* And see, that's a whole new set of road blocks – site based will not be a piece of cake.
- Vea:* Another thing that we need to add to the possible problems and changes that we have been through is the whole idea of the building issues – what building are we going to be in? Where are we going to be? And all that . It really sapped a lot of our energies (and especially Nick's) for other issues.
- Eleana:* It has worn me out. It's been seven years now.
- Vea:* Its something that people put a lot of time and energy into and still there is no real decision, solution. It's frustrating.
- Mary:* Yes, it's drained him. He's also put a lot of energy into this math thing and that's drained him too . . .it's drained a lot of us.
- Janis:* You can't even go to the grocery store without getting attacked. people saying so "what do you think about that math at the middle school?" The last person that asked I just told them that it was just another plot of ours at the middle school to screw kids (sarcastic)!
- Mary:* The other point from the interview with Nick is that he said that we just have to move slow with this . . . you can't force it or rush it. And I think that he knows from his experience with the math program and other issues that you just can't rush change. The parents in Blacksburg are just not going to trust us to do the right thing for kids. They just don't.

Who are we as a group? Previous experience with Social movements

- ❖ Public interest group
- ❖ AAUW – gender equity
- ❖ Common cause
- ❖ Animal rights activist
- ❖ Child of the 60's
- ❖ Kent State protest

Lynn: Do you think that this is significant in any way that you all had these kinds of experiences? That you fought for a cause?

Janis: I think that it says that we're the kind of people who are passionate about justice and that we're not going to just turn our heads when there is a problem.

Who are we? What are our dispositions?

- ❖ Open minded
- ❖ risk takers
- ❖ committed
- ❖ passionate
- ❖ smart
- ❖ lifelong learners
- ❖ self-sufficient
- ❖ love to share
- ❖ works well under pressure
- ❖ energetic
- ❖ doesn't make promises she can't keep
- ❖ not content with the status quo
- ❖ strong personality
- ❖ natural theorists
- ❖ worker bees
- ❖ wants to jump in and do it
- ❖ sees possibilities and sees hope for the future

Lynn: Are there other traits that you'd like to add?

All: I think we're people who can see the big pictures. We like the details, too.

Janis: And everyone of us is committed to Public Education.

Lynn: What do you think about the conflicting dispositions that were noted?

ALL: See that's good. When one person is good at one thing and someone else is good at another . . . it makes for strong work. It takes all kinds of people to make the collaborative or the community form.

The appeal of the Reggio Emilia Approach

- ❖ Time, quality not quantity
- ❖ process not product
- ❖ engages the individual
- ❖ humane
- ❖ student directed
- ❖ about building relationships within a community
- ❖ Its developmental
- ❖ can see self as successful
- ❖ project-based learning
- ❖ teacher collaboration
- ❖ representation of knowledge

Lynn: I was really excited when I was talking with Nick Thomas to find out that he really did have a knowledge about RE – he had good, thorough answers to those questions.

Janis: He must have read the things we gave him!

Our Dreams for this Revolution:

- ❖ That all my best friends would work collaboratively and that we wouldn't feel isolated any more.

(Lots of oohhhs and aaahhhs to that one)

- ❖ I want it to colorful and to have a real sense of community
- ❖ My dream would be that Littleton, Colorado would never happen again.
- ❖ It would be about relationships, about accepting people and honoring their differences.
- ❖ I would love it if the whole school could be Reggio based.
- ❖ We would pull in tons of resources and our combined expertise to create an awesome learning environment.
- ❖ We would collaborate, not just cooperate.
- ❖ This type of school would be available to everyone.
- ❖ On a Sunday afternoon it would be fun to come and paint and it would never seem like a chore.

Lynn: As I talked about these dreams with each of you, everyone talked a lot about what it would look like and how we would get there. But one thing that is consistent is that everyone wants to be in a space together. And originally the preferred space was the East Wing – but then some felt that perhaps we shouldn't be so specific about our space and then there were some other suggestions that we circle the trailers and tarp the area in the center.

Janis: In the morning you'd have your fire circle – like in girl scouts You'd have to make sure that we ask for that in the winter when people are hating the trailers.

Eleana: I'm hoping that we get the renovated middle school and everyone else goes off to the high school.

Felicia: That's what I keep saying – and we're keeping Nick too! We get the school and Nick.

Janis: Well, if we know that that is going to be the proposal – that there will be two schools then maybe we can make that suggestion at that time.

Perceived Roadblocks:

- ❖ Learning to collaborate is scary.
- ❖ Being able to do that is something that a lot of you said you didn't know if you could do. Collaboration is not necessarily an American trait. It's not something that we have practiced. American teachers especially have had a hard time because most often they go into their individual classrooms and close their doors and they're on their own.

So we haven't had a lot of practice and we're unsure of how to go about learning how to make this part a reality. And this was a sentiment that most of you echoed in your talks with me.

Some of you said that it might not be able to happen without a lot of pain.

- ❖ Some of you were concerned that that we might not be able to maintain the purity of "Reggio" within a public school setting.within a setting that is fueled by SOLs, etc.
- ❖ How do we get small enough classes so that we can have the kinds of relationships with the children that we want to have? Many of you mentioned the importance of the relationships between teachers and children and between teachers and teachers.
- ❖ The daily schedule still seems to stump many of you.
- ❖ Being able to articulate to parents so that they will understand what it is that we are trying to accomplish with this strategy of teaching and learning.
- ❖ Another concern was: how will we keep Reggio a priority for our group? Constraints that were mentioned were time, the juggling of the job and the home, being interested in the movement but having to put it on the backburner for a variety of reasons.
- ❖ Shared leadership – came up often and was discussed in terms of collaboration. Can we learn how to collaborate so that we can truly share the responsibility of moving this effort forward?
There have been a couple of major leaders in the group that have sometimes been burdened with that leadership. Some of you called them "defacto" leaders – they weren't really elected leaders it just sort of happened . . . it fell in their laps in a lot of ways and can we as a group figure out a way to lighten that load and share some of the work. Again, can we collaborate?
- ❖ Some people were worried that some people might see this as just another educational "fad".
- ❖ An administrator suggested that the word "revolution" might be off-putting for some and cause some offense.

The group erupted at this suggestion . . .

Daphne: We can change the word later – after we're all around the table.

Eleana: Its scary for some.

Felicia: It gets their attention though, doesn't it?

Mary: For people who are comfortable with change . . . that word is not frightening, but for people who are content with the way things are – that is going to be a disturbing word.

Janis: Or for people who want to drive the change – and to micromanage the change.

Eleana: It's a scary word for people who want to micromanage.

Tina: A revolution is like out-of-control.

Eleana: Yes, the word makes me think of "against".

Tina: Yes, it sounds like there are sides to the issue. We've got to be more collaborative. That's what we want to do within our own

group, and its what we have to be able to do with Boone Middle School and with the County. Or else we run the risk of getting so narrow with our own agenda that we become what we don't want.

Daphne: Change has a process like anything else and it often has to begin with something that is strong – it doesn't mean that we stay with that word, but it was what we needed to get us started.

Janis: And the reason that I like the word is because it has to be clear up front that its not about negotiating some of these things. Some of these things are not up for negotiation. Its not about negotiating whether we will work with our peers and have project-based curriculum – we can't negotiate that.

Tina: But it comes back to semantics. It's about first of all getting the door open to do it. I think that you can propose this in a non-threatening way that won't close doors – but I don't think we have to compromise our principles to achieve that.

Lynn: Some of the administrators said that they spend most of their time pulling the group together and one of their fears is that there would be competition between groups.

Eleana: There is going to be that anyway.

Felicia: I never saw that word as something that we were going to put on our handouts or signs or anything. It was just a way to bring us together. So this whole discussion is just . . . but I'm not afraid of saying that this is a revolutionary movement . . . because it is!



Figure 12. A discussion of the term “Revolution”.

More Roadblocks:

- ❖ Other concerns from administration were that this might be seen as the premiere program, the elitist group.

Lynn: When I talked with some of the teachers from outside this group they talked a lot about the fact that at BOONE teachers tend to want set themselves apart in someway and have some sort of public expertise. ‘I’m the best at math or at history-alive, or for

taking fieldtrips' and that they are then known in the school for that "bestness". And that certain teams have come to be known as the "best" or the "weakest". And there was a lot of talk about how when these teachers continue to want to outshine other teachers that it makes them look bad in comparison.

- Mary* But they have choices . . . they aren't stopped from trying something innovative.
- Janis:* That is so frustrating because its . . .
- Daphne:* Its allowed to be an excuse.
- Mary :* They don't want to put the effort into doing something innovative, but they don't want you to either so they won't look bad.
- Eleana:* I really don't have a problem so much because you can just wave it off and know that if its good for the kids then its worth the flack you might take.
- Felicia:* I'm thinking about some of those that you interviewed that might be helpful in our process. If one or two of them would continue to sit with us and . . . that might be all that it would take . . . to eliminate some of this kind of talk.
- Tina:* And you know the other thing is that learning styles – some children might do much better in a traditional style school instead of in a Reggio school so it doesn't need to be "threatening" there just need to be "options".
- Lynn:* And remember that that is what Nick Thomas said as well that he didn't want there to be just one way of being at the school – but felt that we needed to offer more options."
- Lynn:* Some of you were worried about how the enrollment would be selected.
- Janis:* That is one of the biggest problems I think that we face, because it has to be an "opt-in" sortof . . . but then we can't rely on people opting in because then we're only getting one type of people and so then we're right back to the elitist programming that we've all agreed does not interest us. And I think that's one place where Nick might be able to help us out.
- Mary:* Well if kids are scheduled with teachers now, then they would just get scheduled onto the Reggio Team.
- Eleana:* No, because they have to have that option to be in or not.
- Mary:* Then how would it be random? How would it be heterogeneously grouped?
- Janis:* That's the problem . . .
- Eleana:* That is down the road and I don't think that we have to worry about it now. We'll probably have to take applications and then choose from there.
- Felicia:* It will be like affirmative action. They get all these applications, but they can't take everyone.

Mary: Application means that you may or may not get accepted. When I went to visit the Montessori school they said straight up “we choose who we want” . . . and I wouldn’t want our public school to be like that. It sounds too selective.

Janis: And it will probably be easier to work out after the first couple of years. The first year is going to be pretty tough.

Mary: But if we start off with people opting in then it might start out looking elitist. We’ve got to start off finding a way to get all kinds of kids involved or people are going to say “oh that’s the school for all the Tech professor’s kids.”

Eleana: What if the 5th grade teachers could make suggestions?

Janis: I think we need to talk to Nick about this.

And even more Roadblocks:

- ❖ Can our school withstand any more criticism? We can’t risk any more flack from the public (talking about the math program debate in the media)
- ❖ How can we make certain that everyone feels equal ownership –equal access to information – equal right to promote an idea.
- ❖ One person said that she was fearful of having a bad experience with these people that she cares so much about. It seemed to be a huge risk for this person to take with the outcome so uncertain. She wouldn’t want to lose the close friendships.
- ❖ Another roadblock listed by many: THE @@##\$%^& position paper.

(Laughter)

Janis: That does not have enough #\$\$%^ - it should have 3 more.”

Lynn: I did ask a lot of people about why they thought that the position paper had been such a stumbling block for us. I went back in the notes and the position paper first came up in a meeting back in June of 1998. So its been weighing on this group for over a year now.

The Position Paper: Why has it been difficult for the Group?

- ❖ Time
- ❖ Not being completely certain what a position paper was, maybe not being completely comfortable with how to think in this new way.
- ❖ Teachers are often more “doers” and the theoretical piece is not in our realm. Everyone agreed that it needed to be done, but the next step in getting it accomplished caused complete frustration.

Janis: We should hire it out!

(Laughter)

Lynn: Everyone expressed gratitude to Mandy for taking on that enormous step to get us started.

Janis: Even though she probably didn’t get enough feedback, maybe?

Lynn: Not enough – she deserved more. That’s another thing that I think that we should think about in terms of our collaboration and cooperation with each other. She got the ball rolling and then it just lay dead.

Roadblocks, continued:

- ❖ Funding.
- ❖ Another note: Can large groups be productive? It seemed that when we worked in small groups that we are more able to get a lot accomplished. But when we meet in larger groups that we tend to spin our wheels. A suggestion for this problem was that we should try more committee work. When the committees reported back to the whole group we all felt that we were making more progress.
- ❖ Another problem; the SOL tests. I was talking with some 8th grade teachers who said “this gives me pause”. Are we going to be able to do our kids justice with this curriculum?
- ❖ Another problem: the gaping holes in the faculty if all these excellent teachers leave the faculty as a whole to splinter off.
Eleana: Yes, we have the best of the best here, which leaves a much more traditional approach for the rest of the school.
- ❖ Another problem that came from the people outside the group: that the group seemed to be slow-moving and that they didn’t think that anything was going to come of it....they decided that they didn’t want to devote a lot of energy to something that probably wouldn’t ever become anything in the future.
- ❖ Last problem: resistance to change

Two categories of Roadblocks:

1. How we were actually going to implement the Reggio ideals
2. How we were going to work among ourselves to come up with a system and a process for getting the work done.

Mary: I see how these can really be grouped together as things that *we* can work on and things that Nick needs to think about.

Next Steps for the Reform: An Action Plan

What we ought to do? Who will take the lead in this area? And what is our timeline for this piece?

At that point in the meeting the group began to look carefully at our roadblocks and problems and figure out how to handle them. By the end of the meeting they had identified several areas that needed immediate attention and members of the group had volunteered to work on them. They were:

- ❖ Time. We will ask for recertification credits for the teachers who are committing so much time and effort to this process. A plan of study will need to be written and submitted to the administration.
- ❖ Funding. Vickie, Eleana, Felicia, and Becky volunteered to get together and work on writing grant proposals for additional funding for this group.
- ❖ Shared Leadership. The group decided to rotate the responsibility for taking notes, distributing minutes, and running the meetings. They also committed to dedicating a meeting to a discussion of Shared Leadership very soon.
- ❖ Position Paper. When this topic came up there was a lengthy discussion that is partially included here:

Janis: I think that the topic of the next meeting needs to be the position paper.

(Winona cries out and everyone laughs.)

Janis: We have the skeleton now and we have a good start and you can do what you can before hand . . . but now we have Mandy's work and its time to get on it.

Lynn: Who will take responsibility for leading this effort?

No one says anything. Then someone suggests Mandy. She is out of the room and when she returns we tell her that she is nominated.

Mandy: No, I will not . . .

Lynn: You've already done such a great job and . . .

Mandy: Well I don't think so because I don't think that people liked it but no one told me they didn't like it and my feelings were very hurt about the whole thing. And if that's not what the group wanted then that would have been fine, but I needed to hear something.

Janis: And I'm not saying that that was right that you didn't get any feedback on it but speaking for myself – that was not the feeling.

Mandy: That's how I felt. I felt that I worked hard on it and the fact that no one said anything that the feeling was that that was not what the group wanted. So I felt that no was saying anything because they didn't want to hurt my feelings.

Mary: I didn't say something to you because I didn't see you.

Tina: But I think that if Mandy isn't ready to deal with it again that we should honor that and just continue to work.

Lynn: I think that what Mandy is talking about is one of our problems. She had the time and the energy to put into this important project and she felt stymied in some way.

Mandy: But mostly I just felt that everyone hated it.

Janis: That wasn't it at all.

Mary: Not for me either.

Lynn: Well we need to learn something from this experience – because that's a terrible way for any of us to ever feel.

(Many members including Mandy need to leave and a few remain behind to talk about the situation.)

Janis: I can't believe that I did that to Mandy. I made her feel exactly like I've been feeling and that's not fun.

Mary: I owe her a huge apology.

Reflection: This was a wonderful night for the revolution group. The group was out of school for the summer and in good spirits. Seeing the process of their efforts organized and delineated for them on the wall of the coffeehouse seemed to give structure and support to their work and they recommitted to the effort. I was especially happy that Mandy had been honest with the group about her feelings regarding the draft of the position paper. Up until this meeting, this group did not tend to be forthcoming with their honest opinions. I was hopeful that this would be the beginning of a new trend.

I also felt the power of Participant Action Research during this meeting. Giving the data to the group helped them to more clearly see the forest in spite of the trees. They were able to discuss problems and make plans for solving them.

And finally, using this style of documentation to share the data seemed to be a very empowering experience for all of us. Certainly, the information on the map could have been handed to the group in a more traditional handout format, but this more aesthetically-crafted form was much more powerful. It showed the group in a very public way that they had indeed made progress. It celebrated their individual comments and contributions. It reinforced the fact that it was going to take a group effort to succeed. And, it told them how much I cared about them and their project. Later they told me that it was this single night that dug the reform out of its slump and inspired them to re-energize and re-commit.

Here Comes the Sun: Early Summer Efforts

After that focused group meeting, the summer hit and the every other Wednesday meetings at noon began. I attended each meeting, but there were usually very few people in attendance. Everyone was on vacation and it was difficult to get a quorum. We would look at the position paper and think about what we needed to make it work, and make small steps forward. Finally, because a Reggio Emilia conference was about to be offered in Blacksburg and because Mandy and Janis had been asked to present the evolution of the reform effort at the Middle School, the push was on to complete the paper in time for the conference.

Mandy's first attempt was revisited, the elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach were re-written for a middle school population, and theory and philosophy was blended. Several drafts were completed, worked and re-worked until we felt that we had a decent document that only needed a strong conclusion. We came together on July 28, 1999 at the Easy Chair in hopes of finalizing the paper. (The conference was one week away!).

On the Road Again

“The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind.”

Maya Angelou

Catching a Dream: July 28, 1999

The most important news at this meeting, was that Rita was a grandma. Her daughter had a baby at 8:45 p.m. yesterday! Everyone was excited about this news and asked for all the details on the birth.

Becky came into the meeting holding the most recent draft of the Position Paper in her hand. She sat down with us and in about ten minutes stated her opinion on the wording, the emphasis, and the conclusion. We made a few adjustments based on her recommendations and then looked at each other in amazement. Had we really succeeded in completing this task that we had begun over a year ago. We had some high fives all around and congratulations for a collaborative effort! This was a great moment for the group. The pride of completing a task as a group is exhilarating. Still basking in the great feeling of shared success, the group worked on ideas for the cover of the document. They wanted a sketch, photograph, or image that symbolized their hope for a restructured system of education at Boone. Finally, Becky suggested a “dream-catcher”. Instantly, everyone was in favor of this image that so well represented their efforts and their philosophy. (A copy of the final position paper can be found in Appendix H.)

We then considered the upcoming meeting with Nick, Stan and Patricia and tried to think about how to deal with them at the next meeting. To prepare for the meeting we felt that we needed to be realistic about what it was that we wanted to do. We needed a way to translate philosophy and theory into practice. We also felt that we should include accountability and evaluation.

Becky summarized our purpose of the meeting as: “a preliminary, first time everyone sits down at the table to talk about this so this doesn’t have to be the hard sell – just the meeting at which we let them know that we are serious about this and that we want to move forward and we need their help. We want to know that they are all behind us and are willing to support us.”

After much discussion we developed a plan for the meeting:

1. Here is the Position Paper – our guidelines and philosophy
2. Now we are working on the practical pieces and we need your help- we see our practices as being in keeping with the County’s benchmark practices.
3. This is how we see it happening now:
 - ❖ We would all housed together.
 - ❖ There would be eight classroom teachers plus four support staff to include an art teacher, a special education teacher, a gifted instructor, and an administrative assistant.
 - ❖ There would be approximately 200 kids = 4 teams
 - ❖ We plan to implement different aspects in our classrooms this year in preparation – as a pilot and research for ourselves.

- ❖ We will document our work and report on it to the group on a regular basis.
- ❖ We will start with 6th and 7th grade instead of including 8th grade in the first year.

Reflection: After this meeting I felt that the group had finally achieved the final piece in Sergiovanni's definition of community. They finally had a "community of mind" in which they shared a philosophy and an agenda. I felt that they were really ready to "take off" now. "Grasping the structure of a subject is understanding it in a way that permits many other things to be related to it meaningfully" (Bruner, 1963). This fundamental premise might provide a foundation on which to build further understanding. We were all extremely hopeful.

A Chance to share the Dream: August 6, 1999

Janis and Mandy presented their revolution journey at the *Recasting the Reggio Emilia Approach* Conference in Blacksburg. They were very well received by the audience and drew many positive comments on the conference evaluation forms. Their presentation was professionally done with multi-media representations of their journey. The two friends were inspired and were inspiring as they shared the trials and tribulations of the last two years of effort. It seemed that they had attained a new level of development. They now had a sense of group identity and a feeling that collaboration can be successful. This was the first time in a long time that I noticed a new passion behind their words and a conviction that they would not stop until they had successfully achieved their goal. I cried as I documented their presentation.



Figure 13. Mandy presents at Reggio conference

A Meeting with the Administrators: August 9, 1999

(Nine teachers, three administrators and two-university support were in attendance).

Janis reminded the group of the history of this project beginning with the trip to Italy when she and Mandy had originally attended the institute in RE, Italy. Upon returning they began to think about using the Reggio philosophy within a Middle School setting. There have been many, many meetings talking about philosophy. The group now

has a position paper that undergirds the whole idea. There are currently 17 active members: 13 teachers, 1 parent, 2 university support, 1 administrative assistant. The Position Paper (PP) took the entire group's collaborative effort.



Figure 14. An attempt to join forces

Janis mentioned that we would be constructing some additional addendum's that would address the practical piece of implementation. This PP is for our use only. We think that it is designed for the use of our group and administrators. Once we begin to think about parents and others, the format and content will change.

Now we wanted help with a timeline. We also would like help with issues surrounding recruitment, space, enrollment, faculty education, etc. We plan to work this year with different areas of the approach in our classroom and will consider it to be our teacher research that will help us to work toward our goals.

Nick: I looked over the PP. . . it had been my advise to you to write something down about what you feel and think. I think you've done that. I don't disagree with any of it and I don't take exception – it matches or mirrors middle school philosophy. I have some questions about the nuts and bolts of this. It raised a lot of those questions for me as I looked at it from an administrator's point of view.

Janis: That's where we felt like a meeting with you would really be necessary. You have another vision that we couldn't possibly bring to it.

Nick: I don't have any preconceived ideas. We just need to look at it in some constructive way instead of a helter-skelter way. We don't want to alienate parents or faculty. You all know what happened this spring with math! And it has many of the same traits as Reggio – student based learning. So maybe – why fight the battle? But, then . . . you've got to look at yourself in the mirror everyday.

Mary: *And* look at those kids everyday!

Janis went on to talk a little about the ideas that had emerged from our group about multi-aged grouping with theme-study curriculum and extra teacher collaboration time.

Stan: So now you're talking more about multi-age classrooms than looping? Its not just a school where you have Mandy for 6th and Janis for 7th and Becky for 8th . . . instead you would have all of you for all grades?

The group continued to try to articulate their vision to the administrators by describing the SOL assessment portfolio and the multiple forms of documentation system. They also mentioned that they would need to be physically located together in order to make this possible. In addition, the blending of the aesthetics would be important to the entire process of learning.

Janis told the administrators that they would like to begin with 250 kids.

Nick: Someone would have to convince me to start with that many. I think we'd have to start with fewer kids – so that parents could see that it is going to work and that the kids aren't going to fall off the face of the earth.

Becky: Maybe we could start with fewer kids the first year and then as the program grew, then others could come on board.

Janis: We don't want kids to opt in – because then we wouldn't have a cross-section of kids. You know how the band teachers go and meet with the 5th grade students? Maybe we could do that same thing. We'd need to do some sort of outreach. If the population was only a particular kind of student then we would fail from the beginning – we need a cross section of students. It won't show that it works if you give us all the finest. What if we did an outreach and 150 kids are interested? Could you handle that?"

Nick: Then I start thinking about space. If we've got 50 kids and 2 teachers and then next year growing to 75 kids and add another teacher . . .

Mary: You think its more manageable to start small?

Nick: Yes. I do. Instead of sending the kids to band? Why not send the band, chorus, art teacher to be a resource to you? And keep a family? The only way I could see this working is to start small. We've perfected the schedule over the last 4-5 years – and its not because of me, I'm not saying that – but we've been able to block and gotten people closer together. Remember when we first started we had people all over the place?. And that's what I'm afraid would happen if we started too large.

Mandy: And teacher collaboration is really important. So we would need a time each day to plan together.

Nick: Yeah we need to think about all these things.

Becky: And we can't leave out the parent-piece either. We'll be using parents in a nontraditional way – it's a partnership and about

investing in what's happening with your kids so that we can fill in some of these gaps. It's a very important piece.

Janis: That's probably one of the biggest changes – parents usually start backing away at this age.

Nick: But the kids are usually ready to have the parents less involved at this age.

It means that the space is going to be really important . . . a place where you can spread out and be louder and have good access for parents and others.

(Janis tells the story of the mobile units as a possibility.)

Becky: Of course we're really counting on the renovations to the schools .

Nick: . . . Maybe we need to work toward having one or the other of the middle schools being a Reggio school . . .

Janis: I believe if we could just get going that many others would be interested!

Stan: When I read this (position paper) I don't see much difference between this and an ideal middle school. What's different?

Mandy: It's the flexibility in scheduling and the teacher collaboration.

Stan: Couldn't we try looping as an option now – and say that the kids stay together for 6th, 7th, 8th, and that they might not be able to teach the traditional stuff in 6th grade but they could ensure that they'd get it before they leave 8th. Then maybe Teams would be happier to share and collaborate with each other if Becky knew that she was definitely going to have Mandy's kids in 2 years.

Rita: As a parent I wouldn't be as quick to buy into that – it misses the main point.

Lynn: The main point behind looping is that the teacher and child relationship is cemented, not just child-child relationships.

Janis: In a system like Stan is suggesting all six teachers could work together anyway, and plan together and do some multiage work.

Patricia: I don't think that this PP helps teachers understand what Reggio-inspired teaching is and how it is different than what they are doing. The paper is well written and does acknowledge what people are already doing. In terms of reading it and knowing what actually happens in the school – it's not here.

Janis: Frankly we didn't feel comfortable doing something like that until we met with you.

Patricia: Write the characteristics of a day – even if they are just bullets. That would help us to look at the master schedule. Think about it from the point of view of other teachers – how is it different? The aftermath of the math problem – I wish there was a way not to call it Reggio – I wish there was a way to get past the characteristics of

it. Parents are going to be prone to buying in based on who the teachers are.

Stan: Ask yourself what prevents you from doing it now? We need a list of the things that these teachers feel they can't do right now in the system as it is set up.

Nick: I'm not fearful of this. If you as a staff are committed, I know its going to work. I'm fearful of doing something that will either kill it or we go in a direction that becomes damaging to your career or our career as a middle school. Let's go slow and planful and small steps. Patience is hard to come by but lets look down the road three years and work together to get it done. And that's why we are at the point in our scheduling technique that we are now – because we listened to your concerns.

Patricia: (looking at the PP) This idea here of “nothing without joy” – I can imagine some parents who might read that as “touchy-feely” and without substance.

Becky: Isn't it interesting that parents of kindergartners and 1st graders will buy into joyful teaching and then by the time they are 10 year old, they feel that the joy should be gone?

Nick: How about a two person team at 6th and two person team at 7th – then we could just change the location of the teams and do this without a lot of hoop la. And once school started we could build it in that if we had a parent who said – “I will not buy into this” – then we could be committed to moving that kid off that team?” We haven't talked about the kids. These two teams would be isolated from the rest of the 6th graders.?

Ashley: That's why we had them mixing with the other kids during PE, Spanish, lunch, etc.

Mary: I think that what you're suggesting is a good first, small step.

Patricia: Scheduling begins around Christmas. So in terms of a timeline, we need to know . . .

Janis: Well can you talk about us in December?

Stan: We talk about you all the time, Janis! (laughs)

Nick: We've got to be to that point. Now go back and think about that some more and then lets get back together.

Patricia: Why don't you propose different models for us to respond to?

Nick: And remember that the whole central office is changing now. And that's ground we'll have to play on too.

Janis: If you decide in December that this is something you want to try. Do you have to go to the Superintendent?”

Nick: Last year if this is what we had wanted to do, I'd have to go to the Assistant Superintendent and say this is what we want to do, how we'll do it, what its going to mean for us and kids and parents. The

Superintendent is going to want to know too. And even the School Board might be interested.

Mandy: Can you help us with a timeline?

Rita: In order for the schedule to be done by spring . . . what will you need?

Nick: I'd like to change the thinking – lets get rid of this 'us and they' . . . I don't want to be "they". If you are going to continue to meet, lets keep working together . . . let's put this on the table and talk about it. I don't like the idea of you all presenting something to us. I don't want something to come back formal. Let's get the school underway and set a date for the 2nd or 3rd week in September to sit down and talk again.

Janis: That sounds good, since we're all "us" now.

Reflection: While we all felt that the meeting went well, we could not help but hear Nick's concerns regarding reputation and community backlash. We all were extremely sympathetic to the fact that he had been through so much in the past years with both the "building wars" and then the "math madness". Everyone wanted to take these lessons into consideration, but we definitely did not want our effort to die because of past problems.

Debriefing at Mandy's: August 12, 1999

We began with lots of chatter about kids, childcare, college freshmen, and such. Then everyone began talking about how excited they were after the meeting with the administrators and how valuable the "us –we" discussion was in terms of creating a shared meeting of the minds. There was also some shared understanding from the group regarding Nick's need to start small. It made sense to begin small and work out some of the kinks while the numbers were manageable. But everyone agreed that we needed at least 150 kids and 10 teachers to make the system rich and meaningful for everyone. It was also nice to think that we would not have to do the recruiting that we had assumed we would have to do ourselves. To have the kids randomly assigned to the team sounded much more in keeping with our philosophy of a heterogeneous group.

I asked them what they thought about Nick's apparent shift in attitude regarding who should be consulted before such a system of school can be started at Boone? The teachers thought that it was probably his way of letting us know that the pressures of the SOL tests and the Math program this past year had left him feeling that this might not be as opportune and carefree a time to introduce a new system. The teachers then spoke at length about the Math problem and how the Middle School had taken a real hit in terms of perceived competency and skill when they had supported the constructivist approach to teaching and learning math. They talked about a "secret meeting" of parents and teachers that had occurred at the high school before the School Board vote on the issue. During the meeting those who attended drafted a statement to the Board which said that if Boone continued to teach in this manner that they wanted their children bused to the High School to take their math classes. So maybe this is why Nick seemed more gun-shy than usual.

Next the group tried to decide if they should accept the invitation from the Inquiry Group to join them. Janis was very much in favor of taking this offer because it would get us together every two weeks, we would have help from the student teachers with documentation, and it would legitimize the Reggio effort with Nick. I asked if joining forces with the Inquiry group (with its own agenda) would allow us the time we will need to prepare for fall 2000? Janis insisted that the Inquiry meetings would not be *instead* of Reggio meetings, but in *addition* to them.

The teachers again began to discuss the problem with the possible alienation of colleagues. Ashley noted that the issue with the other teachers was that other people just didn't want to make the time necessary to participate. Becky agreed and said, "Yes, and once this is a well-oiled machine and successful then people will be knocking down our door – but then there will be no risk attached."

Next the group addressed the hesitancy that they noted from all three administrators. There was "some reticence, some 'lets don't jump in the deep end from the start, lets learn to tread water first.'" Janis agreed that this attitude was evident and that she was not surprised by it, but what she *was* surprised by was that "I feel 100% certain that we will have something in place by the Fall of 2000. It won't be completely what we have envisioned, but we WILL have something!"

Reflection: Janis is such a strong and charismatic leader. When she speaks, everyone listens. Her pronouncements always carry so much weight! So when she stated that she felt certain that the school would be in practice by Fall of 2000, the entire group celebrated with high-fives! All the problems from the winter and spring seemed to have slipped away. The dissonance that the conflicts brought to the group now appeared to have been the motivating factor in finishing the position paper and in finding the courage to pitch the restructuring plan to the administrators. On another note, although the administrators asked for a more detailed plan to be delivered by the next meeting, there was no mention of or plan made to prepare this report during this meeting. The group was busy celebrating and enjoying their last couple of days before school began again.

Research and Cappuccino: September 1, 1999

A note had been sent out inviting everyone to this meeting and stating that the emphasis would be on "what we're going to do new in our classrooms this year." We realized that we would need another meeting to prepare for the administrators meeting (scheduled for September 15th) which we planned to schedule for later in the next week. The teachers were in great moods and felt good about the beginning of another school year.

The main idea for this meeting was that each teacher or team of teachers would look at an aspect of Reggio during this school year in preparation for the opening of the new school next Fall. These "Mini-Research Studies" would inform the group as we began to consider *how* this school would be structured.

Here is a synopsis of the inquiries:

Eleana: after some group discussion, she decided to focus on the concept of reflection, revisiting, and sustaining interest over time.

Janis: wants to purchase 7 tape recorders for placing on each table during group discussions. She wants the kids to take responsibility for transcribing their taped

discussion. She hopes that this process will assist them in the process of becoming more reflective learners. She thinks that she might have them analyze the kinds of questions that they are asking one another: factual, analytical, etc. There is a possibility that this process may be able to enhance the Habits of Mind (from the Central Park East Schools).

So, Janis will look at the process of documentation and how it contributes to the learning process and how the kids can take a major role in gathering the data in the classroom.

Mary: wanted to look at the multi-grade level science and language arts experiment that she and Janis and a student teacher will be working on this year. They were considering beginning with a unit on Acid Rain. She planned to tape-record, videotape, etc to capture the experience. Particular attention would be paid to the kids and how they reacted to this new peer grouping.

Mandy and Tina: intended to investigate the ability to (un)cover the SOLs in a Reggio classroom. They also intended to encourage the kids to be active participants in this process. Each child would have an interactive notebook with a list of all the SOLs. Every two weeks they would review the SOLs for criteria that had been covered in their language arts/social studies classes. This project should be very helpful to our group, as the power of the SOLs has been obvious in this state and will be an area that we are certain that we will need to address to our critics.

Felicia: will work on her scrapbook project again this year but with a few new twists: She intended to require that each grading period at least one page had been added to their scrapbook about what they had learned. She wanted it to be fun, hands-on, and reflective of the value of their own learning. She wanted them to ask the question “how will I document what I know?” and hoped that there would be many styles (languages) that the kids would employ. One additional twist is that she wanted them to obtain feedback on their portfolio from a variety of sources probably to include: a peer, a family member, another adult in the building. This project will emphasize the Reggio concepts of representation of knowledge and community connections.

Rita: will investigate creative scheduling and especially the impact on the larger school community.

Before the meeting broke up for the evening there was some brief discussion about what we might be prepared to ask for at our next administration meeting. The group talked about a scenario that might look like:

- ❖ Six teachers plus four resource teachers (art, special education, gifted, administrative).
- ❖ 150 kids – 6th and 7th grades
- ❖ The 10 adults would supervise Advisory Teams of 15 kids and would stay with this team for their tenure in the Reggio school.
- ❖ We realized that we must be ready to accept the school ratios of 1:25 or get a grant and try to buy-down the ratios by hiring additional staff.
- ❖ The Grant Committee (Vickie, Felicia, Becky, Eleana) will meet next week to get started on searching for funds.

- ❖ We agreed that we would prefer to have the Big Room and the several classrooms closest to it, but understood that we would probably need to take whatever we could have as long as we were in close proximity to one another
- ❖ We need to meet again to get this plan polished and to possibly denote a PLAN A and a PLAN B with a phase-in component.

Are We There Yet?

“Once I decide to do something, I can’t have people telling me I can’t. If there’s a roadblock, you jump over it, walk around it, crawl under it!”

Kitty Kelly

Haven’t we been here before? September 15, 1999

Janis and Mandy each developed a handout for today’s meeting. Janis’ paper focused on the characteristics of a Reggio-inspired middle school and Mandy’s form looked at the “friendly” accompanying version of how to implement the system. It also included a few key points that Stan had asked for. This meeting was held in Mandy’s classroom right after school on a day when the weather stations were forecasting a possible hurricane for later that same evening. It seemed that tensions were a bit high and I felt nervous before the administrators arrived.

Mandy began by delineating the task from the last meeting. She passed out the handouts while many people chatted about the weather and wondered if school would be closed on the following day.

Since Stan had suggested that the group consider the things that they wanted to do, but could not do in the current system they began with a short list:

- ❖ Sharing a common planning period
- ❖ Looping
- ❖ Unique scheduling
- ❖ Heterogeneous 6th, 7th, 8th

Almost immediately, (and certainly before he would have had time to read the handouts) Stan said he didn’t feel like he had gotten what he asked for. Stan explained that he was at CHS when they went from traditional to block scheduling. When they tried to get this concept passed within the school they had to think carefully and be detailed about exactly what it was that they wanted to do and how it was going to benefit the school. He said that what he really wanted from our group was a list of things that you can not accomplish in the current schedule. He wanted a list of things that you could only do in the new system. He wanted more specifics so that it can serve as a foundation for selling the system to others.

Mandy stated that this was not the purpose of this handout. It was not intended to be used to sell it to anyone, but only to begin the discussion among us.

Stan then pointed out one feature that he liked. He liked the idea of merging the SOLs over the course of the 3 years. “That’s a good selling point, he said”.

Becky asked if they were ready to say: ‘What I need you to do is to come up with a document.’ “We need to know if you think we’re ready for that? Are you ready to give us your blessing?”

Stan said, “No comment. I don’t know if you’re at that point.”

Mandy said: “Nick and Patricia what do you think?” They remained silent.

Janis: You asked us to put together a friendly way of looking at what is this school. You asked for sample schedules, etc...Something in simpler language....if we’re going to take this and change this into

a presentation...but are we there? Are you saying that we need to be ready to present this to the school board now?"

Nick: I don't think we're to that point. My thinking is so that we can discuss it further we wanted these additional documents. I think we're still in the talking stages and clarifying and testing your own philosophy. I'm still wondering if I want to get into this. Once I get out to the firing zone...is this going to be something that I'm going to feel good about? I don't hear you being firm on your definitions. Team – I've heard you define it in several different ways. How would you put all the pieces together? I'd just like to hear again a discussion.

I want it to be "we" – but how to invest some time so that "we" can begin to look at this together?

Janis: Can we go over these ideas (listed on her handout) one at a time?

The teachers begin to explain their thinking about many aspects of their new school. They talked about grouping, SOLs, heterogeneous groups, socialization of kids, space, preparing to present their understanding, but none of the discussion sounded polished and very well-articulated, and for the newcomer to the group, it was probably difficult to follow.

Finally, Nick asked the group to understand his perspective. "You've got less at stake than I do. I've got to field all the questions from all the 900 parents and all the 75 faculty."

Herb talked about when the Middle School first opened that they had "Nothing to go on...no literature...we just went with what we knew. Here we have a whole bunch to go on and that should help it to be an easier journey."

The teachers asked for a timeline to go by. Nick suggested that these discussions were a valuable way to begin. Patricia noted that there may be some frustration at having to explain it all to them, but that we just needed that time to get acclimated.

Nick suggested that the group prepare to present their effort to the entire faculty at the next faculty meeting. We were all excited about this concession and then he explained his reasoning behind it. He had heard that day at a principal's meeting that a group of teachers from the Boone would be presenting their Reggio Inspired Middle School at the annual county staff development day. He was mostly concerned that other faculty from Boone would feel disempowered if they were to hear about it from the outside before hearing about it from their colleagues.

Patricia mentioned that another reference to the Reggio inspiration was printed in the Montgomery county calendar that had gone out to all the kids in the county on that day. It mentioned The Duck Pond Project – implementing Reggio concepts at the middle school.

Nick felt that it was very important that everyone have a common understanding so they began to plan a strategy for the faculty meeting.

Stan suggested that the best part about this concept is the thematic studies. He then launched into a long list of curricular ideas around the theme of "water". The list was so long and so off the top of his head that he had everyone laughing at him.

Again, Nick reiterated that “I always think that we try to make sure that everyone is informed. It that hurts me personally and it hurts all of us if we aren’t informed.”

Then Nick asked when we would meet again to finish discussing the bullets from the handouts. The next meeting was planned for September 29th at 3:00 p.m. in Mandy’s room.

Reflection: We all left this meeting with a stunned feeling. It had not gone well. There was a lack of focus and preparation on the part of the teachers and I think that they were feeling badly that the administration had reacted as they had. This unexpected reaction caused us to reflect upon previous meetings with Nick and the other administrators. Nick had always given his blessing for them to share information with faculty, parents, conference participants, newsletter editors, etc. We wondered why he was suddenly so concerned about information that was leaving the school. This role of gatekeeper was not consistent with what we knew of him. His reference to a “firing zone” may have been very telling. Nick had been burned one too many times lately and he was weary. Perhaps because he felt so out of control in terms of what reaction to expect from the critical public in our town that it was even more important to him than usual to at least know what to expect from his faculty.

I could not understand why the teachers were so quiet during this meeting. I was angry and upset and disappointed that our hard work was being brushed aside and that we were being told “I don’t think that I got what I asked for” like we were poor students, not professionals. It was somewhat insulting.

The Beginning of a New Journey

“Come to the edge,” he said.

They said, “We’re afraid.”

“Come to the edge,” he said.

They came.

He pushed them.

And they flew.

Apollinaire

Moving Toward External Dangers: September 17, 1999

Mandy called to tell me that “drums are beating in the school.” She explained that the teachers were upset and ready to rally. They had planned a meeting for September 21st to prepare to combat the administrator’s comments. I was happy to hear this and remembered a quote from a book that I had read recently: “Moving toward external ‘dangers’ with purpose, passion and the power of collaboration and alliances is the essence of what’s worth fighting for out there” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). I felt that if the group had truly become a viable community (of place, friendship and mind) that they would be successful in confronting the establishment on behalf of the children at Boone. At this point, although I desperately wanted the reform effort to meet with success, I felt that the more immediate issue was whether or not they could stand together as an articulate, knowledgeable, savvy, group of educators and make a case for their vision of improved education for children.

Are We Ready for the Public Eye? September 21, 1999

The agenda for tonight’s meeting included consideration of the invitation to present at the November 2nd staff development day for the county teachers, a brief announcement about another professional development opportunity, and a debriefing and planning session based on our last meeting with the administrators.

The *initial* reaction from the group regarding the presentation at the county staff development day was positive. Some questions were asked about time, participants, and content. Janis, however, was very concerned about the time that it would take to prepare for such an event. She was very discouraging about having the group take on this project and mentioned that “it’s a tough audience. It needs to be really well planned out and totally prepared.” Then she suggested that we wait until the *January* staff development days instead.

Rita suggested that we should take advantage of this opportunity to get our work out in the public because the administrators are going to be ready to begin thinking about next year’s scheduling by December. If we can do a great job with the November presentation, it could mean that they might have a more favorable reaction to our request for the school within a school. Others agreed with her and volunteered to assist with the planning and the presenting.

Janis continued to insist that we were not ready for such a public display of our work. She mentioned that her daughter’s basketball season was in full swing and that she *would not* miss a game to attend planning meetings. Then she went on to confess that her

main concern was that she would be stuck with doing all the work of organizing the entire effort.

Vickie spoke up and said that she wanted them to know that she thought that they were very ready for the public eye. She encouraged them to take this next step in their effort and to share their understanding with others.

Finally, Daphne, Mandy, and I volunteered to organize the collaborative effort to plan and present at the training.

Next, we talked about the possibility of traveling to Reggio Emilia for the Spring Study Tour in May. Vickie and I are in the midst of planning to take a group of people and we felt that it would be important that at least two more teachers attend. We have some funding from the sales of the Duck Pond video that could be used for this purpose. Vickie mentioned that the grants committee could also begin to look into other sources of funding. They are planning to meet within the next week. Everyone seemed excited and energized by the possibility of such an adventure.

Daphne asked to share her reflections of the last meeting with the administrators. She told us that at first she was angry and frustrated about the response from the administrators and felt that we were just covering old territory and that nothing new or different was being discussed. Later, after she got home she realized that the administrators had a very important perspective to share and that we should value their concerns and questions about our plan. "We need to ask people to shoot at us so that we can learn from it. We don't want to end up in the same place as the math teachers. We need a devil's advocate so that we can cover all our bases."

Claire suggested that we sounded haphazard and unorganized during our presentation. Because the principals have said that they don't want a formal presentation, it has turned into a question and answer session. The problem was that the information comes out in bits and pieces then and fails to sound feasible or connected. She suggested that at our next meeting that we take control when we walk in the door. We give them an organized presentation and we ask them to respect the fact that we have the floor for this segment. Then, we beg for their perspective, because they will be able to help us avoid some pitfalls.

I suggested that since Nick seems to want to hear about a Reggio-inspired Middle school from the perspective of the child, that we write a collaborative story about a child as he/she walks through a day in our school. We could present this story in a way that would also include all of the elements of our very different programming as well as all of the areas of concern that have been raised by our critics.

Everyone liked this idea and the rest of the meeting was spent planning the storyline. We agreed to include socialization of the child, mixed age grouping, family involvement, alternative assessment, the theme studies, teacher collaboration, environment, conflict resolution, habits of mind and lots more. We decided to ask Gus to draw a composite sketch of a generic middle schooler that could be used as a backdrop and visual representation of our story.

Realizing the push for time to complete this effort, we decided to ask for a rescheduling of the administrator's meeting for October 4, 1999. We will meet as a group at 3:00 p.m. on September 29th to work on the story.

Reflection: Janis's hesitancy to "go public" with the effort continued to be baffling. Certainly, since school had started again she was caught up in the attempt to juggle personal and professional lives. But there also seemed to be an undercurrent of frustration with the group; probably due to the fact that historically, she has been at the helm of most of the efforts taken on by this group. I was hopeful that by having alternative leaders for this segment of work that she would be able to relax somewhat and enjoy the revolution!

The responses from the teachers about the administrators meeting were inspiring. Claire was wearing a pin that said "Dreams are Hope" in honor of the work ahead. By the end of the meeting, everyone seemed focused, empowered, and ready to work together to prepare for the upcoming public presentations:

October 4 – Administrator's Meeting

October 15 – Faculty Meeting

November 2 – County Staff Development

November 11 – NAEYC Conference in New Orleans

Getting Organized: September 27, 1999

Mandy, Daphne, and I met in Daphne's office after school on this day to begin to plan the meeting which was scheduled for the 29th. We agreed that we needed to have clear goals for Wednesday's meeting if we were going to be efficient and prepared for the administrator's meeting which was scheduled for the following Monday. Together we developed a short list of goals for the administrators meeting:

- ❖ To share our vision in a clear, articulate way.
- ❖ To answer some of the questions that have been raised in the past and to engender others.
- ❖ To develop a plan for becoming a collaborative of teachers and administrators working together for a shared vision.

After some discussion, we decided that Daphne should be the "Mistress of Ceremonies" during the meeting and should introduce the program format and "run" the meeting. We thought that we would ask Claire to be the narrator (and writer) of the storyline about a child who is enrolled in our new school and that the other members of the group would take short descriptive pieces of the script. We made a list of issues that would need to be developed during our next meeting including: the socialization issue (mixed aged-grouping), collaboration of teachers, theme-studies, the environment as teacher, portfolio assessment (includes attention to SOLs), and parent/community participation.

Mandy quickly typed up the "minutes" of this meeting then Daphne made copies and put them in each revolutionary's mailbox. We asked them to come prepared to work on Wednesday. We left our meeting feeling as though we had been extremely productive and happy with our plan.

An articulate, passionate, savvy group of teachers: September 29, 1999

The group met to make final plans for the meeting with the administrators. Daphne called the meeting to order at exactly 2:50 (the time indicated on the announcement advertising this meeting). She briefly reviewed the announcement and clarified some of the intentions for the next meeting. Everyone was enthused and ready to get to work. Claire was there with paper and pencil and was ready to write the story of

the child who would be the protagonist for our vision. Because we had already determined which areas were to be covered during the meeting, the teachers easily divided the duties among them and then pitched in to write an articulate story of the Reggio Middle School from the perspective of a child.

Gus agreed to create a painting of a child that would serve as a visual representation. After much debate, the group agreed to call the child Tawanda (for the “power character” in *Fried Green Tomatoes*). Tawanda’s day would begin in the Big Room in her small 15-person advisory group (Rita will articulate this aspect of the program) where the day will be reviewed and everyone will get organized (Vickie and Lynn will discuss the environment as teacher and show possible models of environments). Next she goes off to PE and Computer Science classes. While she is away from the Big Room, the teachers will use this hour and forty-five minutes to work in teacher-collaboration groups. (Janis will define teacher collaboration for the administrators at this point). Tawanda and her friends will return to the Big Room for their first theme study (Becky will speak about Theme Studies and will describe how they will be chosen and how they will be individualistic programs). Tawanda will work in multi-aged groups during the theme study (Mary will articulate this aspect). The morning theme study will last about an hour and a half and then the entire group will go to lunch. When they return they will head for their second Theme Study of the day. Felicia will discuss the benefits of parent involvement and will consider diverse opportunities for bringing parents into a partnership with the school. Eleana will elaborate on the use of multiple intelligences and documentation as a means for crafting authentic curriculum and representing understanding in many ways. At the close of the second theme study, Tawanda will return to her small advisory group where she may have a skills workshop or she may have a portfolio meeting with her advisor. Mandy will speak about portfolio assessment and the blending of SOLs.

Once the presentation is finished we will ask for feedback from the administration and a commitment to join us in our journey.

Everyone was enthused and ready to go! They agreed to meet once more briefly on Friday afternoon to “run through” our parts and to ensure that we all sound wise, knowledgeable and savvy about the possibilities. The November presentation was mentioned several times as we crafted this meeting. Everyone sounded confident and ready to take on this next challenge. The camaraderie in the group was high and many people were volunteering to assist one another with their individual pieces. As always, there was lots of laughter and great humor.

Reflection: This meeting marked the transition into the next stage of work on this reform. While the planning-piece will continue, the teachers have now moved into the realm of sharing their dream with others. They have also come to a point where they are willing to allow others to play a role in the re-shaping of the dream. Using the four upcoming public forums as an opportunity to fine tune their vision is a very healthy and mature way to view this next stage.

Walking through a day in the life of a child in their new school allowed each of them the opportunity to envision the reality of the situation. When they have tried to conceptualize the vision in the past, they have foundered on the details when they seemed too great to

overcome. During this exercise, they easily walked through the day and were able to be creative and collaborative and enthusiastic about the possibilities. They have certainly achieved a new status of collaboration and I am hopeful that this elevated state will carry them on.

CHAPTER FIVE MAKING SENSE OF THE JOURNEY

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot advises that the development of emergent themes reflects the researcher's first attempts to "bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data"(1997). Constructing these emergent themes requires a harmony of technique, persistence, and good listening skills. Looking for overarching convergent themes, listening for resonant metaphors, attending to institutional and cultural rituals, using a triangulation of data collection, and discovering the patterns in the chaos; are the goals of this chapter where I'll attempt to apply Lightfoot's theory of meaning-making.

Overarching convergent themes

The teachers who participated in the reform effort gave voice to several themes during the course of their fifteen months together. One loud and clear anthem was obvious: they believed that a better system of public education was possible for their students and for themselves. This sentiment was reflected in the many, many hours of precious personal time that they were willing to give to this endeavor. In addition they each stated this belief in multiple ways during meetings and in my interviews with them: Mandy told me that she wanted a school "where kids and parents don't get lost in the shuffle....where everyone is talking to each other and listening to each other." Gus said that he hoped for a school where "children learned in a more constructive, longer-lasting, life-altering ways". Daphne wanted a place where "they can feel a sense of belonging, where they can connect socially, and where they can see themselves as successful." And Mary believed that they could create a place where everyone happily attended each day and that the motto "Nothing without Joy" was a reality.

A conflicting theme seemed to be that "There are multiple forces that are out of our control that work in opposition to our best efforts." As we met together to talk, to plan, to take action; repeatedly these forces would be mentioned. There were not enough hours in the day or days in the week to devote to this work. Personal life changes and responsibilities often ate up the few excess hours that a busy teacher-mother-reformer might have to offer to the cause. Pregnancies, births, deaths, accidents, all took their toll on the group's ability to sustain focused attention over time. The myriad of extra work at school also demanded the time and energy of the group. Parent conferences, SOL testing, meetings regarding building or math issues demanded their attention. The community and political climate during the math debates seemed insurmountable; as did the ability to successfully negotiate a new system of education with three very different (yet equally powerful) administrators.

Listening for Resonant Metaphors

The most obvious metaphor has been used in the text of this dissertation to highlight the evolutionary quality of the process. To liken this effort to a journey served to capture the unpredictable quality of what was to come next. Ethnographic studies are not clean, clear, and easy. At best, they are dirty, murky, difficult and *real*. The group

got lost, turn wrong turns, made detours, got sidetracked and practically drove off the Grand Canyon in their efforts to make sense of their passions.

Another obvious metaphor for this reform effort can be found in the name that was bestowed at its “birth”: the Revolution. The past two years with these revolutionaries have seemed in many ways to reflect the efforts of others who have also fought for a cause. They have done much of their work at night, in secret, and away from the masses. They’ve adopted slogans (“Nothing without Joy”), fight songs (*Revolution I* by the Beatles), a logo (The DreamCatcher) and they have a color for their banner (“red to match the blood that might be spilled”). They have a hierarchical leadership and sometimes there is dissention among the ranks. They’ve argued over philosophy and it took them a year and a half to write their Declaration of a School-Within-a-School. We’ve come now to the point at which the planning for the revolution is complete and the battles are about to be waged. The teacher-revolutionaries will now bravely go forth and declare their ideas to others. They’ll make speeches and presentations to engender support and they will find others who will become as impassioned as they are about the cause. But they will also find critics who may plot against them. Whether or not they will be able to defend themselves against these attacks will probably depend on their source of auxiliary power. Joining forces with other powerful allies will be important in the next phase of the Revolution.

Institutional and Cultural Rituals

Principal as keeper of the status quo

Each principal has made it known that the peaceful co-existence within the school was a high priority for them. Patricia noted that she disliked the term “revolution” because it served to ostracize others from the group of reformers. Stan said that he didn’t know why we had to say this was so different from all the good work that was going on within the school already. And Nick opts not to encourage a shared philosophy within the school. He believes that every teacher should be allowed to teach in the way that is most comfortable for them. The administrators spend a lot of time working toward a team approach. In a system such as this, would the idea for reform and change be valued by the administrators? Would it, from their perspective, create too much conflict and possible inequality in the school?

Nick has always been a principal who has worked for change when it was in the best interests of the children. As a new principal at the first “open school” in the county, he weathered public debate about such a non-traditional approach to schooling. He found ways to engender support for the school by broadcasting the positive attributes and the good work that was being accomplished within the school. Later, when he took over as the principal at the Middle School he was criticized for his attempts to humanize the school. His brand of school for adolescents was not “rigorous” enough his critics said. It’s too “touchy-feely”. Slowly, he re-educated the community about the development of the adolescent and helped others to understand that this age group needed a setting that would nurture *and* challenge. Next he took on the School Board in a seven-year battle to win approval for the construction of a new facility that would be designed with kids in mind. While still embroiled in the debates and the flip-flop decisions of the board, he came under attack for his support of an alternative math curriculum. Now as the dust

settles from these skirmishes, he appears to have lost them both and to be shell-shocked from the experience. While still an admirable principal with high professional integrity, he seems to be guarding the gate in a way that is out of character. “You’re not the one that has to answer the questions from all 900 parents and 75 faculty” he said in a recent meeting with the revolutionaries. “I’ve got to feel good about putting myself in the firing zone.”

While a certain level of dissonance is necessary for innovative change to occur, too much anxiety can also work against you. Heifetz (1994) suggests that the “level of distress must stay within a tolerable range”. Stacey (1996) concurs and reminds us that “to contain such anxiety, an individual requires a strong ego structure and a good enough ‘holding environment’, which is to be found in the groups to which the individual belongs.” In Nick’s case, his recent brushes with very public dissention may have left him feeling a level of distress beyond the tolerable range and an insecure feeling about his “holding environment.”

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) discuss the plight of the administrator as change is attempted. Their primary premise is that risk must be harmonized with security. In these ideal moments, teachers and administrators can feel a sense of being trusted and valued and of not being afraid to fail. In these moments they are “keen and ready to experiment, to take risks, and to try new approaches” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p.110). However, if as in the case at Boone, there is an aura of insecurity coupled with uncertainty then a sense of fear and hopelessness may begin to spread among the faculty. In this case the wise administrator must develop strong collaborative cultures among the staff in order to rebuild the sense of hope and security. Nick, who has always taken great pride in working for what is “best for kids”, may be feeling his own brand of insecurity and uncertainty due to the recent happenings in the county. Rectifying this unfamiliar position may take time and may be the reason that he has cautioned the revolutionaries to “slow down” and be willing to take small steps toward change. Certainly this position is understandable and part of the shifting system of politics and power that has influenced this attempt at reform.

Principals lead, teachers follow – boundary crossings are difficult

It has been evident that the teachers have not been completely comfortable with their role as leaders of a school reform. None of them has ever had this experience so they have been feeling their way. At times it has caused them to question their own abilities and strengths as teachers. They have had to assume duties and roles that have not typically been seen on their resume. Writing the position paper may have been an example of such a boundary crossing. Judging from the new sense of worth and status that came over the group upon completion of the paper, it would seem possible that successful completion of the paper (and crossing of the boundary) may bring about even more willingness to take on future challenges. Lieberman, (1995) has suggested that “Teachers must unpack the baggage of years of unexamined beliefs, attitudes, and practices” before we will be able to be innovative about new systems of schooling.

From the principal’s perspective it may also be difficult to handle this new and different way of relating to teachers. Depending on dispositions, life histories, and current political climate; each principal may have a different experience. In the case of

Boone where there were three very different, very powerful principals it was challenging to make a presentation to the three of them. Each principal seemed to have their own agenda and style and often they appeared in conflict with their colleagues. The principal who preferred to be gatekeeper for the school may feel defensive about teachers who are challenging the established system. Nick expressed great concern when he heard from a source outside the school that the teachers had been invited to present their work at a countywide conference. It seemed important to Nick to give permission for such a public display of work coming from his school. Another principal who is especially perceptive about community politics, may use this lens to find fault with the new ideas. Patricia seemed to be the most political member of the triumverant. She seemed particularly perceptive to the climate outside the school, which put her in conflict with those who were devoted to the work *inside* the school. And a final source for resisting the effort seemed to come from Stan. Being a fairly new principal, it seemed that he was still trying to negotiate the difference between a traditional set of standards of behavior for Principal-Teacher interaction and one that is more open to and supportive of teacher-led efforts.

Professional jealousy and competition within the school

During almost every encounter with the group, there was a discussion about their colleagues. The teachers repeatedly expressed the desire to be inclusive. They've worried that others would misinterpret their intentions and their passions. But like true revolutionaries, they were too busy with the revolution to spend the time campaigning for their cause and so there remained an air of mystery around their work. When they perceived that they were being criticized from the outside, it only served to draw them into a tighter unit – thus escalating the perception of elitism from the outside. When the teacher-reformers were told during the Focus Group interview that those “outside” the effort had expressed the feeling that at Boone there was a tendency for teachers to “set themselves apart,” “to develop a special expertise,” “that makes the rest of us look bad,” the reformers expressed an irritation and disappointment in such attitudes. “No one is stopping them from doing good work.” “They don't want to put in the effort, and they don't want anyone else to either.” One teacher told me during the interview process that an administrator had suggested that it might be wise and good for morale if their team didn't do so many fieldtrips and special events. The unspoken message was that there was an inevitable comparison being made between teams by teachers, students, parents, community members and so on. Principals want to be able to assure families that no matter what team their child is assigned to that he/she will have an equitable experience. It seems that with a school as large as Boone that this desire on the part of the Principal would be difficult to achieve. This extended look at the professional jealousy issue points out the fact that this dilemma was one that already existed within the school. The Principals may be concerned that the development of a separate school-within-a-school may escalate this caustic attitude.

Triangulation of Data

The Focus group merged the data from observations, participation, and interviews. This braid of data provided the opportunity for testing initial assumptions in multiple ways. Rather than relying on an interpretation that might be made from a single

observation or a single interview; I was able to participate and observe, then ask questions in the interview process to clarify my notions, and finally to follow-up with yet another opportunity to expand on the notion during the focus group. Emerging themes arose out of this layering technique. In this case the theme of collaboration was heard often during the meetings with the teachers, was expounded upon during interviews, and was again discussed as a group during the focused-group interview.

The opportunity to collaborate as a community of professional teachers is one of the most revered elements coming from the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Within the current system at Boone the teachers are paired or grouped in teams of four to work with a team of children for the year. The idea is that they will collaborate and integrate their studies. Janis and Ashley have been able to manage this feat, and others have certainly attempted, but it has been a difficult proposition. Time is the culprit. Very few minutes are built into the day to accomplish this important task and so in order to collaborate a teacher must be willing to do so on her own time. This often leaves teachers feeling isolated and lonely. The revolution meetings have seemed to fill a personal and professional void for these women who crave interaction.

The ambiguity of the collaboration theme occurs when we take a hard look at the group's struggle to function under a shared leadership or democratic system. Although they agreed that in order to practice the philosophy of collaboration that they must be able to share the leadership role and accept equal responsibility for the work of the group; it has been difficult to practice what they preach. Janis and Mandy have continued to organize each meeting from putting messages in mailboxes, to reminding everyone to attend, to gathering all the supplies necessary. The group has seemed content to allow the "defacto" leaders to organize and plan each step. Even when the leaders have protested, it has been difficult for others to feel comfortable enough to pick up the gauntlet until recently. At the September 21st meeting, the tide seemed to shift when Janis insisted that the group was not ready to "go public". Finally, under pressure she admitted that her reasoning came from her certainty that she would be left with assuming the lion's share of the responsibilities; something that she admitted she was beginning to resent. When the group promised to take the lead she relented and relaxed and admitted that she may have been contributing to the lack of a true shared leadership. A new and healthier way of functioning was palatable.

Revealing Patterns – Discovering Order in the Chaos

This fifteen-month process has been a journey with many, many ups and downs. Around each corner another roadblock has appeared. From all members, at every meeting, during each interview, the theme of barriers to success has been mentioned. Upon analysis of these multiple barriers, it seems that they can be divided into a couple of categories: barriers from within the group and barriers from outside the group. In some cases they have managed to hurdle the barriers – when they were able to devote enough time and energy to the effort. Other barriers have been out of the control of our teacher-reformers. In these cases they have felt like unfriendly forces working against their best efforts. And finally, there have been hurdles that are the result of generations of attitudes and beliefs about schooling, education, and teachers.

Barriers from within

Barriers that came from within the group would include the dispositions of the members. While the prominent dispositions among this group of teachers are passionate, committed, and caring; they are also “better talkers than listeners” and not always willing to be completely honest with each other. Mandy’s painful disclosure at the Focus Group Meeting that she felt hurt and betrayed and left out and that her work wasn’t worthy had not been voiced until long after the episode that caused these feelings was over. Janis had been unwilling to admit that she felt resentful toward other members of the group due to the inequity of the workload. Once these honest impressions were shared, the group seemed to rally around their friends and vowed to make life easier for each of them. Perceptions of opinion coming from outside the group, as noted, have also been a thwarting experience. Constant concern about the opinion of colleagues and administrators has taken time and energy away from the effort.

And finally, a need for a shared philosophy took almost a year and a half to craft. Certainly, some forces that were out of their control contributed to the slow nature of this particular project, but other forces were at work as well. Most of the teachers were uncomfortable with this type of writing. “I know how to teach math and science, not write a philosophical paper,” said Mary. “I need to see what one looks like before I can get started,” Janis quipped. Although they devoted several meetings to the work, organized a committee to focus on this aspect, and promised each other that they would “just do it!”, they were not successful until school was out for the summer and they had some extra time and energy to devote to this highest hurdle yet. Once the time issue was not such a burden, they truly began to collaborate. Several people teamed up to write the introduction, others contributed the theory and the middle school philosophy, and finally the conclusion was crafted. This joint effort gave the group a sense of true collaboration and it was a heady feeling.

Barriers from outside

The ultimate hurdle for any teacher-led effort is time. There simply is not enough time to do justice to all the roles and all the responsibilities in a teacher-mother-reformers life. During the course of the time that I spent with these amazing women they would vacillate from feeling guilty about the lack of time they had to devote, to angry about this dilemma. Closely associated with the demon of time is the reality of exhaustion that is inevitable when someone puts sustained effort and energy into all aspects of their life. Giving the gift of time when you’re overloaded and exhausted is a remarkable feat and reflects a “generosity of attitude” (C. Edwards, personal communication, August 6, 1999). Although Janis’s daughter had troubles, Mandy was pregnant, Daphne’s father-in-law was ill, Mary’s husband was sick, and Ashley miscarried, the bus kept inching down the road. These teachers were determined to finish what they started. “This is the most important thing I’ve ever done, next to having my baby,” one reformer said.

The style of leadership in the school is certainly a factor that contributed to the perception of forces working against the movement. Working with three very different leadership styles and approaches was also complex, confusing, and often frustrating for the group. Nick trusts the passions of teachers. He wants to support but he also doesn’t

want anyone to get hurt in the effort. Stan has a more traditional approach. He seemed impatient with the rhetoric and wanted a clear visual description of what was being proposed. Patricia, as an ex-Central Office personnel and building principal was more in touch with the pulse of the community and the School Board. Her political savvy causes her to question some of the concepts that are being offered because she understands what the fallout will be from the public. While some of what the Principals have said has been discouraging, it should be noted here that there was a shift in how the information coming from the administrators was accepted by the group. At the meeting on September 21st, Daphne put the dilemma into perspective. “They (the administrators) have a very important perspective to share. We need to ask people to shoot at us so that we can learn from it. We don’t want to end up in the same place as the math teachers. We need a devil’s advocate so that we can cover all our bases.” With these wise words and their adoption as new attitude by the group, there was a shift toward a more collaborative disposition regarding the established power-base in the school.

The ever changing (and very vocal) community / political climate in the town was also a factor as has been described in the body of this report. The fact that a petition was circulated among the citizens of the town to fight the way that math was being taught in the Middle School says a lot about the political climate and attitudes about education in this small town. “It’s a tough town to teach in. They’re just never going to trust us to do the right thing as teachers,” said one revolutionary. As the planning phase ends and the early implementation phase begins, this dilemma will need to be addressed more directly.

Cultural Barriers

The relationship between the group and the administrators was also a challenge as it reflected generations of cultural assumptions about schooling. Finding a way to clear this hurdle and to establish a sense of collaboration among the two groups would mean attempting to tear down the historic barriers between them. The teachers appear poised and ready to take on this challenge.

Thoughts about the Barriers

Top down mandates for school restructuring have met with persistent failure across the nation. Seymour B. Sarason (1995) writes that the “salvation for our schools will not come from without but from within.” Teacher-led, bottom- up efforts are fraught with difficulty. They probably aren’t going to be successful unless they find a way to engender a strong power base. That power base may already be in place, but may just need some nurturing. Nick Thomas said, “Can we stop being “us” and “them” and become “we?” What would it take to find a community of place, friendship, and mind with the administration in the school?

Despite the Barriers

Another question that begs to be answered here is “how and why did the revolutionaries continue the effort although they faced multiple barriers thrown in their path?” Certainly, the attitudes and dispositions listed on the MAP contain a partial answer to the question. These teachers “don’t start what they can’t finish,” they are “passionate,” “have a love for teaching and learning,” “they work well under pressure,” “they are not satisfied with the status quo,” “they see possibility and have hope for the future,” and they “are devoted to public education.” In addition to these traits, they have

achieved a sense of commitment and responsibility to one another and to the cause. They have struggled to attend every meeting even though they've been tired and it would mean that they would get less sleep that night. They believed in each other and in their shared hope for a better system of schooling and education for the kids that they teach. They've had long conversations about social justice issues. They've agonized over the enrollment question (opt-in or opt-out). Their dedication to *all* children comes through in everything they say, do, write, and teach. In addition, they *like* each other. Although the meetings and the work of the movement takes time from the other priorities in their lives, there is an aura in the room when this group is together. There is always lots of laughter, and good natured teasing. They always begin their time together with food, drink, and bantering conversation. They keep track of each other in a kind, sisterly, way. They know when birthdays and anniversaries are being celebrated. They plan baby showers and fill each other's freezers when times are tough. Several of them get together on a regular basis and do large chores at each other's homes. They're always talking about fixing a drainspout, seeding a lawn, or polyurethaning a deck. And finally, they share a dream for this reform. When they chose the symbol of the dreamcatcher as the logo for their movement, it was highly symbolic of their disposition of hope. Claire wore a pin to one of the last meetings that said "Dreams are Hope." This thought seems to capture the essence of why they have stayed in the race, even though the hurdles have been plentiful and high.

My Changing Role as Participant-Observer:

In the beginning of this ethnographic study, I assumed the role of the quiet documentor. I contributed to the discussions when facts were needed, but rarely offered an opinion. Avidly taking notes and trying to carefully observe the interactions usually meant that there was very little time left for joining a discussion. I was listening really well, however, and I was definitely forming opinions as you have read in the reflections sections of Chapter Four. It wasn't long until I felt comfortable enough to begin to consider what the group's next steps should be. Since this was my research, I was thinking about it all the time and I thought that I could be of service if I offered some suggestions. When I suggested the possibility of a small pilot study for the 1999 school year, I was met with a firm "no". This was an important wake up call for this researcher. Even though I felt that I understood the dynamics and the processes very well, I had missed a very important component. I did not have the perspective of the teacher-mother-reformer. I did not understand the context in which they were trying to function. I was trying to impose my own need for speed on their project without considering the ramifications. I had forgotten how important the process was. Relationships were being formed and this was a process that could not be rushed. I retreated and realized that I needed to trust the people that I had come to respect. In addition, I hoped now to learn the concept of "a multiplicity of vision" (Bateson, 1990). I needed to try harder to understand and respect the perspective of others.

Several months later, I had the opportunity to sit down with each member of the group on a one-to-one basis and interview them for the purpose of this dissertation. During the course of this one-and-a-half to two-hour session we talked about many things beyond the revolution. Many of the revolutionaries did not know me very well and I

found that they all had questions. When they found out that I had a background in early childhood education and especially in childcare in the community, they began to ask advice. Our subsequent interactions were much more intimate as we discussed care for their young children. With other members of the group, I was sharing high school graduation. Five of us had graduating seniors and we often talked about all the ritual and emotion that was associated with that family transition.

A month after the interviews, I conducted the Focus Group Interview. This was another opportunity that gave me an avenue into their lives. I had the chance to share my initial impressions with them, to ask for their clarifications, and to work with them as we collaborated on our next steps together. This event was a turning point in my bond with the teachers. The use of documentation during the Focus Group also had a powerful impact on our growing relationship. Creating the MAP allowed the group the opportunity to go back and revisit their efforts. They seemed to find new meanings due to their heightened perspective and these new meanings gave them the courage to move onward. Viewing the MAP as a “fresco” of their collaborative effort was also powerful for the group. They could easily see their own individual contributions, but it was also very easy to see that the “whole” could not have been achieved without each of their “parts”. It was a powerful reminder of the importance of collaboration. And finally, I sensed that they were very touched by the aesthetic quality and the “act of love” (Rinaldi, 1998) that went into the creation of the product. I felt embraced by the group in many ways that night and I felt yet another boundary crossing was happening for me.

Now that I knew everyone better, I noticed that my notetaking at meetings had changed considerably. I was able to use more shorthand, and because of this, I was able to become more of a contributor to the whole experience. I started sharing more of my ideas and suggestions and soon I was being accepted as a member of their teacher committees. Now, as this experience draws to a close, I know that I will continue to work with this group whom I’ve come to admire and respect. I remain a satellite around their moon, however, as I will never share their community of place; but certainly, we have achieved a community of friendship and of mind.

Next Steps for the Reform

The next part of this adventure should include a continued attitude of courage tempered with vigor and internal support. I would recommend that the teachers continue to develop their research projects. The process of collecting data, analyzing it and making suggestions for future implementation should be accomplished for several reasons. First, the information coming from the research will provide valuable understanding for the future of the new school. In addition, if the process is shared in a regular forum, it may serve to promote collaboration skills and attitudes among the group.

Next, my wish for this group would be that they continue a dialog with the administrators. If possible, opening up to them as partners in the education of the children at Boone. Beginning to identify the ancient barriers and making joint efforts to breaking them down, would be a challenging process but one that might change the face of this effort.

I would be pleased to see the teachers continue to take the risk to share their knowledge and information with others. As they have begun to do they should use these public forums as the opportunity to test assumptions, articulate philosophy, and rethink areas that are questioned.

I would hope for this group that they would continue to seek out additional opportunities for professional development. In particular, I believe that it would be advantageous to the group if additional members could travel to Reggio Emilia. A broader base of understanding within the group may lead to greater collaboration and an opportunity to spread the leadership role.

And finally, I would hope that they would attempt to reinstate the “community committee” that had its beginnings in the Big Room back in the summer of 1998. I believe that this broader base of support might assist them in their future endeavors.

Implications for value in other settings

It is important to think of this story as an example and not as a model (Meier, 1995). There really can't be one way of progressing through a school restructuring process. As has been shown, the individual context in which the effort is attempted must be considered:

Hurdling the Personal Barriers

It is imperative that a community of place, friendship, and mind (Sergiovanni, 1992) be established within a group that attempts to restructure schools. As I found, this process can not be rushed, but needs to be savored. When a group of people shares an intersubjectivity at each of these levels, then the commitment to one another and to their shared cause will be a powerful force to be reckoned with. In addition, the new allegiance and collaboration builds an attitude of courage within the group which will buoy them as they move toward opposition with shared purpose, passion, and power.

Finding a system of shared leadership from the onset may be recommended. As has been noted in this case, it has been difficult to shift the power within the group once it was established and those that lead alone may become weary from the effort.

Identifying funding support to “buy time” may prevent some of the exhaustion, guilt, and unhealthy compromises that needed to be made during this effort. Stipends for outside research, paid planning time, or “duty” buyouts might assist the teacher-mother-reformer in her constant juggle of priorities as well as provide a sense of appreciation for the extra work that is being accomplished on behalf of the school.

Hurdling the Leadership Barriers

As noted above, this work can not take place out of context. The teacher's efforts are very much influenced by the attitude of support coming from the administration in the school. Nurturing a partnership on behalf of kids can be a way to join forces and share the load.

Together, remove the historical attitudes, beliefs, and stigmas associated with traditional American schooling. As our reformers have mentioned, each group (teacher and principal) comes to this work with a unique perspective. Certainly it will take both points of view to be successful.

Hurdling the Community / Political Barriers

Broadcast the good work of the reform effort. Use the fine art of documentation in schools, libraries, museums, at school board meetings and throughout the community to exemplify the kinds of experiences that are occurring in your school. Sometimes, community dissention occurs because of lack of knowledge. Parents do not like to be ill-informed where their children are concerned. Give them every opportunity to hear about the changes in multiple ways.

Engender support from like-minded others. Use every opportunity to broaden your base of support. Find university faculty that will champion your cause, talk with school board members, put out a notice in the county teacher's newsletter and find colleagues. Don't be shy and don't be fearful. Be passionate and be courageous.

Invite experts into the community. Sometimes it is easier for others to "listen" to those from outside their immediate association. Find a way to host to a forum, a conference, a series of dialogs that promote your position. Share the information.

Finding the moments of opportunity

The past two years of work with the teachers from the Boone Middle School in their attempt to restructure their system has been an honor and an education for me. As I have attempted to understand what it takes to restructure education (Innovation) for a small group in a middle school, I have come to realize that there are many harmonizing and conflicting forces at work. As I look back at the original conceptual model that I used to guide this study and in the spirit of constructivism, I feel a strong need to redesign. This reconstruction is informed by the learnings reported in this chapter. While the original design of the model certainly included all of the "players" and paid attention to the dynamic interactions between and among person, process, and time; it did not adequately represent the often unpredictable moving and shifting forces that were at work during this reform effort. This new model attempts to reflect the harmonizing and conflicting elements of personal and contextual characteristics that were in play during the course of the effort to develop an Innovation at Boone Middle School. What has become clear through this study is that the interplay of power, politics, and personalities embedded in the process, proximal interaction, person and time has the most significant effect on the development of the Innovation. The model, therefore, has undergone some transformation and evolution and emerges in a revised form presented here:

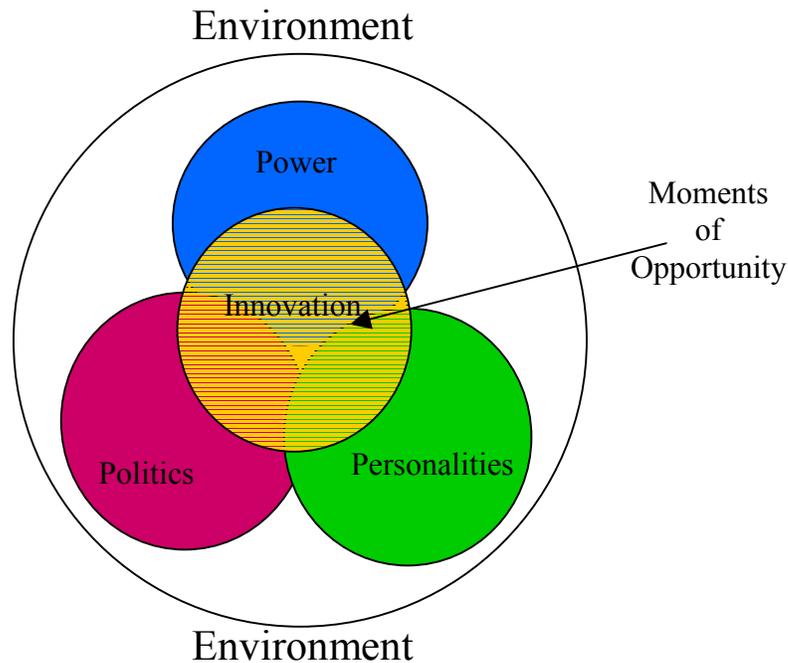


Figure 15. The Ecology Model of Developmental Processes of Innovations

Innovation: The attempt to conceive of a system of change for schooling and education at Boone Middle School.

Power: The leadership within the school which is defined by individual styles, histories, systems, and needs and is influenced by day to day interactions with the personalities, politics, and innovation.

Politics: The organized and unorganized systems outside the school, which effect and are affected by the power, personalities, and innovation.

Personalities: Those in and out of the reform group – defined by individual teaching and leading styles, histories, needs, and allegiance to the innovation; and influenced by day to day interactions with the power, politics, and innovation.

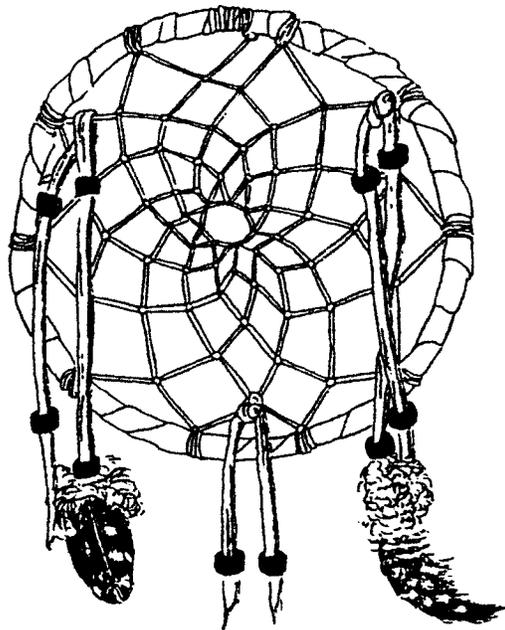
In this model (the ecology model of developmental processes of Innovation) the characteristics (factors/forces) that seem to have the most impact on the Innovation are Power, Politics, and Personalities reflected in School Leadership, Community/Family Politics, and Teachers, respectively. In this new model, these dynamic forces interact, collide, have impact on one another in ways that are often unexpected – fluid, flexible – at times enhance growth, at other times challenge or interfere with growth.

Bronfenbrenner’s concepts used in defining developmental processes are part of this model of innovations. Since the revolution group has actually lived through the development of an Innovation, I can now say that the four components of process, person, interaction, and time are highly influential forces, especially viewed through the interplay of Power, Politics, and Personalities, over time. I believe that it is these conditions or forces that have caused the concepts in my original model (Teacher,

Leadership, Families, and Community) to evolve to Personalities, Power, and Politics. I hope that the conceptualization of this new model elicits the strong sense of interaction between and among all the forces. I am also hopeful that this proposed model may be helpful to those who may want to explore the process of change as they implement innovations.

It is difficult to predict the moment when the forces noted in the model will be in alignment. Many of the processes, experiences, interactions, took place on different planes and in different contexts. As we moved through our own effort at Boone we never knew when a setback would occur – a teacher might have an ill family member, a principal might have just received a new ultimatum from the central office, a community rumor might be brewing about education. Each context worked for and against the development of the Innovation and was in constant flux. How then, could an effort such as the one described in these pages ever find success? Successfully achieving the goal may be a matter of doing the research, engendering support, readying the troops, *watching for the moments of opportunity and being ready to seize them when they arrive.*

“When you look back, you see a clear path that brought you here. But you created that path yourself. Ahead, there is only uncharted wilderness... In the final analysis, it is the walking that beats the path. It is not the path that makes the walk”. (De Gues, 1997).



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APPENDIX A
Literature Review, Continued
School Reform Literature

A look at the curious history of educational reform movements tells a telling tale in which reform advocates in legislative or administrative positions enforce change. Modified textbooks, instructional materials and curriculum guidelines are mandated. However, the classroom practices often remain the same. These "top-down" efforts are difficult to implement without strong support from the practitioners (Herd & Sawyers, 1997). Those who are committed to democratic education are often placed in a position of conflict with the dominant traditions of schools. At almost every turn, their ideas and efforts are likely to be resisted by those who benefit from the inequities of schools and those who are more interested in efficiency and hierarchical power than in the difficult work of transforming schools from the bottom up (Apple & Beane, 1995). In the case of the Boone Middle School, a group of 13 teachers are attempting to change the system. These teachers might be considered to be at the bottom of the "bottom-up" effort. They have set out to shake up the system and call their work: "The Revolution". In many ways they are representative of other revolutionary causes which have challenged the dominant culture. They anticipated resistance from those in power and from those outside the group and have planned their "revolution" to combat the challenges. The stories of national reform efforts generally focus on the leadership required to be successful. Books on school reform are filled with anecdotal pages by principals, superintendents, and administrators. Leadership techniques and strategies for "promoting change in your school" or "developing your faculty potential" are prolific. The

practitioners are mentioned only as a sideline and often in terms of how difficult the experience of school re-structuring has been for them. If, as Herd and Sawyers (1997) have suggested, reform is difficult to put into practice without strong support from the practitioners; could an effort initiated by teachers be the key to successful reform?

Types of reformers and reform

Two basic types of reformers have made efforts to rethink education. One is the organizational - effectiveness reformer: which have been largely national and state policy makers, corporate leaders, foundation officials, occasional academic experts and a few school district administrators. These reformers usually have access to media and legislation. The other type is the pedagogical reformer who is interested in getting teachers to create student-centered, reasoning-driven classrooms. They are largely academic entrepreneurs and researchers and groups of practitioners funded by sympathetic corporate and foundation officials (Kogan, 1997). According to Boyer (1988), this second type of focus on renewal is important as it moves beyond regulation and makes teachers full participants in the process. While the Boone group does not necessarily have a pedagogical reformer, they have found a way to make a connection with a university support system and to move forward as full participants in their own process.

There have been many reasons for recent reform efforts. Some have developed due to dwindling funds, a search for improved learner outcomes, or a call for overall quality of public instruction (Lewis, 1993). In addition, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) has called for fundamental changes in middle schools

after noting that many adolescents, doubting their abilities and fearing failure, invest less of themselves in academics than is desirable (Gable & Manning, 1997).

Chicago

During the widespread Chicago reform effort that took place in the late eighties and early nineties, three researchers embarked on a qualitative-grounded and inductive research study of the effort (Katz, Fine, & Simon, 1997). These researchers followed the reform efforts in Chicago over a period of 6-7 years. They wanted to capture something of the spirit and complexity of reforms as seen through the many eyes of Chicagoians and to determine its significance in the history and future of American education.

The Chicago effort began as a legislative act and then became a social movement. In 1988 Illinois legislature passed an act allowing voters to elect a local school council for each of the city's nearly six hundred schools. Six parents, two community members, two teachers, the principal and in high schools a student member would make up each Council. Councils would hire principals and would exercise broad authority over curriculum and school management and control a sizeable amount of state money. At times the parents and community members seemed empowered and extremely active in working toward change. But at the corporation headquarters, there was very little tolerance for trial and error and they determined that the final criterion for success or failure would be test scores.

The reform took several turns until 1995 when the State legislature passed an amendment to the school reform act abolishing the city's Board of Education and its superintendency. Control of the school system now rested with the mayor and a five

member board including a CEO who would run the system. At this point principals, teachers and local school councils were fired. Headlines in newspapers read, "Fear jumpstarts school improvement". The effort that had begun with an attempt to empower individual schools made an 180 degree change of course. If test scores are to be used as the sole determinant of success, will there ever be a truly successful school reform effort? What other methods of assessment might be useful in ascertaining if our schools are meeting the goals of educating our children?

Kentucky

In 1990 the Kentucky Reform Act (KERA) was another top-down mandate with a rapid implementation schedule. It was prompted by a state Supreme Court decision that funding across Kentucky school districts was inequitable. KERA required change in curriculum, finance, and governance across all levels of the education system. The Kentucky Department of Education used the NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices to identify seven critical attributes for primary school programs that guided the reform:

- developmentally appropriate practice
- multi-age, multi-ability practices
- no retention / no promotion
- authentic assessment
- qualitative reporting methods
- professional teamwork
- positive parent involvement

Guidelines for implementing programs were disseminated to schools through printed material and staff development sessions. Information was a mix of mandate and suggestions and educators were not always certain into which category information fell. The timeline was also an area of concern. When teachers expressed concern over the immediacy of some of the implementation, the Kentucky Department of Education responded by adjusting it to allow more professional development and planning. But then the legislators responded by overruling the KDE's more permissive timeline and required a return to the accelerated implementation system. Teachers had many concerns, were out of the loop and felt that their past work was being viewed as inadequate (Slaton, Atwood, Shake, & Hales, 1997).

Just about the time that KERA was starting to take hold, the state decided to attach a system of assessment to the effort. KIRIS (Kentucky Instructional Results Information System) was the assessment and accountability component that then commanded everyone's attention. KIRIS turned the results of student performance into a "school score" that the state used to determine awards or sanctions for teachers and administrators. Schools could be placed on probation and the school taken over by the state if they failed to make the grade. Some felt that in order to get the teachers to try the new reform strategies that it would need to be tied to a high-stakes accountability system. The practice seemed to undermine the instructional benefits of student performance assessment and forced teachers to focus on whatever is thought to raise test scores rather than on instruction aimed at addressing individual student needs. The role of the teacher

becomes that of the technician, expected to put into play decisions made by others outside of the school (Herbes & Whitford, 1997).

Once again, a system of student assessment has been tied to instructional reform efforts as the sole technique by which the entire effort is judged. In addition, we might learn from this top-down attempt that when teachers feel unconnected to the venture that they are less committed to following through. Passion seems to be a component that is important in keeping the movement alive and energized.

Single School Efforts

H-B Woodlawn School, an alternative secondary school in Arlington, Virginia has been in existence since the early 1970's (Clark, 1998). The school grew from radical beginnings into a place for high-achieving, college-bound students. There are currently 500 students in grades 6-12. The school functions with independent projects, flexible electives and free periods. Parents are asked to sign a pledge to "accept the philosophy and structure of the school and try as best they can to make its unique program work for the student" (Clark, 1998). The self-selection of enrollment produces students and teachers who are loyal and committed to one another and to their school. The protagonists of this school feel that they have been extremely successful, but are reluctant to tout the program as the next big solution to educational problems. Instead, they believe that it has been successful within their own culture and context (Clark, 1998).

From this school we can learn several lessons that might impact our own efforts. Student - centered curriculum, parental support, and voluntary enrollment are all aspects of this movement that are replicated in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Perhaps it is

possible to re-invent the Italian system in America. Further, the H-B Woodlawn school began as a grassroots effort and has remained small and separate from the greater political and legislative boundaries that have marred the reform efforts previously mentioned.

Central Park East Secondary School is a cooperative project of the community school board of New York City and the Coalition of Essential Schools. These schools are guided by the principles of Ted Sizer's CES: less is more, personalization, goal setting, student as worker. The school's academic program stresses intellectual achievement and emphasizes the mastery of a limited number of centrally important subjects. It emphasizes learn how to learn, how to reason, and how to investigate complex issues that require collaboration and personal responsibility. The final high school diploma is based on each student's clear demonstration of achievement through the presentation of 14 portfolios to a graduation committee. The schools values include high expectations, trust, a sense of personal decency and respect for diversity (Meier & Schwarz, 1995).

At Central Park East they believe that education provides the foundation for creating young people who can be intelligent and responsible citizens in a democracy. The two founders of the school were early childhood professionals who used this basis to frame the school for the upper grades. They wanted a school where it was possible to know their students well so that they might come to use their minds well. They desired a school where teachers could be responsible and in control of their professional lives and where there was a strong professional community to support them. They wanted a place where the assessment system could hold the students to high standards without

standardization. And they wanted a school where the curriculum structure was based on habits of mind that focus on tools for thinking (Meier, 1997).

This school offers much to consider as we embark along the path to our own alternative educational program. This is another relatively small school - independent of the expectations of a greater political system. The school was started by early childhood professionals using some of the philosophical guidance from that level of education. So, the idea of using an educational concept from early childhood to frame the upper grades is not without precedent. Perhaps the Reggio Emilia approach can be reinvented for the more mature student after all.

In addition, the values of high expectations, trust, a sense of personal decency and respect of diversity are values embedded within the goals of education for our country. And, at Central Park East, the assessment system is focused on high standards without standardization. They have found the answer to assessing the student without applying meaningless criteria.

Dispositions of successful reform attempts

Smaller schools - with the hopes that teachers will interact more, participate more in designing curriculum and running the school and develop a greater sense of connection and commitment (McLaughlin, Talbert, Kahne & Powell, 1990; Meier, 1989; Ratzki, 1988).

Magnet programs - By coupling schools with a particular theme or educational focus, reformers hope that teachers will self-select schools with philosophies and beliefs similar

to their own and be drawn together through the development of common beliefs and understandings (Meier, 1989; Metz, 1986; Raywid, 1984).

Site-based management - By giving teachers greater decision-making control over their workplace reformers expect teachers will increase participation in and commitment to the community (Barth, 1990; Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1990; Lieberman, 1987; Sizer, 1992).

Collegiality and collaboration - By encouraging teachers to share ideas, discuss teaching strategies and work together in planning, teaching and advising (related strategies include team-teaching, peer-coaching, action-research) reformers hope to reduce teacher isolation and facilitate stronger professional connections (Lampert, 1991; Lieberman, 1988a, 1995; McLaughlin, 1993; Shulman, 1989).

Other recommendations: engage the support of the principal, find others who agree philosophically, involve parents, visit other classrooms to view a variety of models, build in planning time, be flexible, have faith. (McCarthy et.al., 1996)

Promoting democratic groups for reform

Beane (1990) has agreed with these suggestions from reformers and has emphasized the conditions for a democratic way of life. He insists that what is necessary is: the opportunity for an open flow of ideas (regardless of their popularity), faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for solving problems, the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies, concern for the welfare of others and the common good, concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities, an understanding that democracy is not so much an ideal to be pursued as an idealized set of values that we must live and that must guide our

life as a people, the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. Perhaps the Boone reform effort could be observed through the lens of Beane's democratic way of life.

This section of the paper will offer a collection of ideas and practices that have been indicative of successful reform efforts or which have been learned from the failure of other efforts.

- * Reform eludes neat, tidy evaluations. It is a multilayered process and must be looked at from the perspectives of its varied constituencies (Katz, Fine & Simon, 1997).

- * A focus on an individual school has a great deal of appeal support. Top down reforms are limited while school-level factors are associated with a high degree of student success (Shields & Knapp, 1997).

- * Characteristics of promising school-based reforms include: Scope should be a blend of narrow and comprehensive. Curriculum and Instruction should be the primary or sole focus.

Time Frame: change should be expected in long term time frame.

Locus of authority of decision-making: should be a balance of school driven and externally driven. Collaboration among stakeholders must be high. The depth and range of professional development opportunities related to reform must be rich and sustained over time (Shields & Knapp, 1997).

- * Other success stories include these factors: a strong base of teacher support, teachers at the center of curricular revision, sufficient funding, school-based decision making (Honey & Herriquex, 1996).

* School climate responsive to young adolescents should include: creating small communities of learning, teaching a core academic program, ensuring success for all students, staffing the school with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents, re-engaging parents and families, strengthening the alliance of schools and communities, competition among students should be minimized, evaluation should be individualized - "fair is not the same as equal" (Gable & Manning, 1997).

* Teachers must have their voices heard in creation of curriculum (Apple & Beane, 1995).

* Two qualities defining the ideal citizen from the Central Park East Secondary School were empathy and skepticism; the ability to see a situation from the eyes of another and the tendency to wonder about the validity of what we encountered. (Meier & Schwarz, 1995).

* In successful reform efforts both pressure and support are important. Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation. Support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources. (Joyce & Showers, 1988).

* When people try something new they often suffer the "implementation dip" where things get worse before they get better as people grapple with the meaning and skills of change (Joyce & Showers, 1988).

* "Deep ownership" (Fullan, 1992) is important in order to affect real change.

* Gus Shulman (1997) states that the success to any reform ultimately depends upon the interaction between teachers and students. David Hawkins (1966) calls this the "wisdom of practice".

* Jerome Bruner (1997) states that the most effective changes have occurred in places where policy makers and administrators have invested in developing teacher ideas and skills.

* David Hawkins (1966) wrote in a paper titled *Learning the unteachable* in which he argued that there are times in human history when there is more wisdom in practice than in the academy. We are probably at a time in the history of education when there is more wisdom about teaching among practicing teachers than there is among academic educators.

* Shulman (1995) counters that the wisdom of teachers is often isolated and unvoiced.

The goals of public education

Consideration of the goals of public education might be one way to rethink the system. According to Kogan (1997) we must be concerned with accommodating and doing justice to three traditional goals. The first is to transmit the values and habits of mind that fashion character and sustain a common culture. The second is to teach those basic skills that enable a person to enter the world as a productive member of society. And the final goal is to provide each individual with the opportunity to realize his or her full potential. Most effort and controversies over educational reform during the past two decades have centered largely on how to realize these educational goals, either individually or in combination (Kogan, 1997).

Organizational Formation and Culture Literature

"Today we see a loss of a sense of identity and belonging, of opportunities for allegiance, for being needed and responding to need and a corresponding rise in feelings of alienation, impotence and anomie" (Gardner, 1991). American's penchant for "rugged individualism" seems to come in conflict with calls for stronger communal associations. There is some question as to whether idealized, liberal communities can exist at all - communities with a strong collective orientation that also maintain individual protection and freedoms (Noddings, 1996). These comments from Gardner and Noddings seem central to the issues that surround the formation of community groups: group work is hard work. According to contemporary theorists, central features of a community include interaction and participation, interdependence, shared interests and beliefs, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships (Westheimer, 1998). These noble traits do not magically appear among members of a group and this was also the case with our middle school reformers. Some (Dewey, 1938; Greely, 1975) have said that when a group engages in ongoing interaction and participation directed toward other goals, that "community" may be a side effect of the time spent together. The resulting sense of community also enriches and facilitates future interaction. Certainly this Middle School reform community could be considered a by-product of previous non-reform related interaction and participation.

As mentioned in the introduction, Sergiovanni (1994) has put forth the notion of authentic communities that deal with people "in the round" – not just in terms of tasks and roles, but in terms of relationships and understanding between and among members

of a group. He consider a community of place as having a shared space that is welcoming and facilitates interaction. Next he addresses a community of friendship. This informal contract is built within a group when informal, casual, and often social interactions take place over the course of time. And then he denotes the concept of a community of mind. Creating a community of mind means actively listening, acknowledging differences, wanting to learn from them and working for closer agreement.

Toward a common purpose

Malaguzzi's (1993) comment: "relationship is the primary connecting dimension of our system...understood not merely as a warm, protective envelope, but rather as a dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose"; expresses the point that communities are not simply warm and fuzzy places that make us all feel good. But rather they support and challenge each member to be a more effective member.

Ideally communities provide forums for exchange that lead to growth as new perspectives are considered. When consensus cannot be reached, compromise often permits communities to remain cohesive while acknowledging the diversity of members (Gardner, 1991). Often the idea of community is romanticized but the act of coming together around a shared interest and then making group plans for the future of the community will certainly be ripe for conflict.

Nisbet (1953) addresses the importance of embracing diversity while engaging in what he calls the "quest for community". Philosophers have challenged hegemonic

notions of value and worth in an effort to "de-marginalize" those traditionally left out of community discourse (hooks, 1994; Rabinow, 1984; West, 1990). Confusion stems from the idea that individual freedoms are in conflict with strong collective community beliefs. Members of a community while sharing interests and a commitment to one another, don't always agree. Individual differences, are not only inevitable but also foster growth within a community (Gardner, 1991). Diversity of ideas are an integral and desirable means for the growth of the community and of its individual members (Bellah, et.al., 1985; Dewey, 1916). Critical reflection is essential in the process of negotiating differences and building shared purpose.

In the building of a common purpose others have focused on professionalization of teaching, giving teachers greater authority and decision-making power. Foremost in this study of the literature is the emphasis on creating professional conditions more conducive to a sense of collective mission and responsibility: this has become an essential component of many local, state and nation school reform efforts (Meier, 1995; Sizer, 1992).

Basic assumptions and beliefs of the organization

The concept of organizational culture is widely used in private and public sectors, and not only by academics who study organizations but by businesspeople, clergy, and practitioners. Edgar Schein (1985) defines it as:

"the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and

beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in the external environment and its problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably"

Schein (1992) insists that these assumptions and beliefs permeate an organization and become an ingrained and accepted part of routine and practice within an organization. The culture within an organization reflects our "human need for stability, consistency, and meaning" (Schein, 1992, p.11). While the fulfillment of these needs is crucial to a sense of wellbeing, they may also be the primary reason for resisting innovation and change. Therefore, other issues or concepts that may influence the revolution group process could include those of change and resistance.

Change and Resistance

Change is a highly personal experience. It affects individuals in profound and startling ways. Individuals who will be affected by it "must have the chance to work it through, become familiar with it, see how it fits, and discover what they can gain from it as well as what it will cost them (Fullan, 1991). This process takes time and thus, it is these people who are doing the changing who are in control of the reform. It may be helpful to have a fuller understanding of this phenomenon in order to be empathic to the process. How might the reform group use this knowledge to build empathy and intersubjectivity between and among groups?

Change is not always a good thing

Change can bring a sense of loss or even a feeling of bereavement (Evans, 1996). Bereavement may be the resulting feeling if assumptions that we live by and take for

granted are devalued. This can be a threat to basic security, the ability to understand and to cope. In attempting to understand the resistance to change, it would be important that the revolution group consider that "it is never just the logical that we are dealing with but the psychological as well" (Vaill, 1989, p.57).

Change can challenge competence. It may threaten an individual's wish to feel effective and valuable. "Alterations in practice, procedures, and routines hamper people's ability to perform their jobs confidently and successfully, making them feel inadequate and insecure, especially if they have exercised their skills in a particular way for a long time" (Evans, 1996). For this reason, it seems especially important that the revolution group has chosen to be a voluntary-reform group, meaning that the reform will not be forced within the school but instead will be an option.

Change may promote a sense of unpredictability. During change, "people no longer know what their duties are, how to relate to others, or who has the authority to make decisions. The structural benefits of clarity, predictability, and rationality are replaced with confusion, loss of control, and the belief that politics rather than policies are now governing everyday behavior" (Bohman & Deal, 1991, p. 382). The process of change itself can provoke distress in all members of an organization, even those who pressed for the change (Evans, 1996). While the revolution group currently feels in control of this effort to change, it may be that during the course of the process that the stress of uncertainty will be experienced. This possibility will be watched for and observed as part of this study if it should occur.

Conflict may be a by-product of change. Friction is almost always generated during the process of change and can be felt between individuals and between groups (Evans, 1996). It is inevitable that factions will form and that a perceived sense of "winners and losers" will exist (Bolman & Deal, 1991). These competing priorities and the competition and "jockeying for power that ensue can create new sources of friction and rekindle old wounds and resentments" (Evans, 1996). This phenomenon, known as cognitive dissonance, was inevitable during the process of coming to understand a new way of being in the school and is shared in more detail in Chapter 4.

Openness to Innovation vs Resistance

With a greater understanding of all that the process of change can inflict upon the individual, it is not surprising that most institutions and practitioners resist innovation. In fact, it might be even more surprising if they welcomed it. This study will seek to uncover the factors that might allow one to be more open to innovation. Evans (1996) offers the following factors as pivotal: one's personality, life experience, and career experience. Likewise, Schein (1992) asserts that "people's acceptance of a new perspective depends much less on its intrinsic validity than on their own readiness to consider any new ideas at all. Before they can respond to a particular innovation something must unfreeze their current thinking and perceptions and reach them in a fundamental way" (p. 107). This study has utilized these concepts in designing a methodology that allowed these important components to be uncovered.

Categorization of Innovation

For further insights into why some change efforts have been more successful than others, I turn to Cuban (1988) who has considered categorization of innovation. In his description of *first-order change*, Cuban asserts that these are efforts that are developed to "improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done; without disturbing the basic organizational features and without substantially altering the way that children and adults perform their roles" (p. 342). *Second-order change* "seeks to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including new goals, structures, and roles (e.g., collaborative work cultures)" (p. 342). Fullan (1991) contends that most changes since the turn of the century have been first-order changes, aimed to "improve the quality of what already existed. Second order reforms largely failed" (p. 29). Cuban (1988) summarizes that these second-order changes were unsuccessful as they were often "boosted by those who were unfamiliar with the classroom as the workplace" (p. 343). One of the challenges, therefore, of this group of revolutionaries as they sought a second-order change was to affect the culture and structure of their school in such a way as to engender support from all members of their school community. This was perceived as a highly risky endeavor by some of the reformers as failure could have served to strengthen the existing organizational design (Cuban, 1988). This aura of impending failure was also considered as the study unfolded as it had a profound impact on the formation and commitment of the group as well as on the speed with which the project proceeded.

APPENDIX B

Design of the Study

Ethnography

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) have offered an illuminating description of ethnographic studies. They see it as method with a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena. Rather than setting out to test an hypothesis about them, the ethnographer tends to work with "unstructured" data that has not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories. Typically, investigations are of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case in detail. Analysis involves the interpretation of the meaning and processes of human actions and takes a descriptive and explanatory form. I began my analysis by considering the theories previously mentioned in the original proposal, but remained open to the possibility of emerging and shifting emphasis. In this way, the lived experience (of the ethnographic study) has informed the research. Details of this component of the study can be found in the following chapters.

Case Study

The case study is a form of ethnographic research that is "defined by interest in individual cases, not by methods of inquiry used" (Stake, 1994). Emphasis should be placed on designing the study to optimize the understanding of the case rather than generalization beyond" (p. 236). Stake (1994) has noted that different researchers have differing reasons for studying cases. The Intrinsic Case Study is a study that is followed because the researcher desires a better understanding of this one case. The researcher has an intrinsic interest in, for example, "a particular child, clinic, conference or curriculum"

(p.237). The Instrumental Case Study is followed because it will provide insight into an issue or theory. While the case itself is supportive in facilitating our understanding, it is the expected advance in understanding of the concept or theory that fuels the research. The Collective Case Study is the study of a number of cases simultaneously in order to "inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition" (p.237).

Case studies seek out that which is common among cases, but the end result is to present something unique. The uniqueness of each individual case is pervasive and extends to the "nature of the case, the historical background, the physical setting, and other political and economic aspects...." (Stake, 1994, p.238). Walton (1992) would concur and further suggest that the case study is an attempt to investigate how "general social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings" (p. 122). "Cases are always hypotheses" (Walton, 1992, p. 122) and their value lies in showing how complex "processes fit together and unfold in time and space. Both policymakers and people directly participating in processes or situations similar to those described in the cases can then use the stories to re-think basic preconceptions and categories and draw on them as models of how similar systems work and might be changed" (Wieviorka, 1992). Because case studies are likely to produce the best theory (Walton, 1992), I was committed to remain open to the possibilities and to the emerging qualities of my research.

This case study of a reform effort is informed by Stake's (1994) conceptualization that it is a form of research which is "defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p. 236). In addition, it represents Stake's (1994) concepts of both Intrinsic and Instrumental case studies. Certainly, my own enthusiastic interest in

the efforts of these teachers as well as my relationship as a member of this group influenced my decision to follow this process which falls under the definition of an Intrinsic Study. But in addition, I would offer that my study has the qualifiers for the Instrumental Case as well because change as a group process in educational reform is the issue that I seek to examine through this case study.

The teachers were mostly female (one male) in the 28-50 year old age range. Three administrators from the school were interviewed as well. The principal of the school (male, 50-55 year age range) was included as he would ultimately make the decision regarding implementation of the reform ideas. Two assistant principals were also interviewed (one female, 40-45 year old age range; and one male, 30-35 year old age range) and provided an even broader perspective for the study.

As I have said previously, I participated as an active participant/researcher in the project. In this role, I attended all meetings of the "revolution group". The meetings were held every other week. Originally, the meetings were held monthly, after school, in one of the classrooms. After a couple of these afterschool meetings, the group decided that the classroom setting was not as conducive to good, focused work as there tended to be many distractions from the intercom and visiting students. The time of day for those meetings also seemed difficult. Most of the group seemed tired by that time and were not able to give their best dedication to the project. In addition, the group absentee rate was high. So, for the past year the group has been meeting from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 pm on every other Tuesday at the Easy Chair (a local coffee shop). Some of the teachers would arrive early and grab dinner and confiscate one of the back rooms for the gathering.

There was often a social air about the meetings. The teachers seem pleased with themselves that they are "out on a school night" and that they had found a novel way to mix business and pleasure.

Field Texts

Field texts are documents or artifacts created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experiences. A great deal has been written about field notes as they are the mainstay of ethnographic data collection (Emerson, Fret & Shaw, 1995; Sanjek, 1990; Van Maanen, 1988). They become an important text in personal experience methods and serve to "bridge the gap that divides reflections on ethnographic texts from the actual practice of ethnography" (Emerson, et.al, 1995).

Individual Interview

Audiotaped individual interviews were conducted for the purpose of gathering additional information that might be utilized in telling a more complete story of the processes of this group. "Nonscheduled standardized" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 169) interviews were used in that the same questions were asked to each person however, the order was changed as the interview proceeded allowing for a flexible and spontaneous format. An anecdotal style was encouraged, thus bringing the power of narratives to the study (Wetherell & Noddings, 1991).

I also interviewed all other members of the "revolution". I was interested in hearing their views on the same topics listed above. I also believed that it would be important to hear from the school administration, so I planned to interview two different principals. As the interview process evolved, however, I decided that in an effort to

obtain a more complete understanding of the administrative perspective that I should interview all three administrators. And finally, I met with five teachers from "outside" of the effort to ascertain their opinions. These teachers were chosen after consulting with the principal and other members of the reform group.

The interview process was unstructured but I focused on probing for the following information from:

The teachers "inside the group":

- ❖ Their personal versions of how the project began and where they felt it might lead.
- ❖ Their interpretations of their personal dispositions that had allowed them to take on this potentially risky and failure-prone project.
- ❖ Their impressions of the work environment at Boone and the conditions that might promote or prevent innovation.
- ❖ Their speculations regarding the willingness or not of colleagues to join the group.
- ❖ Their reasons for joining the group originally and for continuing their interest and effort.
- ❖ Their hopes and dreams for the "revolution".
- ❖ What they considered the roadblocks to these dreams to be.
- ❖ The aspect of Reggio Emilia that most appealed to them.
- ❖ Their impressions of the speed at which the group was moving.
- ❖ Their impressions regarding the writing of the position paper.

The administrators:

- ❖ The story of the early days at Boone including the move from a junior-high concept to a middle school concept. I also probed for additional information regarding parental concerns and teacher resistance, etc
- ❖ Their view of the current movement and any concerns or suggestions.
- ❖ Their view of the "in" and "out" issue.
- ❖ Their view of how these teachers are different from others in the school.
- ❖ The aspect of Reggio Emilia that most appealed to them.
- ❖ What it would take for the group to be successful.

The teachers "outside" the group:

- ❖ The story of when and how they first heard about this effort.
- ❖ Why they chose not to be involved.
- ❖ Their feelings and impressions from "outside" the group.
- ❖ Their impressions of the leadership styles in the school.
- ❖ How they spend their professional time.
- ❖ Their impressions of how the climate of the school might change if this reform is successful.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are used as a data-gathering strategy (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) in which a group of people interacts with a leader in response to organizing questions. The goal of the focus group is to uncover peoples' understandings, attitudes, and perspectives about the issues which will in turn allow the researcher to understand what people think

as they participate in a group experience. Often, the interaction between the participants during the course of the focus group will stimulate their thinking and produce a deeper level of disclosure about their experiences and the emotions surrounding the experience (Flores & Alonso, 1995).

Data Maintenance and Analysis

Audio, video recordings, and photographs of the subjects were a means of gathering data for this study. These alternative styles of data collection along with the written observational notes offered a great deal of richness and authenticity. They allowed for the true voices of the participants to come through in the research. These means of *gathering* the story assisted in the *retelling* of the story. As I coded these recordings and observational notes, I was guided by my research questions. References to who is joining the group, who is opting out, impressions about colleagues, techniques for including or excluding others, discussions about absenteeism were noted. These references related directly to the literature regarding school reform and change and were highly valuable additions to this study. I also coded for discussions regarding previous change efforts at the school and the climate for such change. Discussions regarding any of principals and their attitudes toward this group, the nervousness regarding sharing information about the movement publicly, the decision to hold most of the meetings outside of the school, were included in my observational notes. True to the definition of ethnography, I found as I reviewed the data that new understandings came to light.

All audio tapes, video tapes, and field notes have been secured in a locked file cabinet in my home and kept under my supervision. No others have had access and the

tapes will be destroyed at the close of the project. I have coded my own tapes and notes. I shared the transcription duties with a professional transcriptionist.

Validity

One of the dangers of participant research is that one may grow blinders to the problems or less positive outcomes of the study. In order to retain a critical eye, I have tried to adopt a skeptical attitude.....one that questioned, played "devils advocate" and looked beyond the obvious. By interviewing a wide variety of teachers and administrators, I believe that I have gained a more complete perspective of the issues. Also, by sharing my fieldnotes with my major professor, with the members of my research support group, and later with the reform group; I was challenged to collect, produce and notice those bits of evidence that were not consistent with my initial understandings.

My position in the Study

Important characteristics of qualitative research are the "use of self as an instrument" (Eisner, 1998, p. 33) and "the presence of voice in the text" (Eisner, 1998, p.36). This display of my own signature is stated from the beginning as I realize that it is impossible to detach myself from my research. I further recognize the importance of identifying my own biases and ideology for the study and realize that it is this very position that will allow me to engage the situation and make sense of it. As Janesick (1994) has offered, I tried continually to "raise awareness of my own biases" (p. 212) and to "stay attuned to making decisions regarding ethical concerns, because this is part of life in the field" (p. 212). This attention to the unexpected that may arise is an

important position as it has allowed me to remain open to the many possibilities of the research. It is with this understanding in mind that I now share with the reader my reasons and desires for participation in this study.

My reasons and desires for participation in this experience are multifaceted. First, I am a mother of two daughters who have each spent three years at the Boone Middle School. While many of their experiences in the school were positive and profound, there were also many experiences that were difficult and possibly damaging. During the course of their combined six years in the school, I came to know several of the teachers and principals who participated in this study. I found many of them to be passionate and excellent teachers. I purposefully sought them out when the Duck Pond Project was beginning and since then our relationship has grown more intense and intimate. Participation together in a community project, the filming of a video about the project, travel to Europe for professional development, and now the "revolution" have combined to cement our friendship and ability to work well together. While I am thrilled to have this opportunity to work along side these wonderful people on behalf of the current and future teachers and children at the Boone Middle School; I must admit to feeling a sense of disappointment that my own children will not be the recipients of what might transcend at the school.

Next, I was an active participant researcher in the project. My position could not be one of removed, clinical researcher. I served a purpose in the group and I was there to make a difference. While I have never taught at the Middle School level, I felt somewhat informed about the school culture at Boone due to the six years that my own children

spent in the school. Therefore, in matters related to school organization and structuring, I would usually defer to those teachers and administrators who had the expertise.

However, in matters related to curriculum, student needs and interests, I was a more vocal presence.

From the beginning, it was my intense desire that this attempt at school reform for the Boone be successful. I committed myself to assisting with the process as mother, researcher, and reformer. In order to temper my passion for this experience, I was reminded of the foundation on which the Coalition for Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992) was founded. These schools sought to assist their students in becoming both empathic and skeptical human beings. My empathy for this project and for the people who were toiling in it was enormous. I believe that I have achieved a strong state of intersubjectivity where a high level of understanding and compassion has been reached. On the other hand, I have had to push myself to develop a skeptical and more critical eye for the work of the "revolutionaries". It was because of this challenge to develop this side of my position that I read the literature on change, resistance, and organizational culture. These works were not about the joy and pride that come from collaborating for a better system of schooling for children. Instead they told the hard tales of the pain and likelihood of failure that was typical in school reforms. I hope that this multifaceted vision will be obvious in the retelling of this story.

And finally, it was my desire to conduct a democratic research. The purpose of the study was twofold: to increase my own knowledge base, but also to assist with the development of the reform effort. I shared tentative assumptions and preliminary

interpretations with the group as a matter of course. I did not feel that this disclosure of information was harmful to the study, rather, I am certain that this technique served to strengthen the processes of the group as they then had the opportunity to share alternative views and insights.

APPENDIX C
Protocol to Accompany IRB Request

Lynn T. Hill, Investigator

Justification of Project

The purpose of this project is to follow (as a participant / researcher) a group of teachers and administrators from the Blacksburg Middle School (BMS) as they consider a major curricular and philosophical change. Middle school education has often been ignored in the literature. Emphasis tends to be given to the early years of education and then again to the later years. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) called for fundamental changes in middle schools after noting that many adolescents, doubting their abilities and fearing failure, invest less of themselves in academics than is desirable. The curious history of school reform tells a telling tale in which reform advocates in legislative or administrative positions enforce change. These "top-down" efforts are difficult to implement without strong support from the practitioners (Herd & Sawyers, 1997).

This ethnographic study proposes to follow along as a group of practitioners attempt to change the face of education in their school. Particular emphasis will be placed on the formation of this "bottom-up" group, i.e. how some teachers and administrators end up "inside" and others "outside" the reform movement. In addition, exploration into the history of innovation and change efforts at this particular school will be completed in an attempt to determine how this history has contributed to the conditions for additional reform.

Procedures

The participants will be fifteen (15-20) teachers and two administrators from the Blacksburg Middle School. Most of the teachers (13) are members of the group that has formed in an effort to re-invent the curriculum and philosophy for the Middle School based on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Several additional teachers from "outside" the reform will be recruited with assistance from the administration. The teachers are mostly female (one male) in the 28 - 50 year old age range. Two administrators will also be involved and will be chosen based on their history with the reform group. The principal of the school (male, 50-55 year age range) will be involved as he will ultimately make the decision regarding implementation of the reform ideas. An assistant principal will also be involved (male or female 35-40 year old age range) and should add an additional perspective to the study.

In order to conduct this research I will meet with the "reform group" during their regularly scheduled group meetings. They schedule these meetings themselves, participate voluntarily, and often hold these meetings away from school in a coffee shop or at the home of one of the participants. I will serve as a participant / researcher. I will be an active member of the group who contributes as needed to the process. In addition, during these meetings I plan to take field notes using a laptop computer, audiotape or shorthand. I will also take photographs of the session during moments that are particularly representational of the study. There will also be times when I will videotape a session. The use of videotaping will be announced to the group ahead of time so that

the participants will have the opportunity to decline the participation in this data collection technique. I plan to attend these meetings for at least a year.

In addition, I plan to interview several members of this group as well as other Blacksburg Middle School (BMS) faculty who are not members of the group. Interviews will be set up based on the interviewee's preference of time and location. Each interview should last about one hour and will be audiotaped. Some participants may be interviewed more than once.

The interview process will be unstructured but will generally contain an emphasis on the following:

For the teachers "inside the group" I plan to probe for the following information:

Their personal versions of how the project began and where they feel it may lead.

Their interpretations of their personal dispositions that have allowed them to take on this potentially risky and failure-prone project.

Their impressions of the work environment at BMS and the conditions that might promote or prevent innovation.

Their speculations regarding the willingness or not of colleagues to join the group.

Why they joined the group originally and why they have remained committed.

For the administrators:

The story of the early days at BMS including the move from a junior-high concept to a middle-school concept. Probe for additional information regarding parent concerns and teacher resistance, etc.

Their view of the current movement and any concerns or suggestions.

Their view of the "in" and "out" issue.

How these teachers are different from others in the school.

For the teachers "outside the group"

The story of when and how they first heard about this effort.

Why they chose not to be involved.

Their feelings and impressions from "outside" the effort.

Towards the end of the research period, I would like to conduct a final focus group interview with all members from "inside" the group. The purpose of this interview will be to share initial research interpretations and to elicit the groups' reactions to the research. It is my hope that this group interview will allow for a shared understanding of the research topic.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with this study. Should any risk (emotional, physical or other) become apparent once the study begins, guidance will be sought from my departmental advisor.

The benefits of participating in this project would include the opportunity to analyze a personal position within the reform effort as well as making a contribution to the body of knowledge that may assist other similar efforts.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, the teachers and administrators, and school will be given code names. The code names will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office in Wallace Hall.

Audio and video recordings as well as photographs of subjects will be a means of gathering data for this study. These alternative styles of data collection offer a great deal of richness and authenticity. They allow for the true voices of the participants to come through in the research. These means of gathering the story will assist in the retelling of the story. As I code these recordings, I will search for information regarding the building of the group. References to who is joining the group, who is opting out, impressions about colleagues, techniques for including or excluding others, discussions about absenteeism, etc. will be noted. These references will relate directly to the literature regarding school reform and implementation. They should be highly valuable additions to this study. Also, I will code for discussions regarding previous change efforts at the school and the climate for such change. Such discussion could include (but not be limited to) the mention of the principal and his attitude toward this group, the nervousness regarding sharing information about the movement publicly, the decision to hold most of the meetings outside the school, etc.

All photographs, video and audio tapes will be secured in a locked file cabinet in my office in Wallace Hall and kept under my supervision. No others will have access and the tapes will be destroyed at the close of the project. I will analyze my own tapes and notes. I will share the transcription duties with a professional transcriptionist.

Informed Consent

Please see attached a copy of the Informed Consent Forms as well as a letter of consent from the Montgomery County School System.

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent for Participants
of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: **Moments of Transcendence: The Story of a Middle School Reform Inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach**

Investigator: **Lynn T. Hill**
Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Victoria Fu**

I. The Purpose of this Research / Project

The purpose of this research is to follow a group of teachers and administrators from the Blacksburg Middle School as they consider a major curricular and philosophical change. Particular attention will be given to how the group forms and how some teachers and administrators end up "inside" and others "outside" the reform movement. In addition, I plan to explore the history of innovation and change efforts at the school that may have served to shape the conditions for additional reform.

The subjects of this study will be fifteen middle school teachers and two administrators.

II. Procedures

In order to conduct this research I would like to meet with you, the teachers, during your regularly scheduled group meetings. I will make myself available to meet with you wherever and whenever you schedule these meetings. During the course of the meetings, I will serve as a participant/researcher. I will be an active member of the group who contributes as needed to the process. In addition, during these meetings I plan to take field notes using a laptop computer or shorthand. I will also take photographs of the session during moments that are particularly representational of the study. There will also be times when I will videotape or audiotape a session. The use of videotaping will be announced to you ahead of time so that you might have the opportunity to decline this data collection technique. I will also collect any documents that are generated by the group such as, but not limited to surveys, lists, philosophical papers, etc. I plan to attend your meetings for at least a year. Data which has been collected prior to this consent will also be utilized in the analysis of this study.

In addition, I would like to interview several members of your group as well as other Blacksburg Middle School faculty who are not members of the group. If you should agree to be interviewed, I would set up the interviews based on your preference of time and location. Each interview should last about one hour and will be audiotaped. During the interview we would explore the processes involved in developing this reform effort including some discussion about membership. We would also discuss the school climate for change. Some participants may be interviewed more than once. At the end of my study, I would like to conduct a focus group meeting with the entire group of teachers who have been participating in this reform effort. The purpose of this group interview

will be to share initial interpretations and to elicit the group's response to the research to date.

III. Risks

There are no known risks associated with this study other than what you would experience in everyday activity. Should any risk (emotional, physical or other) become apparent once the study begins, guidance will be sought from my advisor and others.

IV. Benefits of this Project

The benefits of participating in this project would include the opportunity to analyze your place in the reform effort and to contribute to a body of knowledge that may assist other similar efforts.

Understand that no promises or guarantees of benefits are being made to encourage you to participate.

If you are interested in a summary of the research, I would be happy to supply this for you at your request.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

As per the agreement with the Montgomery County Schools, anonymity will be attempted. Within the written portion of this project, teachers and administrators will be given code names as will the school, however, this does not guarantee anonymity. Certain people close to the situation may be able to see through the codes.

As stated previously, photographs, video and audio tapes will be utilized during the process of this project. The pictures and tapes will be secured in a locked file cabinet in Wallace Hall and kept under my supervision. No others will have access and the data will be destroyed at the close of the project. I will analyze my own tapes and notes. I will share the transcription duties with a professional transcriptionist.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose without penalty. Should you prefer to withdraw from this study at any time, you should contact the faculty advisor, departmental representative or the research division chair listed on the last page of this form.

VII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Human Development and by the Montgomery County School System.

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Lynn T. Hill
Investigator

540-552-6615

Dr. Victoria Fu
Faculty Advisor

540-231-4796

Dr. Gloria Bird
Departmental IRB Representative

540-231-4791

T. Hurd
Chair, IRB
Research Division

540-231-9359

APPENDIX E
IRB Approval Letter



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Sponsored Programs

301 Burruss Hall
Blacksburg, VA, 24061-0249
(540)231-5281 Fax: (540)231-4384

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lynn T. Hill, Victoria R. Fu
Human Development 0416

FROM: H. T. Hurd 
Director

DATE: May 4, 1999

SUBJECT: IRB EXEMPTION APPROVAL/"Moments of Transcendence:
The story of a Middle School Reform Inspired by the Reggio
Emilia Approach"- IRB #99-150

I have reviewed your request to the IRB for exemption for the above
referenced project. I concur that the research falls within the exempt status.

Best wishes.

HTH/baj

cc: Gloria W. Bird

*A Land-Grant University—125th Anniversary
An Equal Opportunity / Affirmative Action Institution*

APPENDIX F
Letter to and from Montgomery County Schools

APPENDIX F

September 15, 1998

Jim Sellers
Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Montgomery County Public Schools
Junkin Street
Christiansburg, Virginia
24073

Dear Jim,

Dr. Victoria Fu and I met yesterday with Gary McCoy regarding a teacher-initiated inquiry-based project that is ongoing at the Blacksburg Middle School. During our discussion we determined that we would like to share with you the details of this project and to elicit any suggestions that you might have.

As you may remember, the project began during the summer of 1997 when Vickie and I formed a community of educators to begin to study and research the Reggio Emilia Approach to Education. Through the Duck Pond Project, teachers from preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school and college came together to imagine an integrated curriculum fueled by student interest. The experience was so inspiring that we formed an expanded research group to travel to Reggio Emilia, Italy in January, 1998 for the purpose of continued study and collaboration. Two teachers from Blacksburg Middle School were participants in this research group. One year later, this project has taken root in various schools and universities across the country. In Blacksburg, the project has evolved into a focused, teacher-led inquiry into the possibility of informing practice in the Blacksburg Middle School. The teachers have invited Vickie and I to participate as they study together and plan the next steps and to chronicle the process of change.

Meanwhile, I am working on my Ph.D. and have chosen to study the Reggio Emilia Approach with particular emphasis on learning communities and the change processes involved as teachers begin to reflect on their practice. This notion of teachers as researchers is very evident in the Blacksburg Middle School group. In meeting with the teachers it became evident that this innovative project can serve as the focus of my study. The teachers are aware of my plan. My research will be ethnographic and participatory. I will take part as both a member of the inquiry group and as the documenter of the experiences. Since the group began to meet in June, 1998, I have been the "recorder" - and have tried to capture the process of their innovative work, studying and planning together. I cannot at this time project a timeline for this study, as it will emerge and will be negotiated among the teachers themselves. However, I

could imagine that they will continue to meet on a regular basis at least throughout this school year with the intention of implementing their developed plan during the next school year.. Again, the emphasis for this study would be on this teacher group. The project is inherent to the functions of these teachers who are engaged in exploring and creating innovative teaching approaches in their school. Students will not be involved in this project. The teachers are informed of my interest in following this process for my dissertation. It is planned that if personal interviews of individual teachers are needed, individual teachers will be contacted and consent will be obtained from each of them.

Gary, Vickie and I feel that this letter to you is in order so that you are informed of the project and my role. Gary felt that approval from you can formalize this project. However, we all felt that we wanted to seek your advice as to proper protocol under these circumstances. I would very much appreciate any suggestions or feedback that you might have for me regarding this project.

And finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in such an innovative project in the Montgomery County Schools. The passion and desire to provide the highest quality program to their students is evident in the teachers whom I have observed at Blacksburg Middle School. For me, the experience is inspirational!

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 231-8666 (work) or 552-6615 (home). Again, thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Lynn T. Hill
Coordinator of Curriculum / Instructor
Virginia Tech Department of Family and Child Development

cc: Gary McCoy
Dr. Victoria Fu
Fred Morton



Montgomery County Public Schools

TELEPHONE 540-382-5100
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200 JUNKIN STREET CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA 24073

October 20, 1998

Ms. Lynn Hill
Coordinator of Curriculum/Instructor
Virginia Tech Department of Family and Child Development
Blacksburg, VA 24061-0416

Dear Ms. Hill,

I am in receipt of your letter requesting permission to conduct a teacher-initiated inquiry-based project at Blacksburg Middle School. I understand that you have discussed this project with Gary McCoy, principal of that building. I should advise you of school board policy in reference to conducting research projects:

- (1) No student names, school names or identifiers should be used without prior written permission from the parents, students and the superintendent of schools.*
- (2) Any publication, announcement, or use of the results of this survey beyond those in your request will require additional WRITTEN permission from the superintendent prior to use.*
- (3) All research must be cleared through the building principal PRIOR to beginning any study in a school. If multiple sessions are needed, each session should be cleared with the principal in advance and the researcher(s) should check in and out of the school through the principal's office for each session.*
- (4) All research must be planned and conducted in an effort to minimize lost instructional time for the students involved.*
- (5) Any other restrictions applied by the administration of the site school should be strictly adhered to by all members of the research team.*

Please do not hesitate to call if you have any other questions or concerns. I wish you the best as you conduct this research project.

Respectfully,

Patricia A. Fenton
Supervisor

C: Gary McCoy, Principal at Blacksburg Middle School

APPENDIX G

Synopsis of Interviews with the Protagonists

A Discussion of Previous Innovations at Boone:

Felicia: “During the last principal’s tenure we had the change to a middle school concept. The Vanguard commission said that there was not a middle school concept in place at Boone. This was disturbing and alarming to many. Although if you had been really thoughtful about it you should have expected it. But no one likes to hear that you are not the best that you can be. We definitely needed team identity.”

Daphne: “We looked at the team approach, schedule changes, room changes, bell changes, heterogeneous vs homogeneous grouping, tracking, advisory, inclusion. We wanted to create a sense of smallness in a large multi-building campus. Each teacher was assigned to committees to work on different aspects. Some teachers could not make the changes necessary and moved to the high school where the secondary system was more firmly entrenched. Rumors were easily spread about the change.....people were on edge about the possibility of displacement. Teachers received re-certification points for working on these committees after hours during the year-long planning process.”

Becky: “The last principal is the one who really supported our efforts to reassemble ourselves as a true middle school. We got ourselves arranged so that teammates were adjacent to each other instead of across the parking lot from each other. We detracked the school – the whole inclusion program got heavily underway. It was a very dynamic time and of course as you might imagine, a very scary time. Change is a scary thing and

some people felt a little threatened and a little uncertain and even those of us who claimed to like change were in panic mode. The real scary thing for most people was the whole de-leveling – it was just horrifying – not just for faculty but for parents. We had a hard sell job of this whole transformation to deal with parents too. And I remember having many, many parent meetings and parents were concerned and outspoken and a lot of them didn't want us to do that. So a lot of it meant having to get your ducks in a row in terms of having to defend what you were doing and who you were doing it to and coming across not like you were paying lip service but you had really done your homework and knew what you were talking about and believed that it was the best thing for kids.

During this time there were some colleagues who were trying to subvert the process behind the scenes. They were basically saying you can make me do this because I'm just a teacher, but once I shut my door I am the master of my own universe.

At the beginning it felt like a top down reform because Jim was very dynamic and energetic....but then you started listening to the things that appalled him about the middle school and you realized that he was right – it was havoc and confusion all day long.

We had lots of time for talking through the issues and doing some reading. Some people went to see other middle schools to see how they worked. But it all moved pretty fast. A

year and a half is fast for a school that had been operating in a certain way for 20 some years.”

Janis: “I was a student teacher during the big change. They were in committees and they had been doing it for awhile I think on different topic areas. I think that most of the people were like “yeah what goes around comes around, we’ve been there before”. That sort of cynical talk about change and “oh here we go again, throwing the baby out with the bath water”. There was always a lot of chatter and I remember thinking “boy, a lot of people are ready for retirement”.

Nick: “With the math program, we explored it and decided that there is a reason behind it and that it’s good for kids. Some traditional-types just can’t see it. You see, there is just so much risk involved in change. And its like you are giving up what you have stood for and what you have believed in. We can’t be embarrassed to say that three years ago we as a staff believed that the traditional way of approaching math was the right way. We have to be willing as a staff to grow and change.”

A Description of Leadership style at Boone:

Becky: “During the reform the last principal’s style was to delegate. He solicited your input and then asked people if they would be interested in being on certain committees. The committees mirrored the self-study issues. There were committees on physical plant, curriculum, tracking. He always made you feel like you were important and special – a

real important cog in the wheel which is speaking to a basic human need to be recognized. He also had an amazing way of listening to you when you came to him with a concern or a problem. He was very sincere and very knowledgeable.

Nick has always supported his teachers 100%. I mean he is a good honest person who cares about people and people from whether they are little people to big people and so that is important in terms of just continuing to let the teachers in this school grow and expand and try things that they would like to.”

Ashley: “Nick is a smart cookie and a people person and is well respected. He’s also consistent.”

Janis: “Nick’s leadership style is so inclusive. He is about consensus-building and he wants everyone to be respected where they are. Sometimes it is frustrating because you want him to tell people “look, this is the way it’s going to be”. But he is not going to be that kind of guy. He will listen to anyone that wants to talk to him and if he doesn’t get feedback, I think he gets frustrated and probably a little hurt. Sometimes I think that a consensus is a cop-out. But he wants his role to be more of the mediator and he wants the people to be the spearheaders. He’s very empowering in that way.

I can't say enough good things about him because he is all about kids. And everyday is a new day with him. No matter what happened yesterday, today he is going to start fresh. That is a special person who can do that."

Daphne: "Nick is very much open to change. He also contributed to a sense of community at BOONE. He initiated celebration days where we all came together for nice occasions that were not necessarily school-related. He also insists that if you have a good idea you should bring it forward and let's see what we can do about it."

Felicia: "Sometimes I think he believes in all things for all people. I think there have been times when I have thought "why is he letting that teacher do that?" And now the longer that he has been here I trust that I don't know that I need to know what he said to them privately. I think it is just a trust issue, now."

Mandy: "Nick has never pushed for a whole school philosophy because students do have different needs. Sometimes I think that its ok that we have so many different teaching styles in our school. But on the other hand, sometimes I think that it would be nice if we all had the same philosophy.

I think that he trusts us as, you know, professionals. I think he trusts us that we are going to do what we can. Nick would fight to the end for us.

He's a listener. He's quiet and he lets you talk and he doesn't cut you off and tell you the rules and regulations. He'll let you talk for two hours if you need to. He's got so much going on but he gives you the time and he just makes you feel wonderful. He's always complimentary.

On my first day on the job at teacher orientation he told us "no matter what I'm always going to support you – if you're in a conflict with a parent, I'm going to support you".

He's also often the first person to arrive at the school each day at around 6 am and there are a lot of nights that I'm downtown eating dinner with my family and I see him pull out of the school around 6:30 at night. And then he has night meetings to go to all the time. I definitely would not want his job."

Gus: "Nick rescued me from the high school. He puts notes in my box telling me that he's glad that I'm here. That never happened once in all the years at the high school. They just kept putting notes in my file saying I was a problem."

Mary: "Nick is not dictatorial – he is democratic in how he makes decisions. He gets your input and wants to know how you feel about it. He really tries to make sure that we all feel like we are getting our needs met as well.

During this whole math fiasco, Nick has been really supportive. He goes to all the meetings and he went to the high school with our teachers. He finally cut the public meeting short when that Tech professor was having too much floor time and too much power. The bottom line is that he wants what's best for kids and what is going to help the majority of children.

He treats us like professionals. He trusts us to do what we are supposed to do. He doesn't come checking up on us. It's very empowering.”

Kim: “I think the administration here is really good about seeking input from people. I think that they are agreeable to trying things that people want to try. Patricia Seller is good because she obviously wants a certain quality of performance and yet she doesn't dictate in the way she gets there, necessarily.”

Stan: “At Radford's training it was all very preached against top-down. All very collaborative and facilitative. Consensus among people you know and lead by example and those kinds of things and in the back of my mind I always thought that I wanted to be the kind of administrator that would never be stuck up in that office that I would have a lot of contact with teachers and that I would keep my hand at teaching by volunteering to teach classes.

Now there are occasions where I get disillusioned. There are occasions when philosophically you want to forget how bad top down can be. Sometimes when you have to be tough..... when I have to go on and say well gosh, I'm the Assistant Principal."

Lance: "Nick basically just lets us do our thing and believes in us as professionals enough to know what we are doing and to do our jobs. And its not until he sees that is not happening that he would step in. He trusts his teachers."

A Discussion of the Aspects of Reggio Emilia (RE) that most Appeal:

Gus: "One of the things that most appeals is that with RE you can take the time to look at things more deeply. There is a real emphasis on quality vs quantity. And in the long run you learn more. I also like the idea that you can use art to go more in depth with a project. There is more learning and preparation and personal growth that can be applied to the next things that are done and it all becomes the process and not the product.

I also like the idea that it engages the individual to be involved in teaching themselves and so it allows the journey to be more about the teacher and the student working together and exchanging ideas instead of it being a more hierarchical things and it also allows that child to emerge as an individual – which is to me the goal of education. So the Reggio idea sort of builds in the idea that we can trust one another because we are all saying that we are in agreement about the way that we feel about the students.

With Reggio you can teach the individual and teach them how to deal with other people and more importantly how to deal with themselves, to understand themselves better to understand other people better. But they learn in a more constructive and longer-lasting more life-altering way – you know not by regurgitation.”

Mandy: “Because its what kids need. The way the learning happens is so humane and respectful and kids need that . They need to feel that people are listening to them and that they are free to express. And it needs to happen now in middle school where all the problems begin to manifest – eating disorders, abuse, etc.

I like it because it’s so humane and kids and parents don’t get lost in the shuffle. Everyone is talking to each other and listening to each other – and isn’t that how we learn?”

Patricia: “The part that appeals is that it is student directed.”

Felicia: “Community building and the idea of being with the children for a long period of time and really getting to know them and helping them get connected to others with similar interests. The relationship piece is the key – the foundation.”

Daphne: “The majority of students need the chance to see themselves and to experience learning in multiple ways. This is the developmental stage of this age group – a need to

belong, a need to connect socially and a need to see themselves as successful. It all fits with the Reggio Approach.”

Becky: “I like the project based learning. Its nice to see the kids enthusiastically picking out what it is that they want to do.”

Ashley: “I like the projects and the fact that teachers can collaborate together. I also like the using all the different ways for students to express their learning – like you know not just a test.”

Janis: “The representation of knowledge. It’s about assessment using something other than an opscan or multiple choice or something. So I’m really interested in documentation and how the kids can probably do a lot that themselves – I’m liberated by the fact that they can document themselves.”

Mary: “I first got interested because I heard Janis talking about it and I have the utmost respect for her. She is just wonderful. She kind of drew me in. But the part that I’m most interested in is the multi-age grouping and the project rooms and the idea of teaching with another teacher and how we can make it fun for the kids. I can get out of bed every morning looking forward to going and being with those kids and I like the motto “Nothing without joy”.”

Nick: “I think that the bottom line is that its good for kids. And another thing is that it makes connections among people. We depend on each other in a community and how we learn or what we learn affects others. I like the idea of kids understanding how they fit in the community from a young age.”

Considering the Vision for the Reform:

Janis: “The total vision is that all my bestest friends – that think so wisely- would be able to pal together and that we would kick everyone else out. That is the dream, you know, not the politically correct thing. Also we would kick everyone out of the East wing and we would take that space over and we would have these little rooms that were set up for different things and then we would have that big huge room that was gonna be our documentation and representation room with stuff everywhere and kids working all over the place and that we could all live happily ever after.”

Ashley: “I would like to see everyone together. You could bring all these different experiences together and then hammer out units or lessons and instead of having 6 years of experience you’d have like 40 years experience. And it would be such fun and so enjoyable because you know – it takes a village.

We’d be pulling in tons of resources because we would all have different things to offer and then the kids would be working on projects that they are interested in and it would be by choice. It would really be student-oriented.”

Felicia: I'm not sure that we're going to be able to start with all three grades – so I'd like to see us start with 6th and 7th . I also don't want this to be only for the parents who are involved and say yes I want this for my child, because then you might leave out some of the other kids who really need it. We will need that sense of community in order to be successful, so we have to work real hard on our population.

I'd like to see us be small. Small is best or else little pods – family pods that allow real community to grow. I would also hope that we would be on this property and everyone who is a part of the effort brings with them a spirit of adventure. I would like to see everyone feeling a great sense of ownership. So that on a Sunday afternoon it would be fun to come and paint and do things and that it doesn't ever seem like a chore. I hope also that we somehow don't have to worry about having difficult conversations and that we will keep having them – because that is so exciting. My vision is that I want it to be colorful and I want it to have a sense of community.”

Mandy: “I would love it if the whole school could be Reggio-based. But that is probably not realistic – even though it would be the best thing for the kids. There are just people who are not ready for something so child-directed.”

Gus: “The middle school is the perfect place to start an effort like this one. Maybe because there is less lime-light on our piece of the educational pie, we might have more chance or opportunity to make it happen without a lot of adversity.

My really big dream would be that this becomes a successful model that answers not only the questions that we want it to answer, but I think it has the possibilities and potential to address a lot of other issues that are continuing to come up – everything from classroom overcrowding to how students learn to how they can get the most from their school experience.

My dream would be that Littleton, CO would never happen again. It would be about relationships and about accepting people and honoring their differences and realizing how their differences make them strong and inevitably aid you.”

Mary: “In my wildest dreams, I would like to see this system be county-wide.”

What are the Dispositions of the group members?

Mandy: “I think that it takes open-mindedness. You’ve also got to be a little risky and have a little bit of courage to take on those Tech parents who are going to come down hard on us because it’s a little bit intimidating when a Ph.D. is coming down your throat.

You've also got to be committed and stick with it once you make the decision to take it on."

Patricia: "Well what I find is that a lot of people when they are real passionate if they don't get a start then they will lose that passion or get worn down and I think that that will be a real shame. Yes, I would hate that. Because if they have it for this they really have it for teaching and learning all around and that's the real key. They are also life-long learners. And they have sincerity about teaching kids."

Felicia: "I don't necessarily like groups. I like to do it on my own. I won't say that I am not a community person but I really am self sufficient in terms of wanting to study things on my own. But I love having colleagues that share with me what they do. I don't necessarily enjoy them feeling like I need to do it too. Nor do I feel that they need to do what I do."

Daphne: "I'm a pretty structured person and I like to have a plan and a task to achieve."

Becky: "I'm a person who gets a lot of energy from other people and I work well under pressure. I would just look for opportunities to do other things with other people and in some cases especially on the technology end, I got in early and started doing it before it was kind of out there for everybody. I like those sorts of leading-edge experiences. Also, I don't make promises that I can't keep and I think that this has certainly been

appealing to people who are looking to find places to spend some money and invest some resources.

In our group I think you see people who have an educational philosophy that has come to be over time and they truly believe it and they can defend it to anybody. Then there are the younger teachers who have been in the system for a shorter period of time but must have some of those same traits because they just aren't satisfied with the status quo.

There are also those of us who have pretty strong opinions and strong personalities and can overwhelm the others. I think that we are much better talkers than listeners.”

Ashley: “I think that some of us are natural theorists and philosophers and can take that and put it into practice. And then there are others of us who do a lot of things in practice and don't realize that it is tied to a particular theory or philosophy. It all meshes very well as a group.

I don't want to stagnate as a teacher and whenever I get the chance I like to find out new ways to teach – it reaffirms what you believe in. I make the time to do this because I believe in it and I'm dedicated to it and I guess maybe it's the Math part of me. Also, I like being in on things from the beginning and not coming in later.”

Janis: “I think it takes a teacher who already has a good time in their work. And one who sees possibility and has hope for the future.”

Gus: “I’m really good at the philosophy part and at the “doing” part, but the planning stage is not where I feel I can make a contribution.”

Herb: “My style is to say “let’s get on with it and see what happens and see how it shapes up” and if you don’t like the way its going then we can change it as we cross bridges. I like to get on and do things and in carpentry I am not a very good finish person. I can do all the other stuff but when it comes to all that fine detail, it’s just not my style.”

Mary: “We’re all supportive of one another – both professionally and personally. Some of us are worker-bees and some of us are thinker-bees.

I’m just more task-oriented. But in a strong community, you need all kinds.”

Nick: “We have a staff that is committed- a staff that is going to make it work. And we guarantee that – so just step back and watch and we will make it work. And when you’ve got a staff that is committed and when you’ve got people excited about teaching in this way – then its going to work. And I am a firm believer in the passion of teachers.

It's not so much who they are as what they are. It's the way that they were taught, brought up, the life they lived coming up through the years. It starts with a connection to someone. If one or two people have got a passion for something and they talk about it with others then a little spark happens and over the course of a couple discussions, a change begins to happen.”

Previous involvement with Social Movements:

Janis: “ I worked with the VA Public interest Research Group which kind of like a Ralph Nader organization – a consumer awareness organization who were watch dogs for things going on in government. And I worked really closely with a group called Common Cause when I was in college. I've also been President of the PTA and always one of the ones to speak at public hearings and try to get them to pump money into the schools. So I think I've been a voice.”

Ashley: “No – except for the math program. But I haven't really been a formal advocate just informally. But since I've been a part of this group, I find that I'm not as tolerant as I used to be.”

Becky: “I'm real active in the AAUW and in the gender equity conference and issues of equity that has to do with girls in particular. When I was younger I was a regular attendee at hunger marches and stuff like that.”

Daphne: “You’re looking at a child of the 60’s.”

Mandy: “When I was in college I was big into animal rights movements and I was big in the student group and there was a city group. We had signs and we went and marched on the streets in front of fur shops and that was pretty exciting. I felt like it made a difference. I was very passionate about it. People talked about testing for cosmetics and that would make me cry and I would start yelling and crying. I would show them pamphlets of what happens to veal cows and maybe I even got some people to stop eating veal. I don’t think on a huge level I made a huge difference, but I felt so passionate that I definitely affected the people in my life.

Also, my mom was the person who started the New School and I watched her all my life. When she wants something to happen she works really hard until it happens.”

Impressions regarding Roadblocks to Reform:

Gus: “Learning to collaborate is really scary – it has been my whole life.

How to maintain the purity of Reggio and the idea of what we are trying to accomplish and at the same time meet all the sols and exist within a framework like the one we have in public schools.

Figuring out how to get small enough classes so that we can give the individual attention and form a relationship with each kid.”

Mandy: “I think it is really hard sometimes for teachers to work cooperatively – truly, truly cooperatively. And I think that it is our adult egos which get in the way.

Collaboration does not seem to be an American trait – we don’t like to share the limelight or share the credit.

Some people are really worried about the daily schedule.

Parents might be a roadblock.

The biggest worry is collaboration – because this is a very, very important part of Reggio Emilia and if we can’t do it then how are we supposed to model it for the kids? This is a hard thing to bring up at a meeting because there will be finger pointing and I think it might be very hurtful to bring it up and talk about it.

Keeping this revolution as a priority for the members of the group. I worry that we are going to loose more members if we don’t start making some progress. Maybe this group and the inquiry group should merge.

We need a more acceptable leadership style.”

Patricia: “That people will see this as just some fad or something that will pass. That is a suspicion that people have sometimes.

The word “revolution” may be a roadblock to others accepting it.

Some people are put off just by the nature of change.

As administrators we spend a lot of time trying to bring a faculty together, we would not want to see one group set apart from the rest.

There are a lot of parents who are suspicious of new innovations. There are many who are already plotting their child’s chances of being valedictorian of their graduating class, so there will need to be a lot of justification to these parents.

If anyone perceives this as being a “premiere’ program than everyone will want it and then it will loose its effectiveness.

What are you going to do about special education students?”

Felicia: “I don’t know how much more criticism this school can take.

We will have to be able to let go of our need for total ownership and learn to collaborate.
For me this is going to be very hard.

How will we make sure that we each have accountability to ourselves and to each other?
How do we get everyone to buy into this weird thing – even the custodians will have to
buy in.

We've got to find some funding.

How are we going to justify that the child is learning – what is the evidence?

The idea of risk and the fear of pie in your face in public is very real.

I'm fearful of having a bad experience with these people whom I care about – it makes
me cautious.

Finding ways to let some of the rest of us have some ownership – not just the people who
traveled to RE”

Daphne: “Parents who are going to say “so you plan to use my child as a guinea pig?”

We don't want to be seen as an elite group.

Writing the position paper was a very daunting process because writing as a group is a hard thing to do. Time components.”

Becky: “Finding a way for a fairly large group to be productive when working with all the different time and energy constraints.

Finding ways to keep friendly, chatty people on task.

Allowing each person to contribute when they have the extra time so that frustration does not set in.

The sol tests give you pause.”

Ashley: “ We will probably have to supplement the math program with some direct instruction – how will this look in a Reggio school?”

Janis: “TIME. Everyone is just swamped.

If we take all these great teachers out of the traditional Boone to put them in the Reggio Boone, then there will be gaping holes. Maybe this sounds arrogant, but we bring a certain amount of energy to the 7th grade and when we leave it – it will suffer.

Segmenting the school could create factions that will be a threat”

Herb: “The effort moves too slowly and risks losing momentum and fizzling. If there is any chance of snob appeal attached to it, I think you will have a big rush toward one or the other whichever is considered the most likely to be successful – factions in the school = not good.

People feel “if it ain’t broke – don’t fix it” Lots of resistance to change.

Some teachers will say “oh gosh there they go making us look bad””

Mary: “After watching all the math teachers put themselves on the line and get shot down and lose some sense of reputation, I’d have to think about that – and besides that you start second-guessing yourself.

Sometimes within our group we have conflict and we disagree. There are going to be times when it’s hard, but we just have to keep up with where we are going and it will be worth it.

Teachers and administrators above us have to approve of what we want to do. This is a huge roadblock. A lot of people are not open to change and say if its not broke.....

The demands of family and the job are roadblocks. Reggio is not the most important priority. It is a back burner sort of thing because it is not the priority that is looking you the next morning (plans, grading, sick children). It's a real hump to get over.

We don't want to appear elitist or excludist.

Sometimes I think that we collaborate too much and then we never get anything done.

We're so afraid of stepping on each others toes."

Nick: "We wouldn't want to say to the whole faculty: this is the ONLY way to go.

Sometimes when a group of people who feel strongly about something come up against opposition from another group.....it makes those teachers who believe in it much stronger. Because what happens is every time there is opposition, it makes those teachers go back and re-test their philosophy and re-test their thinking and so it comes down to making their cause stronger and even more committed in the end."

Irene: "At Boone there is competition, if our team does something, well I don't want to say with all teachers but with some. At Boone if our team does something and another

team doesn't do it then the kids complain to the teachers and teachers get upset and then we are told that you can't do it again. It's silliness."

What should be the Next Steps?:

Herb: "I was thinking that a way to document the work of the children would be to use one of those Apple Newton hand-held computers. You could put the whole class list on there and just have it with you so that when a student makes a comment or does something that I want to remember, I jot it down immediately. It would be super organizational tool.

Maybe the next step is to just try some of these concepts in the classroom. Why wait around for approval from all sorts of people when that's not necessary?

Despite my absence and apparent non-interest, I really am interested in it because I am a person who likes to change and who likes to forge new pathways. And definitely would like to be a part of it."

Janis: "Now that we're getting two middle schools, maybe it's the perfect time to have one middle school as a Reggio concept school and one as a more traditional school and then you've got a choice for parents. The only thing I hate is putting public schools in competitive environments and that sort of does that and I really hate it."

Ashley: “As we have been working on the CMP we have been given course credit.

Sometimes I wonder if this is going anywhere. I think that we talked so long about philosophy that we lost some of the people who just wanted to get started.

We also need to have someone who is kinda going to be the director – because Janis you know is a little burdened by always having to be responsible. Although she is not really supposed to be – it should not have to be her. Its too bad that they can’t stipend that (position).

I think it would work to have a shared leadership role. Like I wouldn’t mind taking the minutes and stuff. Maybe if we just asked people what part they wanted. In inquiry meetings we start each meeting by looking at the agenda and then we say now the meetings are over at 4:15 and we need someone to be the facilitator to keep it moving.

We’ve got to prioritize – what needs to come first – because it might not happen.

I go to those meeting and I feel kind of honored. I feel professional. I see extremely brilliant and bright people and it would be so cool to implement our dream together.”

Becky: “I joined initially because you know Janis is so dynamic and so energetic and so invested in her teaching and really knows what she believes as a teacher which are all

very appealing traits to me. I'm drawn to people like that. And Mandy— who I didn't know as well is so open minded about everything – like kids and possibilities. She likes kids a lot and she is excited about her teaching. And for me, I think it was a time for another big dose of change and the idea of real interdisciplinary teaching with integrated units and collaborating with colleagues really appeals to me.

If this is going to happen, we've got to start making decisions about how its going to happen and there are hundred and hundreds of aspects to that. The amount of planning that needs to go into this thing isn't going to happen in an hour and a half every other Monday night. I'd have to say that we've got to sell this program and to sell it to kids, parents and community we might have to get our little committees going hard. I wish that I could take a sabbatical and have 2 or 3 months to focus on this without other distractions and responsibilities. Some of this work can be done this summer, but I predict that we'll find the occasional day or two here and there but we need to find the time to do this if we are going to move forward. But I also know that summer is the time when people rejuvenate and spend time with their families.

Now individual little committees of 4 and 5 people might find time to meet and do their piece and bring it back to the larger group. It's pretty typical that smaller groups are more productive.

Because we're better talkers than listeners, that is why we couldn't pull it off by this year.

The position paper is a matter of give me 8 hours with Janis and Felicia and Mandy and whoever else wants to be there and we'll sit down and crank it out. We've got all the information it doesn't have to be a dang dissertation. Mandy's draft was a great start – it just needs polishing and tuning but you know I appreciate that she did what she did. Mandy is frustrated because she has time now and we are kind of lagging But you do what you can do.

I think what we need to do it RE-COMMIT – to gain back some of that momentum that we had last summer and last fall. Right now we are weary and it's the end of the year and everyone is tired and overwhelmed. We need a time-line, set some goals, some realistic goals that are do-able. Even having everything in place by Sept 2000 is a pretty ambitious deadline but at the same time I realize that this is not something that needs to be drug out.

Maybe there are some incremental stages that we could slowly phase in. What are the bits and pieces that we could envision? Maybe we could do some field testing on this next year.

For all this to happen we are going to need some strong leadership. Janis and Mandy have tried to take on that role, and its also important for the people at the university to help – even though we might not be moving as fast as you know people might like. But the

university is a critical connection and it has certainly been a powerful connection for me in terms of my own teaching and learning and growing.”

Daphne: “When we were working with the last principal on the new middle school concepts there was an expectation that everybody would participate and give their expertise to the effort. We were awarded rectification points for doing it.

I’d like to see us all come together and take the proposal and discuss it and say ok here is what we’ve got and then bounce ideas around.

We have 2 defacto leaders because they were the 2 that went on the trip. Maybe they are tired – as we all are. Maybe we should bounce ideas around about leadership.

When we went to Mandy’s moms house for the visioning meeting that was such a nice occasion. Then the committee work was good. But since then we’ve lost momentum. Maybe we should review our efforts up to this point in order to move forward.

It would be nice to have clear agenda’s and minutes from each meeting to review.”

Felicia: “We need to continue our relationship with Virginia Tech and any other university that has the time and money and love to help us.

We need to get the position paper written. We should ask the group who wants to help and allow us to say no if we don't feel that we can contribute the necessary time and energy to the task and that's ok. But allow others to move forward with it."

Patricia: "I think its probably time to sit down with administration and let them help out with a time line."

Mandy: "We need to get organized so that we feel a sense of commitment to the cause and that something is happening."

Gus: "We need money to do some of the work that must be accomplished. Grant writing?"

Could we try this on a smaller scale at say a summer camp? We might have to be willing to adjust our vision and realize that it might take three years or so to get to the point that we want to be at and just ease into it.

We have to be afraid of stagnation."

Mary: "Maybe we should consider phasing in this whole idea. Do we really have to have ALL our ducks in a row?"

Nick: “As administrators I think we’ve got to stay out of the way and not be a roadblock...but be there to support and be there for when teachers need support, money, help, time, or whatever.....to facilitate. The administrators could help out by handling some of the details.

I think they should continue to develop a position paper and get grounded in their beliefs. Then there is always the option for a couple of people or teams to try it and see how it works.

The school-staff-at-large needs to understand it since it will be a little bit different and they may get questions asked by parents. Then we’ll all sit down and figure out how to do it. The administration can help with some of the struggles with scheduling, grouping, recruiting.”

SPECIAL TRAITS of those outside the group:

Kim: “I work a lot with bringing in hands-on labs in science and that has been something that we really focused on the last few years so that just about anything that we are going to present we have materials organized and if you need something you can find it.

I approached Charlotte about using my duty period instead of having something that was of no consequence.....I could have a time like this to work on curriculum. So I had a class period every single day where I could put together labs.

I'm really organized and I find that its important. Really important. Because children lose interest quickly if materials aren't presented in a way where they can actually access them and use them for the purpose intended.

I'm not a person that does a lot of group kinds of meetings. I rarely do things during the week. For me its harder to think in a group. To me its easier to think and then share and I try to remember that with my students too. Becausewe are so adamant that we want them to be the team member constantly and not everybody is.

I love to go to conferences and things. But as far as the bowling team....no!"

Irene: Re: her work with her teammate: "We try not to have tests on the same day. If one has a huge project going then I will try not to have one going at the same time. Small things like that. We work together on extra curricular activities and flex activities. And we have tried in the past although its very difficult to design units together. But to get to this point I guess you have to be with someone for years to really feel like you can do that. WE are still kind of working out little kinks that come along and its hard to try to develop the big units together.

At Shawsville there was a closer “Teacher family” because they had to band together since there wasn’t much administrative support.....it made the bond between teachers tighter than it is at Boone.”

Lance: “My desire to treat all kids fairly to provide the same opportunities for all kids no matter what their ability. I like to plan things so that everybody is doing the same type of activity and they work up to their own potential. I am a major advocated of tolerance and respect for individuals.

My only rule is respect. And the dialogue continues through the year. “

How those outside the group feel about this Reggio Effort:

Kim: “I wanted to see concisely and directly what the basic premise was and I never got that, ever! You know it seemed like a very simple request to me, And I could not imagine that anything that could be adopted over an entire school couldn’t be concisely stated.

One of the biggest reasons that I don’t participate is that I hate having my time wasted. I hate it. And after several meetings I realized that we were just going to talk a lot.

Its like everyone has to make their own little statement. You know its hard for people just to be a part of the crew and go along with it. If you do, you have got to look at it and kind of adjust it a little differently you know.

Still after a whole year practically of meeting and people talking and really no one knows what the heck is going on. Aside from that little group. You know I have never seen anyone say “we have been really successful trying some techniques that are from the Reggio Approach and this is how it has turned out.”

I know that at the time there were a lot of people who agreed with me – well its going to be a lot of meeting and a lot of talk and you know when the talk gets over lets look.

I hope that they can get somewhere with it. I really do. I think it would give the kids more chance to have control over what they do.....”

Irene: “There was one at one time in my box but I had something else going on (announcement for a meeting).

If there was a school within a school I would probably wouldn't be too fond of that....because I feel that you are losing a sense of community, if you do that, if you change what half of the people are doing.

I have always been the type of person that is open to new ideas. So if it was something that this was approved and it were open to all teachers then yes, I would definitely go to all the workshops and conferences and meetings to be able to adapt my classroom and whatever I needed to do to work with this approach.

Change is scary to me.

One of the hardest things to do would be to convince some of the more experienced teachers on doing it. I think the younger, newer teachers will probably be open to it more, simply because we are not set into any mindset so it is exactly what we know and what we like and want to do because we are still learning what we want.

I'd say the younger teachers are always open maybe because some don't have tenure and they will do anything to get it. Or some whom have just gotten it want to keep it.

(Re: looping) It's a lot easier to work with a childonce you get to know them...but on the other hand its good for children to have different teachers and go through these changes. Because in high school that is going to happen and in college that happens and in life they are most likely not going to stay with the same job their whole life. They are going to have co workers come and go. And I just think that as far as being able to communicate with people.....all different types of people....and if they are with the same kids for 3 years they loose a lot of that socialization that they need.”

Stan: “I think that the things I have heard it reminded me a lot of my graduate classes because it is a lot of really good well-intending conversation and everybody out there has kids best interest at heart. The ideas are wonderful. They are very idealistic. I’m very pragmatic. I hear the philosophical stuff pretty quickly process it and immediately want to jump to okay how are we going to make it work? Cause I would get frustrated with that and otherwise I would want to not talk about it any further if I didn’t think there was a way.

I don’t think there needs to be a great revolution to where we completely stop doing everything the way we are doing it and totally revamp because I think that everybody within their own classrooms can make just a s great changes individually.

You are going to have to have some policies and procedures. You are going to have to have a disciplinary code of conduct. That is why those things developed over time in the schools that we had. So we have to be practical

When I hear the word revolution, I picture some kind of throw out everything and rebuild from the ground up. And I think WOAH!

(Re: other faculty and their concerns) I don’t think there are a lot of them who even know about it or care about it. I just think that a lot of people don’t even know it exists.

I don't think there needs to be a school within a school to tell you the truth.

(Re: the teachers in the group) They are the kind of people looking for a cause or something. They are the kind of people who like to take something on. They will be quick to confront you about something that they disagree with and just as quick to come over and support you and appreciate you for something that they like. They are very articulate people and they enjoy sitting around even informally and just talking. A lot of times they remind me of my friends in college where we sit around and solve the problems of the world in the dorm room.

But a lot of times people like that don't have much concrete direction and they don't know what to do with that passion and they need somebody with another set of skills that can say, okay, I'm here and I'm with you but here is what we've got to do to make this work.

As right as they might be on a lot of philosophical points it may not even be possible to pull it off logistically and that might be frustrating."

Lance: "I had to choose – I was involved in so many things and it was just something had to go and that seemed to be the one that I happened to be least involved with at the time so it would be easiest one to pull away from or pull out of.

I'm not sure that it will ever be allowed to happen.....due to the political climate in this country – it is still very conservative. The school board is only going to approve things that will make them money.

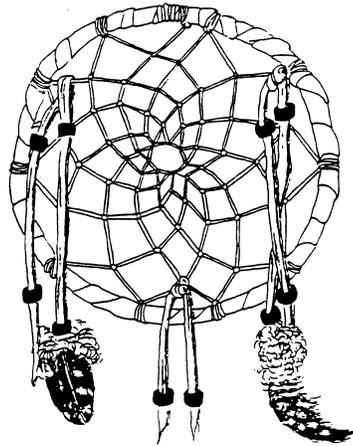
My only fear would be that members of the community would constantly be comparing what is being done, if this is what this one is doing in comparison.

Also, anytime you have something new, people are afraid of something new, just like the math. And it has unfortunately pitted the high school against the middle school.

This is a tough town to teach in.”

APPENDIX H
The Position Paper

**Position Paper for a Proposed
Reggio-Inspired Middle School**



A Group of Blacksburg Middle School Teachers
Blacksburg, Virginia
August 1999

Position Paper for a Proposed Reggio-Inspired Middle School

Introduction

The Reggio-inspired model provides a learning environment that is flexible, supportive, understanding, and encouraging. This approach supports the continued exploration and study of the middle school learning environment. Within a large middle school, a variety of skills, capacities, and experiences exist among the students, teachers and parents. This model seeks to enhance the middle school community as a cohesive entity. Through student empowerment, teacher collaboration and parent participation, this diversity is celebrated.

Statement of Purpose

The Reggio-inspired model is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents articulated by the National Middle School Association. By virtue of the model's success in integrating the educational, social, and emotional needs of young people, it is especially appropriate for middle school communities. It directly addresses the needs of this age group by advocating curricular connections, inquiry and problem solving models, and long-term projects in collaborative communities of peers, teachers, and families.

In adopting the ideas described above, we are aligned with the National Middle School Association's position on programs and practices to meet the developmental needs of middle school students.

"Middle school programs and practices address developmental needs through a variety of activities and strategies. As young adolescents have an orientation toward peers and a concern about social acceptance, work in small groups and advisory programs promote opportunities for interaction with peers and adults... Achievement and competence is achieved through authentic assessment based on personal goals, progress, and improvement, challenging intellectual material focused on relevant problems and issues and with recognition by peers and adults... The increase in the desire for autonomy and resolving identity issues can be addressed through learning strategies involving choice, a curriculum based on social and individual interests, opportunities for exploration of topics and exploratory programs, and the prevalence of a safe environment for experimentation."

Supporting Theories and Principles

The schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy are renowned worldwide for their innovation and excellence. These schools began in the 1960's when Loris Malaguzzi was inspired to create a system of education for the very young. The philosophy of the schools is influenced by the teachings of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner and other social constructivists. The main premise of the experience in the schools is that it is an education based on relationships that promote collaboration and inquiry.

The relationships within the learning community are dependent on a view of the student as capable, competent and curious. Teachers capitalize on this image and develop strong and meaningful curriculum. The motto in the Reggio Emilia schools is: "Nothing without Joy". In this way, education is a joyful, pleasurable experience and one that is looked forward to with anticipation. Each day is filled with enormous possibility.

The teachers and the students participate in a co-construction of learning. They are researchers together in the classroom. Because of the deep and intimate nature of the relationship between teachers and students, the teachers are able to carefully craft experiences that will capture the student's interest and will provoke further investigation and learning. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is important here as the teachers must carefully insert themselves into the position with the students which will best challenge them. The teachers offer the new material in a way that is challenging without being boring or too frustrating while meeting the learning goals of the students. Bena Kallick, speaking to a group of Montgomery County educators, stated that in an effective learning community it is essential to have a common understanding that knowledge is constructed, responsibility is shared, and the learner's 'habits of mind' are integral to life-long learning. Cognitive conflict is encouraged and considered to be a critical tool for learning. Inherent in this framework is meaningful, authentic evaluation and assessment.

The environment is the most visible aspect of the work done by the learning community. It conveys the message that this is a place where adults and students have thought about the quality and the instructive power of space. The layout of the physical space fosters encounters, communication, and relationships. The environment is also highly personal as it is filled with the essence of the students.

Representations of student thinking and learning using many media are carefully arranged by the learning community to document the work and process of learning.

Teachers work closely with students to enable the students to explore a variety of medias to make their thinking visible. This documentation and representation is supported by Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and has several functions: Among these is to make students aware that their effort is valued; to promote further learning through reflection; to allow teachers to understand students better and to become more reflective about practice and curriculum development; to facilitate communication and exchange of ideas among educators; to make parents aware of their children's experience and maintain their involvement; and to create an archive that traces the history and pleasure of learning by students and their teachers.

The organizational structure of the school must promote collaborative exchange among the participants including students, parents and teachers. The focus is on each student in relation to other members of the learning community rather than on the individual student in isolation. Additionally, the ideas and skills families bring to the school are essential and take on many forms. Parents play an active role in all aspects of the school. The role of the teachers is considered to be one of continual research and learning. Collaborative discussions and interpretations of student work contribute to the professional development of the teacher as well as the ongoing richness of the curriculum.

In order to plan and proceed with their work, teachers listen and observe students closely. Teachers facilitate student's work on projects guided by Montgomery County and Virginia Standards of Learning. Strategies using an inquiry approach are considered fundamental to the program. The projects must be student-inspired and teacher supported. Projects are based on the strong conviction that learning by doing is of great importance and that to discuss in group and to revisit ideas and experiences is an exemplary way of gaining better understanding and learning. Developing this rich sense of reflection is important to the students as they become skilled researchers and introspective learners.

Conclusion

We are a group of teachers from Blacksburg Middle School dedicated to collaboratively moving the philosophies of the National Middle School Association and Reggio Schools into practice. The members are conscientiously researching the sources and practices of these philosophies and reflecting on their own practice in the context of the realities of today's middle schools. Continuing the process of middle school reform, while recognizing the place of the student at home and in a changing society, remains an important goal of our group.

APPENDIX I
Time Line

(See file: timelinep1)

(See file: timelinep2)

APPENDIX J
Focus Group Map

(See file: focusgroupmap1)

(See file: focusgroupmap2)

(See file: focusgroupmap3)

(See file: focusgroupmap4)

Current Research: School reform efforts. Adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach for Middle School populations.
Documentation as a tool in teacher education

Recent Publications:

Stremmel, A.J. & Hill, L.T. (1999). Toward multicultural understandings: A reflective journey. In V.R. Fu and A.J. Stremmel (Eds.), Affirming diversity through democratic conversations. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall.

Hill, L.T., Wells, K., Fu, V. (1999). The amiable school project. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

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Fu, V.R., Hill, L.T. (1998). Learning within and between communities: Reflections on the 1998 Reggio Children Winter Institute. Innovation in early education: The international Reggio exchange. Detroit, MI: Merrill-Palmer Institute.

Fu, V.R., Stremmel, A.J., & Hill, L.T. (1998). Building a caring community for learning: Multiculturalism in action. Early Years.

Fu, V.R. & Hill, L.T. (1997). Exploration of the Reggio Emilia Approach to inform practice in the United States: Collaborative learning among practitioners from diverse university communities. Proposal to Reggio Children Italy.

Hill, L.T. (1998). The Great Duck Pond Project: A learning community project based on the Reggio Emilia approach. Video produced by King Video Productions, Blacksburg, VA.