

A Narrative Inquiry of Parent Understanding of School Culture:
One School's Story

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative inquiry into how parents at the Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School in Blacksburg, VA define and attempt to understand their school culture. This study was guided by the following points of inquiry: 1) to understand the ways the parents articulate their conceptualization of the lab school culture, 2) to examine how parents negotiate change in the school, 3) to identify any social, political, and/or historical factors that caused this transformation, and 4) to inform best practice in the school. Participant observation, interviews, a reflective journal, and thematic analysis were used to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Particular attention focused on social, political, and historical factors that influenced parent understanding of the school culture. Analysis of the interviews conducted with 11 parents who currently have children enrolled in the school and entries from my personal research journal reveal the need for dialogue and careful listening of parents thoughts, beliefs, values, and goals related to the lab school in order to achieve a sense of shared understanding (Bruner, 1990) and intersubjectivity (Vygotsky, 1978) around this notion of our school culture. Suggestions for building a shared culture for learning and teaching involving all the protagonists-- children, parents, teachers, staff -- are discussed. Implications for future research on understanding school cultures are presented for consideration.

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