CHARTER SCHOOLS: POLICY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

KRISTIN SARA POST: Charter Schools: Policy and Practice
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Charter schools have been promoted as being more innovative than traditional public schools, but that is not always the case. Change agents can transform either type of public school. Both types of schools can also rely on traditional practices, which are not as innovative as they are reliable. This research focuses on a charter school and a neighboring district school that were transformed by change agent leadership. The results indicate that neither school is radically innovative, but both are employing "effective schools" research into their structure, leadership, and curriculum. Furthermore, the research explores change agent teachers, and their perspective on curriculum and school governance. This research seeks to suggest that educational innovation is temporal, and reforms are modified by what is sustainable over the long term.

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Shirley Kelly, whose wish that I graduate in December kept the candle lit even in the wee hours of the morning.

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Many people contributed their expertise and knowledge to this research, and I appreciate their time and effort. I am grateful to my hosts in the charter school community for allowing me to visit their campus for a few days. My committee has been supportive of an intensive effort to finish this on time. My family, loved ones and my editor extraordinaire are always a source of support and joy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES vii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS viii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. METHOD AND APPROACH 3

Analytic framework 7

III. THE BACK-STORY 11

The new family tree 14

IV. THE TWO BLOCS 17

New Village Children's School: "a chip off the old bloc" 17

Edgar Moses Elementary School: "the old bloc" 21

V. COMPETING BELIEFS 24

Are charter schools innovative? 24

Are charter schools serving the same population as public schools? 25

Are charter schools improving academic performance? 27

Are charter schools getting more for the dollar? 29

VI. TEACHERS: AGENTS OF CHANGE OR RESISTENCE 32

VII. CONCLUSION 38

REFERENCES 41

LIST OF TABLES

Table

Table 1. *"Effective schools" characteristics* 24

Table 2. *Student demographics, by school, 2004-2005 (in percent)* 26

Table 3. *ABCs measurements, by school and year, 2002-2004* 28

Table 4. *Teacher demographics, by school, 2004-2005 (in percent)*........................31

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASA- American Association of School Administrators

ABCs- Accountability in the Basics with local Control

ADM- Average Daily Membership

AYP- Adequate Yearly Progress

CSPs- Charter School Proponents

DPI- Department of Public Instruction

LEA- Local Education Agency

NCLB- No Child Left Behind

TSPs- Traditional (public) School Proponent

INTRODUCTION

> The executive leadership of an organization has two responsibilities: one is *maintenance* [emphasis not mine] of the system the way it is, and the other is *changing* the system so that it performs better. In other words, the leader is both a change agent and a resister of change. (Havelock, 1973, *ix*)

The above quotation is taken from *The Change Agent's Guide to Innovation in Education*, a "how-to" guide for principals and other school leaders about becoming change agents and employing change agent strategies. This guidebook was published more than two decades ago, at about the same time that another term, "effective schools research" was being coined (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p.15). Both terms relate to philosophies of strong leadership and also incorporate notions of transformation; they share an optimistic outlook about the potential of change within the educational system, (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1992; Havelock, 1973).

Subsequent studies have gone further with these terms, offering finer definitions about successful change agents, or the characteristics that define "effective schools." An example is the eight-volume study conducted by Rand Corporation between 1975 and 1978. This "Change Agent study" was commissioned to discover how four different federal programs impacted public schools (McLaughlin, 1990). A key finding was that the federal government and its policies were weak change agents, due to the effects of local variability in implementation. Furthermore, teachers acted as individual change agents in choosing the manner and extent to which they adopted these federal programs. McLaughlin (1990) summarizes, "the study correctly stressed the significance of the actions and choices of teachers" (p.14). Thus, individual change agents have greater transformational power than a governmental agency or policy. Both the original study and McLaughlin (1990) concur,

"the most effective strategies promoted mutual adaptation, or the adaptation of a project and institutional setting to each other" (p. 14).

There have also been many theories about the institutional aspect of education and whether or not change agents inside the system can make real reforms. Ted Kolderie (1990), who made significant contributions in the charter school debate of the early 1990's (Hassel, 1999), states that public education is a "bad system" (p. 2), and asserts that "the problem is not people and not money, but is in the structure of the system itself" (p. 11). For Kolderie, the system is not adaptable and must be challenged from the outside by introducing market competition and choice (1990, 1993). In his transformational vision of the system, Kolderie's charter schools share the same characteristics as "effective schools." These shared ideals include: school site management, parental involvement and support, commonly shared clear goals and high expectations, and district support (Kolderie, 1990; AASA, 1992). The difference is that effective schools were usually created within the system (AASA, 1992) and Kolderie's (1990) thesis stated that better schools could only be created after withdrawal from the "exclusive franchise in public education" (p. 13).

This article will discuss the concept of leaders as change agents. It will also address how characteristics of effective schools are perpetuated in different public schools today, mainly a charter school and a traditional public school. The analysis will be based on institutional theories including Tyack and Tobin's (1994) "grammar" of schooling argument that asserts that educational reform is hampered by a tendency of new policies to fall back to the center; even as the "loosely coupled" structure of education (Weick, 1976) allows for these same policies to be proposed and implemented.

Charter schools are an example of a transformational idea that introduced choice and competition to the educational system (Kolderie, 1990). This article will focus on a ten-year-old charter school in North Carolina (one of the oldest) that is both an example of the radical change that Kolderie (1990) promised, and also serves an example of the stubborn

resistance of the “grammar” of schooling. Through a comparison with a school that serves similar students in the same geographical area, it will be demonstrated that this charter school is no different from its neighboring traditional public school using the following accountability measures: curriculum; testing; student demographics; and teacher certification. When charter school theories advanced a market-based competition model, some people assumed that either the traditional public school or the newer charter school would “win” the competition. A great deal of research has dealt with the question of who won by which accountability measure, with inconclusive results (Deal & Hentschke, 2004).

The charter school that is the focus of this study was founded by a group of teachers who set out to create their own “dream school” (interview, September 27, 2006). Before the charter school law in North Carolina legalized schools as individual local education agencies (LEAs), these teachers were not able to start a public school that matched their vision. They took advantage of the new legislation and organized a school as a cooperative, ran their own instructional program, and essentially became self-employed; which is an exact fulfillment of Kolderie’s charter school idea (1993).

Most studies agree that where school reforms have succeeded, teachers have been involved in the formation as well as the implementation of the policy (Tyack & Tobin, 1994; McLaughlin, 1990). Even though this charter school is not remarkably different on paper from the traditional public school nearby, the very concept of teacher control can act as a catalyst for a public discourse about what is important in education, specifically as it relates to the ongoing and critical role of teachers in producing quality education.

METHOD AND APPROACH

I used qualitative research methodology, particularly narrative analysis, to examine perceptions around charter schools and traditional public schools for this article. Interviewees' perceptions include explanations of how charter schools originated and evaluations of their current performance. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 stakeholders in the public education system; some are charter school or public school teachers who operate as "street level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1983); others are bureaucrats who directly influence educational policy; and a few are policy analysts.

The 14 interviewees included: two administrators in two different charter schools; a former teacher, current teacher and an operations manager in a third charter school; a former principal of a public school; a current superintendent of a city school system; two legislators; two state bureaucrats; and three policy experts, one of whom is also a legislator. Of the fourteen, eight live and work in a pseudonymous area of the state that was the focus for the case study presented below.

Each person consented to a one-hour interview, which in a few cases stretched to one and a half or two hours. A few of the charter school practitioners were interviewed multiple times during two days of on-site observation. Data from interviews were collected in field notes, transcribed into digital format, and analyzed inductively (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The observations recorded in field notes were used primarily for background details. Interview data were read several times and initially coded with a rudimentary coding scheme (Glesne, 2006). I marked the margins of the interviews with numbers that related to a list of themes that I identified through data analysis. I used a comparative method of contrasting

overall themes from one interview to another. This analysis indicated that similarities existed amongst all of the interviewees as well as certain groupings (e.g. those who were teachers, those who worked in charter schools, or those who held political offices).

I paid particular attention to similar (or almost identical) accounts that were repeated by different interviewees. This represented an aspect of narrative inquiry best described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who said, “it is in the tellings and retellings that entanglements become acute, for it is here that temporal and social and cultural horizons are set and reset” (p. 4). I had anticipated a great breadth of opinion about public education because I interviewed many different types “actors”; instead I discovered that different educational stakeholders were retelling the same opinions and accounts, leaving me with a greater depth than I had anticipated.

I researched news articles online to familiarize myself with current events in charter schools and to find a focus or case study. Initial research reflected that one geographic region was particularly distinctive because it frequently appeared in the news. One series of articles reported that several charter schools in the area had formed a coalition and were hosting a press conference to inform the public about a potential bill that would apportion some lottery proceeds to charter schools (Bothwell, 2006). Though the bill did not pass, the fact that charter schools had formed a coalition around a legislative issue was of note.

Online data from several years ago also indicated that a charter school in this geographic region filed a lawsuit against the city school board, which will be discussed in greater detail below. I decided to focus on this school because I felt it and other schools in the region showed an unusual tendency to be politically and legally outspoken. I felt this might be indicative of an overall attitude toward being “change agents” within the system.

Once I identified this geographic region through the news articles and other research, I interviewed charter school personnel at three different schools within that general region. I followed up with the one administrator of the charter school for my case

study, and was allowed to observe school activities for a few days. I also interviewed additional staff members. I interviewed or observed and interviewed five people who work directly with charter schools.

One initial similarity I found is that all three individuals became interested in charter schools because a close family member did not "fit in" to public schools. These early interviews also consistently presented several concerns: raising the cap that limits the number of charter schools in North Carolina to 100; financial equity with traditional public schools (because charter schools will receive minimal, if any, direct proceeds from the lottery and they do not receive capital funds); and testing or accountability demands.

After observing the charter school, I sought out interviews with officials who worked in the traditional public school system in this same geographic area. I hoped to find some interviewees who could recall the time when this charter school first opened ten years ago and others who were working in the system currently. I interviewed two legislators who had previously served on the school board and two current employees of the district's central office. Like the charter school group, most of these interviews reflected surprisingly consistent viewpoints. Some of these views indicated a sense that charter schools had "separated" themselves from public schools; that charter schools were not receiving equitable funding because "you have to give something in order to get something" (interview, October 20, 2006); and that charter schools, while serving a public need, were not as accountable as public schools. Some were willing to consider equal funding for charter schools if greater or equal criteria were met; one suggested that charter schools become more collaborative; but most seemed alright with the current "live and let live" relationship. Very strong views about vouchers, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and a perceived notion that public schools are disproportionately "punished" were also expressed.

Out of this group of people, I happened to stumble upon someone who once served as the principal for a traditional public school that is located about a mile away from the

charter school I had observed. All of the founding teachers of the charter school had previously taught in the area, and three came from this neighboring traditional public school. The information I learned in this interview led me to focus more closely on the relationship between the two schools. I found that the two schools were linked in a few ways; not just by the teachers who had taught at both schools, but also by a shared belief in the ability to act as change agents to better support students and their learning styles.

This kind of comparison was not my original intent when I started the research. I did not spend any time observing the traditional public school, nor did I interview anyone there but the former principal. I wanted to explore this relationship in greater detail, but time constraints prevented an equal investigation using qualitative research methodologies. Instead, I created a head-to-head comparison using official documents and performance reports that are available to the public.

Along the way, I also interviewed three policy experts and two state bureaucrats. Of the experts, one is a sociology professor who has written about North Carolina politics, one owns his own policy and management consulting firm and focuses more than half of his work on charter schools, and one works for a non-profit leadership and public policy institute that advises on educational issues at a statewide level. Two of the three experts indicated a philosophy that education is an effective way to address poverty issues. Of the state bureaucrats I interviewed neither had ever worked in a charter school, but one was more familiar with charter schools than the other. All of these viewpoints enabled me to take a step back from the data in order to understand how they fit into a broader framework.

Analytic framework

My sample of 14 educational stakeholders reflects an understanding of social relations as depicted by Marshall, Mitchell and Wirt (1989) in their research on the subculture of state education policymakers. According to their findings, “actors” are groups of people with a vested interest in an educational policy, who relate to other actors

according to their relative power or influence. Rather than a pyramidal or linear hierarchy, this model depicts circles of power and influence among actors as a bullseye, with "insiders", "near circle" and "far circle" groups that make up the bullseye; and "often-forgotten players" and "sometimes players" as external to, but still attached to the bullseye (cited in Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p. 17).

This model serves as a framework for the groups of people I interviewed. As mentioned earlier, my intent was to investigate the breadth of educational opinion held by actors with varying degrees of political influence or participation in charter schools. There are many different educational actors, and I have omitted the perspectives of parents, students, taxpayers and journalists. Their opinions and expertise are equally valid in this research, and the lack thereof is a limitation of my study. However, I gained continuity with my sample; those I interviewed had a long-term familiarity with public schools and provided first-hand accounts from a decade ago, when the charter school legislation passed.

I also made assumptions about these different actors, specifically those involved with charter schools and traditional public schools. According to Marshall, Mitchell and Wirt (1989), certain actors will operate within prescribed "assumptive worlds." Policy makers and policy practitioners (like teachers and principals) use assumptive worlds to understand "how to behave, who is expected to initiate policy, what values are acceptable, what interests must be respected, and what policy options are logical" (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p. 75). Because assumptive worlds are bounded and contained within certain ideological parameters, policy options or issues that fall outside them may not be considered. I assumed that there would be a strong correlation of opinions across interviewees whose role was in either the traditional public school or charter school system. The data reflected a high correlation between these roles, and I have labeled these consistently held viewpoints as either coming from the charter school proponents (CSPs) or the traditional school proponents (TSPs).

The critiques of charter schools I heard from TSPs correlated to critiques that other researchers have found in similar studies. Deal and Hentschke (2004) term these arguments “the battles over what we know” (p. 10). The authors list five “prevailing contradictions of competing beliefs,” four of which include: “charter schools were supposed to be innovative”; “charter schools will not serve the same distribution of class and race as public schools”; “charter schools were supposed to improve academic performance”; “charter schools get more out of a dollar” (Deal & Hentschke, 2004). In my interviews any given TSP would usually state at least two of these four beliefs as proof that charter schools are not achieving expectations.

Surprisingly, interviewees who did not share a similar role also held certain common viewpoints. If someone were a CSP, that person did necessarily disagree with everything a TSP said. Both blocs, for instance, mentioned that charter schools and public schools were struggling to do their best for the kids. A number of interviewees also expressed the opinion that test scores are not an accurate reflection of learning. This touches on what Tyack and Tobin (1994) called the “cultural construction” of what constitutes a “real school” (p. 478). The cultural construction can be commonly held opinions, as described above, or they can also be organizational practices like testing. These organizational practices make change difficult, “Continuity in the grammar of instruction has frustrated generations of reformers who have sought to change these standardized organizational forms” (1994, p. 454).

But all is not lost when it comes to school reform. Tyack and Cuban (1995) credit teachers, parents, and other practitioners with most of the changes that are accomplished:

> Better schooling will result in the future- as it has in the past and does now- chiefly from the steady, reflective efforts of the practitioners who work in schools and from the contributions of the parents and citizens who support (while they criticize) public education. (p. 135)

Tyack and Tobin (1994) stated a year earlier in their article on the “grammar” of schooling that implementation is almost never an exact reflection of the original reform

innovation. This is consistent with McLaughlin's (1990) analysis of the "Change Agent study", where implementation depended on habits of teachers, local circumstances, and the public. Overall, these studies conclude that change is relatively constant yet not very permanent, "the net return for the general investment was the adoption of many innovations, the successful implementation of a few, and the long run continuation of still fewer" (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 12).

THE BACK-STORY

In 1990, one year before Minnesota ratified the first charter school legislation in the nation, and six years before North Carolina passed its law, Kolderie (1990) wrote an article that established his argument for charter schools. In it, he introduces the competitive language that pitted charter schools against public schools that can still be detected in critiques of TSPs and CSPs. Kolderie (1990) first establishes his theoretical framework by referencing the 1983 Nation at Risk report and its portrayal of a deteriorating public school system; and ends with references to John Chubb and Terry Moe's influential book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, which argues for market competition against bureaucratic monopolies (Kolderie, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Kolderie generalizes about public discontent:

> Steadily, however, the national discussion is moving on; gradually thinking through the ideas of choice and competition and their relation to public education. There is a real problem in the schools. There is an urgent need to improve. There is a practical problem of how to get it down. So there is a growing willingness to look at new ideas—however uncomfortable they may be to educators—to see if they work. (p. 1)

Kolderie then introduces the reader to someone who has taken action; she is Polly Williams, an African-American woman living in Milwaukee, who took bold action to rectify a classic "white flight" situation that had left twenty all-black urban schools[1] in its wake. Kolderie (1990) says, "Here is a black woman, a former welfare mother, a supporter of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, interested not in ideology but simply in what works for her people, telling the Republican governor to stay out of the way so she can pass the bill, which she

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[1] For more on the political and legal back-story to this situation, see Dougherty, Jack. *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

did" (p. 2). This is followed by a paragraph where Kolderie (1990) describes Democrats who have "stood against the effort by residents of those cities" because of their "preoccupation with the traditional interest-group politics of education" (p.3).

First Kolderie sets the stage describing a crisis in deteriorating public schools. Then he describes a can-do attitude of someone who is seeking the assistance of private schools where public schools have failed her; and finally he criticizes the Democrats whom he portrays as stymieing the will of the people. This simplified summary of Kolderie essentially works for describing the process of charter school legislation here in North Carolina, which emerged from a push for vouchers (publicly funded private schools), and despite mixed support from Democrats (Luebke, 1998). North Carolina was among six states to pass its charter school law ten years ago in 1996. At present, 40 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. have all passed charter school legislation. Each state law is different, defining charter schools in different ways, using different accountability procedures (Hassel, 1999); nevertheless, most charter school legislation is influenced by Kolderie (Hassel, 1999).

Though North Carolina is generally considered a conservative state, it is also considered to be progressive in matters of education (Luebke, 1998). The November 1994 election had given a comfortable majority to the Republicans in the North Carolina House of Representatives. A citizen lobby, made up in part by members of the religious right, wanted to have a voucher plan, and found a proponent in Steve Wood, a High Point Republican in the house. The state–funded voucher bill he proposed would allow each child to attend any school, public or private (Luebke, 1998) but was defeated in 1995.

The next year, Representative Wood pushed for charter schools. Not all opponents to vouchers were against charter schools. An example is business interests like the North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry (NCCBI), who were in favor of charter schools "as a way to light a fire under what they viewed as entrenched schoolteachers and

bureaucrats" (1998, p. 67). Support from the senate came from Durham Democrat Wib Gulley who thought of charter schools as a potential to "reinvent government" (1998, p. 67). With this Republican/Democrat alliance in both houses, the General Assembly passed the bill in 1996.

The business interests and Gulley's reasoning both seem to reinforce Kolderie's thesis that public education was stagnant and needed reinvention. But not all Democrats felt the same way. One Democrat who is still serving on the legislature feared a less successful outcome from charter schools:

> I probably voted no. I don't know. I can't remember […] There was this question- were they going to be white flight schools, so that public money was going to support a dual school system. That's the major argument that was made then, which turns out […] that's not where charter schools are going.

To this day, charter schools remain a politically charged issue between the two parties. This enters into the considerations of state leaders who are trying to decide how much or how little to support charter schools, according to educational policy expert Toby Dixon[2]:

> People from the left see charter schools as a threat to public education. They see it as a step towards school privatization and ultimately ending public education as we know it.

This is an opinion shared by many TSPs I interviewed, who expressed an outright dislike for vouchers and a suspicion that charter schools would serve as a stepping stone to more radical educational policies. (To clarify, all TSPs are not necessarily "from the left" or Democrats; but as supporters of public schools, they form a constituency Democrats have historically courted.)

Dixon goes on to say that the political right has a very rosy view of charter schools, which is based on a market-based theory of competition:

> People from the right, generally speaking, see the charter schools as the best way to build private markets into what they see as the state bureaucratic system of education; where we do some privatization through charter schools and other

[2] All participant names have been changed.

> methods and we can really build an innovation and creativity and really help build wonderful models of education.

Dixon also mentions that many from the right see charter schools as a way to "cut the amount of money you need" to deliver education.

These are issues that TSPs and CSPs raised in their interviews. TSPs say that charter schools have not been as innovative and creative as promised by their Republican backers. CSPs feel that inequities in charter school funding are making it difficult, though not impossible, to deliver on these other promises. These arguments will be addressed in much fuller detail later under Chapter V, Competing Beliefs. First, I will introduce the charter school that is the focal point of the eventual comparison with a nearby public school.

The new family tree

What follows is a description of two schools that are part of the Riverside City[3] school district in Locola County, North Carolina. One is New Village Children's School, a K-8 charter school founded and opened by a group of teachers in 1997, the first year for charter schools in North Carolina. The second is Edgar Moses Elementary School, a K-5 school that was experiencing some drastic changes in its staff and curriculum at the same time that New Village was opening. In a head-to-head comparison between these schools, it is evident that they look very similar in terms of their testing scores, the populations they serve, their curriculum goals, and their teacher certification standards.

This case cannot necessarily be generalized to all charter school and public school relationships across the state. An argument can be made that this is an isolated case based on certain contributing factors. The first is the characteristics of the citizens and the county where these schools are located. Locola County is different from some of its neighboring counties. It has a thriving tourist industry and a moderate industrial base; jobs are available

[3] All geographic and school names have been changed.

and residents here receive higher wages than in the predominantly rural counties nearby (Luebke, 1998).

Acting superintendent of the Riverside City school district, Mitchell Henry[4], also describes a great deal of school choice in the county:

> Parents have all the choice they can stand here. We have 14 private or parochial schools, 1 residential school […] and we have three charters. […] The parents shop- they do look around and they move to a school if they see something they want.

The residents of Locola County are generally middle class, educated and share an outlook that falls under what Paul Luebke, in his book *Tar Heel Politics 2000,* would call "modernist." Modernizers are fiscally conservative, but nevertheless believe certain infrastructures, like roads, schools and health care are worth the state's investment (Luebke, 1998). For example, in the 1940's, modernizers in Riverside City voted that money collected from local fines and forfeitures would go directly toward the support of public schools (interview, October 20, 2006).

This supplemental school tax later became the basis for a lawsuit filed by New Village Children's School against the Riverside City school district, a bold move that distinguishes this charter school from others in the state. In their final judgment, the North Carolina Court of Appeals ruled that the taxes and penal fines collected by the city were part of average daily membership (ADM) allotment that public schools received for children living in that tax district; and since charter schools were public schools, they should receive the same ADM. Though many TSPs, who were part of the Riverside City school system at the time, justified their reasoning for not withholding the supplemental tax money from the ADM, Superintendent Mitchell Henry is more neutral on the subject:

> I agree with this settlement. I was here when the settlement was made, and I hope I had something to do with that […] New Village is located in the school district and should receive the tax if the child resides in the school district. It's fair because [the taxpaying parents] are the source of the funding.

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[4] All participant names have been changed.

This open-mindedness on the part of a public school superintendent, who also describes himself as a change agent, is another illustration of why this case may be difficult to generalize.

THE TWO BLOCS

New Village Children's School: "a chip off the old bloc"

Most charter schools in North Carolina do not resemble one another like traditional public schools do, and New Village is no exception. The school is actually made up of a variety of buildings. The most prominent is a tall gray house with broad porches facing the tree-lined street. It used to be a residence, but now holds a few offices, some individualized learning spaces and a technology classroom. A newly paved black asphalt driveway extends behind the house in a gentle slope toward the back of the fenced in lot. Lining the parking lot on the left are seven or eight white vinyl-sided modular units with black shutters that are elevated off the ground. Unstained wooden deck-style stairways and ramps lead up to the doors located on opposite sides of each unit. A broader, lower unit directly behind the house serves as the multi-purpose room, lunchroom and office, where visitors are asked to check in. There is a recreational area across the parking lot that has a basketball goal, a playhouse, a swing set and playground, and an open grass field. This field doubles as an auditorium, since there is no other place large enough for the entire school to gather.

One morning in October 2006, despite the drizzle and chill in the autumn air, the students and teachers of New Village gathered on this field, sitting on small blankets or huddling under umbrellas, to celebrate their ninth anniversary of moving into their facilities in East Riverside. Ten years ago, New Village was amongst the first thirty-four original schools granted a charter after the ratification of the 1996 North Carolina charter school legislation. The 1997 school year started, but the building site was not yet ready, so classes initially

took place in a nearby African American church. The date that the K-5[5] students and teachers moved to their current facilities is considered their "spiritual birthday" (school website), which they celebrate annually with short performances and songs from each class and short speeches from the founding teachers, after which the students eat a birthday cake and go home for the half-day.

Seven teachers who knew each other through their work in the Riverside City school system became the founding teachers of New Village Children's School. Three came from nearby Edgar Moses Elementary School, three came from a second elementary school, and one came from a third. All of the teachers had been meeting together as a group to exchange professional advice and ideas. Lucy Thompson[6], one of the founding teachers, describes this exchange as a "Teacher support group. […] We would get together for laid back meetings to talk about what's going on in our classes and schools and new strategies for problems that were puzzles to us, and we talked about what our dream school would be." Once the charter school law was passed in 1996, she continues, "that gave is the possibility to do the dream school we had been talking about."

The legislation did not stipulate who may start a charter school, and different groups have done so over the years, according to a Department of Public Instruction (DPI) employee:

> In the beginning, (and "New Village" was an example of this) it was a chance for educators who've often said to themselves, 'if I could start a school, this is what I'd do…if I had my way, this is the way I would do it.' […] So there were, in the beginning, lots of teachers and administrators who got together and tried to start some [charter schools.] I think we've seen more community leaders doing it in the past few years […] but not as many teachers as we thought would happen.

Schools that were formed by teachers and administrators like New Village have become more unique over time.

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[5] When the school first opened, they served grades K-5, and added a grade each year thereafter. They are now a K-8 school.

[6] All participant names have been changed.

The “dream school” did not get off the ground easily. The state had not worked out several details including whether or not charter school teachers could receive state retirement or health care, making it a risky decision for the founding teachers to leave their current jobs in the school system (interview, October 19, 2006). The founding teachers faced a lot of work laying out their educational philosophy as well as mastering the legal and financial skills that would be necessary to run a school. The New Village classes took place in a church for less than a month, but even when they moved to their new facilities, there was still a lot of work to be done.

At the October school celebration in 2006, where the rainy fall weather was a literal reminder of the facility challenges this charter school still faces, two founding teachers told the gathering of students, parents, and newer teachers at New Village what their first days were like:

> My classroom [at the church] was really tiny, a quarter of the size it is now, and in those first days we had no steps [up to the doors], so we had to crawl in. […] And in the beginning, my kids only stayed in one quarter of their new classroom. It took them a while to get used to having more space.

A former teacher and current curriculum specialist recalled,

> When we moved in, we wished for grass, because it was all mud. We wished for someone to help with the commode, because we had to clean them. That Christmas, I gave a plunger as a gift to all the teachers, because we had to be the plumbers. But I’m glad we did all that, because we see the rewards.

These founding teachers created a new school based on philosophies that they hoped would distinguish them from traditional public schools. One distinction is that the teachers wanted to make collective decisions about the day-to-day administration of the school. They did not hire a principal or other administrative staff that are part of the “grammar” of schooling for traditional public schools. Rather, the teachers met in meetings to decide on budgetary, staffing and disciplinary issues. These teachers wanted to create an environment where they had complete control over their classroom and collective control over “what goes on in the school level” (interview, October 19, 2006). This is the kind of

arrangement Kolderie (1993) hoped charter schools might allow, a teacher-led community rather than an administration-led bureaucracy.

The founding teachers also saw a lack of continuity in the public school system. Rory Batchlore[7] is one of the original teachers. Though she retired from the classroom, she now serves at New Village as a mentor and curriculum advisor. When she worked in the traditional system, she felt that children had a limited time to master skills that should have been reinforced for longer:

> I worked with first and second graders. And we would have readers and writer's workshops, and they'd publish their own books. But [after they moved on to higher grades] they would never have that experience again. There's generally not a consistent philosophy in school.

The original curriculum at New Village was based on research by linguist Michael Halliday, among others. Batchlore explains that, even though she had taught for ten years, she felt something was missing until she and the other founding teachers discussed this kind of research:

> I know there had to be something more, but I was trained that way, and every class was traditional. But once I started learning this research, a door was opened. It made sense to me. It made sense that if you have 180 days of reading and writing the kids make progress.

Teachers and students are encouraged to use authentic reasons to write, and to use problem and inquiry-based learning in math, science and social studies. This philosophy is consistent from elementary through middle school. This practice is different from the standard version of American public schools that Rowan and Miskel (1999) describe, where curriculum is "often described as fragmented, unfocused, and repetitive, covering a vast range of topics in little depth" (p. 375).

This curriculum, however, is not a departure from the state testing assessment system called ABCs. The founding teachers did not object to the curriculum or state tests that traditional schools were required to follow and use. Lucy Thompson says their

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[7] All participant names have been changed.

curriculum worked well within the state curriculum because it was about changing the practice instead of the content:

> We originally went with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and the North Carolina testing program. One, because it itself is not a bad course of study. We felt the way it was implemented was where we wanted to make changes. And the North Carolina testing goes with the standard course of study.

Though charter schools are not required to teach the standard course of study, or state curriculum, they are required to take the end of year tests. This is what makes it possible to create a comparison between New Village and Edgar Moses.

Edgar Moses Elementary School: "the old bloc"

The founding teachers that formed New Village came from different traditional public schools for different reasons. Lucy Thompson says she was interested in becoming a founding teacher because she had a "niece and nephew in the exceptional children's program who weren't doing as well as I would have liked." Two of the three teachers that came from Edgar Moses to found New Village had previously had their contracts severed by the principal of that school a year before submitting the charter application. I did not interview these two teachers, and do not know their motivations for becoming involved with New Village Children's School.

However, three interviewees from the Riverside City public school community have said that this rift with the administration led these teachers to want to found their own charter school. Mitchell Henry (who was not serving as superintendent at that time), explains, "we have one [charter school] here that literally split off from the public school because they got upset with the principal and they just started their own school." Phrases like "split off" and "got upset" are indicative of how charter schools are broadly generalized among TSPs (interviews October 20, 2006 and November 6, 2006). These phrases often overshadow a more complex set of motivations among those who founded charter schools.

The year following these dismissals was supposed to be a year of recovery for Edgar Moses (interview, October 24, 2006). Recovery was not rapid enough, so the superintendent made more changes, and Helen Prince[8] began her job as the new principal for Edgar Moses a few months before New Village opened its doors in 1997. Prince recalls the turmoil she was facing "had nothing to do with New Village." Prince describes herself as a change agent and used change theory to help reshape the struggling school:

> We had to build trust in the community again and tell them that Edgar Moses was a good place for children to come. And we had to look at the faculty and reestablish a climate that school was based on student achievement, not adults that had problems. We had to bring all of our work back to one issue- that our job was to provide the best education to the students.

Many of the changes that were implemented appear very similar to Purkey and Smith's "Thirteen Characteristics of Effective Schools," (as cited in AASA, 1992). With the support of the superintendent, Prince introduced a new leadership method called the Comer process (a philosophy of governance that organizes collective participation between parents, students, teachers, community members and school administrators.) This governance change corresponds with four "effective schools characteristics" in Purkey and Smith's model: district support; parental involvement and support; school site management; and leadership (1992, p. 8). Prince also introduced Foxfire, a magnet curriculum adopted from a Georgia-based non-profit that advocates experiential learning and an appreciation of local oral histories. This curriculum change corresponds with three additional effective schools characteristics: curriculum articulation and organization; staff development; and school-wide recognition of academic success (1992, p. 8).

All of these characteristics contribute to four "process variables" that constitute the "dynamics of the school culture" (AASA, 1992). These four process variables include: "(1) a sense of community; (2) collaborative planning and collegial relationships; (3) commonly shared clear goals and high expectations; and (4) order and discipline" (p. 8). Prince

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[8] All participant names have been changed.

exhibits classic behaviors of a change agent, as defined in the 1990 McLaughlin study. Due in part to her leadership, Edgar Moses transformed into a school that closely resembled New Village.

Many CSPs would like to argue that New Village set the standard for a formerly stagnant traditional school like Edgar Moses and modeled a supportive, experiential learning community for Edgar Moses to follow. However, the timing of this specific case makes that argument problematic. Edgar Moses was already adopting these changes in 1997, the same year New Village was opening. One could not have served as a model for the other. It is more likely that both schools drew from well-known research and practices, such as the Comer method and "effective schools" research, which both originated in the late 1960's. Because they both use established research methodologies, neither school is truly innovative; which contradicts an important premise in the market-based competition model Kolderie (1990) introduced.

Kolderie also asserted that permanent change within the system was not possible; which may not be true in the case of Edgar Moses. Edgar Moses is an example of "change from within," but it is unknown whether or not it was a response to "change from without," in the form of the charter school legislation. Perhaps the charter school law did "light a fire" under certain administrators so that they finally accepted the need for change; or perhaps certain administrators were waiting for a change in the overall structure of the system so they could justify taking more radical changes in their districts. Either way, both New Village and Edgar Moses made conscious decisions to abandon certain "grammars" of schooling (like a single authoritarian figure and a segmented curriculum). Both schools and administrators are change agents; one simply took an additional legal step and started a new type of school; one took place within the already the existing school system.

COMPETING BELIEFS

The following section includes four tables that compare New Village to Edgar Moses on the four criteria against which charter schools have historically been judged. These criteria are paraphrased from research conducted by Deal & Hentschke (2004). Two criteria sound as if they are coming from a critical TSP: "charter schools were supposed to be innovative"; and "charter schools were supposed to improve academic performance." Two of the criteria seem to reflect the political perspectives already discussed; one Democratic: "charter schools will not serve the same distribution of class and race as public schools"; and one Republican: "charter schools get more out of a dollar" (Deal & Hentschke, 2004). As was stated earlier by policy analyst Toby Dixon, charter schools were associated with innovation by Republicans who hoped that the market-based competition model would inspire entrepreneurial ideas. The idea that charter schools disturb social cohesion goes back to the Democratic fear that charter schools would potentially result in "white flight."

Are charter schools innovative?

New Village was created with two distinctive founding philosophies (among many); teachers making day-to-day decisions, and children learning a curriculum that spans all grade levels. These philosophies match up to some of the "effective schools" characteristics (AASA, 1992) already mentioned. Using the "effective schools" characteristics as a basis for comparison, Edgar Moses and New Village philosophies appear very similar (see Table 1).

Table 1. *"Effective schools" characteristics*

"Effective schools" process variables	New Village Children's School[9]	Edgar Moses Elementary School[10]
Characteristic #1: **A sense of community**	"I'm just proud to be a part of (New Village) over the years. Every time I turned into that driveway (of the school), I had a sense of pride just thinking about what *we* had created."	"Ensuring that 'the connections between the classroom work, the surrounding communities and the world beyond the community are clear' is a core Foxfire principal."
Characteristic #2: **Collaborative planning and collegial relationships**	"We have a meeting every week with the directorate. Every teacher whether vested[11] or not participates. They still have to know [about what is going on] and they can have their say even if they're not vested."	"Collaborative leadership is the key for success in schools: joint decision-making creates a dynamic cohesion of staff, child and family."
Characteristic #3: **Commonly shared clear goals and high expectations**	"What we have here that's unique is a K-8 curriculum. What comes out of a writer who chooses what to write for eight years is amazing. We're not doing anything other teachers haven't figured out. It's just that we're all on the same page."	"When students explored Appalachian history and culture, they became intrigued by 'canjos,' […] a canjo is a banjo made from a can. Students built their own canjos, learned some of the old ballads, wrote about what they had learned, and presented their findings and music at a community concert."

Conclusion: Either a charter school or traditional school can adopt similar curriculum and governance strategies, provided that its leaders have the willpower to do so. New Village does not prove to be more innovative than its neighbor. It simply offers a similar kind of innovation in a non-traditional environment.

Are charter schools serving the same population as public schools?

Public schools must serve whomever lives in their local community. Private schools have complete control over which students they choose. Charter schools do not have a say over whom they will accept, but they are not under the same requirements as public schools. Like public schools, all applicants to charter schools have an equal chance of

[9] Source: October 19, 2006, interview with Rory Batchlore and October 18, 2006, interview with Annie Charles.
[10] Source: (2005). *National Blue Ribbon Schools.* Retrieved Nov. 3, 2006, from US Department of Education, Washington, DC.
[11] Vested teachers have taught at New Village Children's School for two years or more.

being admitted. Unlike public schools, charters can affect their applicant pool by marketing themselves or by designing a curriculum that might have a strong appeal to certain groups (though they cannot be religious in nature). Charter schools also determine who might apply by certain choices they make in regard to location, providing transportation, or their accessibility to urban or minority areas.

New Village made conscientious choices to appeal to a wide demographic. Rory Batchlore says that it is their intent to be "as diverse as possible, to show that all kids learn through first hand experiences." The school is located within the Riverside City limits, provides free transportation and free and reduced lunches to students who qualify. They have made efforts in the past to market to the African American community in particular. The results show. When compared to Edgar Moses, New Village serves a similar population, though the traditional public school serves a slightly higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students and fewer white students (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Student demographics, by school, 2004-2005 (in percent)*[12]

[12] Source: No author. (2005). Education first: NC school report cards. Retrieved Nov. 9, 2006 from the Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC. Web site: http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/. This data was extrapolated from dividing the number of students in this testing category by the total

	New Village Children's School	Edgar Moses Elementary School
Economically disadvantaged students	28	40
Students with disabilities	17	14
White students	68	58
Black students	20	24
Limited English proficiency	0	2

Conclusion: New Village leadership wished to attract a diverse student body that reflected the surrounding population, and has done relatively well. They are not an example of a "white flight" charter school.

Are charter schools improving academic performance?

Recent studies are reporting that despite their promise, charter school students are failing to meet desired testing results (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004; American Federation of Teachers, 2004). Two years ago a study sponsored by Duke University concluded that students in North Carolina charter schools "make considerably smaller achievement gains than they would have in traditional public schools," (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004, p. 3). Frequently TSPs reference this study as proof that charter schools did not live up to their promise; while charter school proponents argue how the data is not relevant (interviews, October 24, 2006 and November 3, 2006). In the end, the discussion becomes about the merit or falseness of the report, rather than the charter school itself:

> The battle over the theory of charter schools is now being fought over how to interpret the accumulating studies, stories, and statistics. Beliefs and unresolved issues are remarkably resilient after a decade of post hoc research. (Deal & Hentschke, 2004, p. 10)

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number of students who took the end of grade test in 2004-2005: 90 for New Village, and 189 for Edgar Moses. This is not the same as the total number of students at the school, which was 137 at New Village and 413 at Edgar Moses for the same year.

Most TSPs agreed that charter schools perform no better than traditional schools, but they also do no worse.

End of grade testing data in North Carolina reflects this reality. All public schools ABCs performance is reported on a yearly "report card." Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standard and measures progress toward achieving grade level performance. North Carolina awards specific honors to certain achievements in meeting AYP goals; if a school is designated a "School of Distinction," 80-90% of its students tested at or above grade level. If 90% of a school's students are at grade level, and the school met AYP, the school is awarded "Honor School of Excellence," which is the highest of the seven designations. One below that is "School of Excellence" where the 90% of students are at grade level, but AYP is not met. Both schools have similar records of performance (see Table 3).

Table 3. *ABCs measurements, by school and year, 2002-2004*[13]

School year	School name	AYP Designation	Growth	Met AYP?
2002-2003	New Village	School of Distinction	High growth	Yes
	Edgar Moses	School of Excellence	High growth	Yes
2003-2004	New Village	Honor School of Excellence	High growth	Yes
	Edgar Moses	Honor School of Excellence	High growth	Yes
2004-2005	New Village	School of Distinction	High growth	Yes
	Edgar Moses	School of Excellence	High growth	No

Conclusion: Just like traditional public schools, charter schools are required to administer tests and are expected to meet the same standards for student achievement and growth.

[13] Source: No author. (2005). Education first: NC school report cards. Retrieved Nov. 9, 2006 from the Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC. Web site: http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/.

New Village students do not perform significantly better or worse than their neighboring traditional public school students in any given year.

Are charter schools getting more for the dollar?

In 2005, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute published a study that documents how much public revenue goes to charter schools (Speakman, Hassel & Finn, 2005). The study examined findings from 16 states and the District of Columbia and reported in their primary findings that:

> Overall, charter schools are significantly underfunded relative to district schools. The per-pupil funding disparity ranged from 4.8 percent in New Mexico to 39.5 percent in South Carolina. In dollars, the gap ranged from an estimated $414 in North Carolina to $3,638 less per pupil in Missouri. (2005, p.1)

The $414 difference mentioned above is in state funding. In addition to this deficit, many charter schools across the state also receive significantly less local funding than traditional public schools. For instance, the study found that the per-pupil revenue difference between charter schools and the district schools in Wake County for 2002-2003 was $2727 less for charter schools (2005, p. 100).

This discrepancy can be attributed to the funding structure in the charter school law. Charter schools receive funding from the state and the county and/or city based on a per-pupil share of their current funding appropriation known as the ADM, or Average Daily Membership. Speakman et al. (2005) explain that this money must also go toward capital expenses in North Carolina, "Local capital funding, which provides a substantial amount of funding to district schools, is not available to charter schools. Charter schools must pay for facility leases, renovation and/or purchase out of their operating funds" (p. 101).

CSPs describe this funding inequity as a severe hindrance. In different interviews, one described it as having "one hand tied behind your back," another described it as "starting the race with one leg." They also have several understandings for why they did not receive equal funding in the first place. One sees it as a compromise that was necessary in

order to get beyond the resistance of the traditional public schools. Another sees it as a matter of not wanting to fund an unproven concept, which ten years ago might have been another fleeting school reform. Lucy Thompson says, “I can understand not wanting to build 100 new schools just as an experiment, but I feel that if the school is established [by making it through a five-year review cycle], then it should get the capital outlay money.”

TSPs maintain at least two rationales for why charter schools should not receive capital funding. The first is that charter schools willingly stepped out of the system and by doing so, made their own compromise. One North Carolina legislator says, “choice often means that you give up one thing to get another. Charter schools wanted to give parents a choice and free themselves up to do some things […] There are some consequences, some good, some not so good.” The core of this argument is that charter schools “got” freedom from accountability, so they could create a curriculum and structure they wanted; and they “gave up” funds as result.

On the other hand, a different legislator would vote to increase charter school funding if charter schools were more accountable, “if they get to the point where they show that they’re meeting the standards [that have been set for public schools], I have no problem funding them with their building needs also.” Both legislators share the perception that charter schools are not held to the same accountability standards.

Charter schools are already meeting the same testing and racial integration standards that public schools do (see Tables 2 and 3). But there are other standards against which schools are measured. TSPs cited teacher certification as an example of an important standard charter schools do not have to meet. This perception is due in part to a state law that requires charter schools to hire a minimum percentage of certified teachers: 75% of the elementary teaching staff and 50% of the middle school and high school teaching staff must be certified. There is no minimum for district schools.

This minimum standard makes it appear as if charter schools "get away" with fewer requirements. Even if this were true in the past, the federal NCLB legislation demands that all teachers at a school (charter or traditional) be highly qualified. To be highly qualified, a teacher does not have to be certified, which further complicates this issue.

The easiest method of illustration is to once again return to accountability measures and compare the statistics from New Village and Edgar Moses (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Teacher demographics, by school, 2004-2005 (in percent)*

	New Village Children's School[14]	**Edgar Moses Elementary School**[15]
Fully licensed teachers	100	91
Classes taught by highly qualified teachers	94	100
Teachers with advanced degrees	45	29
Teachers with national board certification	18	11

Conclusion: Charter schools receive less revenue from the state and county than district schools. Charter schools insist that they have willingly complied with the vast majority of accountability requirements that district schools are required to meet. An example is teacher certification. New Village has a higher teacher certification rate than Edgar Moses. According to a DPI employee, more charter schools are seeking to certify 100% of their teaching staff, "that's not unheard of. That's not unusual."

[14] Source: No author. (2005). North Carolina charter schools renewal report. Received Oct. 25, 2006 from Lucy Thompson of New Village Children's School.

[15] Source: No author. (2005). Education first: NC school report cards. Retrieved Nov. 9, 2006 from the Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC. Web site: http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/

TEACHERS: AGENTS OF CHANGE OR RESISTENCE

Thus far, I have illustrated that, according to its curriculum, New Village is not any more innovative than its neighboring traditional public school; both adapted to and adopted change. According to “on paper” accountability standards that many government agencies, policy analysts and journalists use to judge schools nationwide, such as test results and student demographics, New Village looks very similar to Edgar Moses. As has already been pointed out, this comparison may not be sustained across the state amongst different charter schools and traditional public schools. Edgar Moses may stand out as an innovative school in an innovative district that was willing to try new management and curriculum techniques that would otherwise be unheard of elsewhere in the state. New Village is also unique and may not represent all charter schools in terms of its ready acceptance of standards like the standard course of study or hiring certified staff.

One feature of the New Village philosophy that does not appear “on paper” is its attitude toward and treatment of its teachers. A school created “by teachers for teachers” should reflect a “new departure” that Tyack (1994) suggests is possible when teachers are part of the reform process. Teacher interviewees describe how New Village is different from their previous schools below. Tyack (1994) also predicts that reform can suffer because of “teacher burnout,” which can cause innovations to return to the “grammar” of schooling. These predictions turn out to be real threats in the New Village case where teacher interviewees also mentioned that the added leadership responsibilities tended to become overwhelming. As a result, the governance structure at New Village has evolved over time.

Annie Charles[16] is a relatively young though experienced teacher who began her career in the Teach for America program, where she worked in a Texas school near the border with Mexico. There, the experience "opened my eyes to the inequalities of public funding." She now teaches grade 1-2 at New Village Children's School, where she is still dealing with issues of inequitable funding in schools. She and her fellow staff are currently discussing plans for raising the $2 million needed to replace the older modular units on the campus with a permanent building. Despite this apparent disadvantage of working at a charter school, Charles is excited to share all of the ways that she benefits from being a teacher at New Village.

One advantage is that teachers have control over spending decisions. This runs the gamut from teacher salaries to instructional supply money. New Village teachers are paid on the state pay scale, which Charles says helps in "attracting the best-qualified teachers." More than sixty percent of the school's budget goes to teacher salaries. The charter limits class size of all grades to approximately 16. Every K-5 classroom has one teacher and one assistant teacher. Additional assistant teachers help with middle school math and split their time in other middle school subjects. There is still enough money to spend on the classrooms as well. Charles explains, "I get $1500 in instructional supply money. You don't see that anywhere else. [Teaching at other schools] I thought I was rich with $200." Because their curriculum is centered on "real books," Charles has spent a large proportion of her money on a variety of age appropriate reading books which fill the shelves in her classroom. Teachers try to minimize duplicated purchases amongst the staff, but in the end "it's my decision how to spend the money based on my class needs."

Professional development is another example of a staff investment. Professional development does not just entail sending teachers to professional conferences. In the New Village model, it means ongoing reading and discussion groups with other faculty, based on

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[16] All participant names have been changed.

topics upon which the teachers have collectively agreed. Teachers read research published on their topic of choice, discuss their interpretations of the research in monthly meetings, put the research into practice in their classrooms, and reflect on their experiences with teachers in those same monthly meetings. This year, Rory Batchlore is leading discussions with staff groups on writing and anti-bias approaches to teaching. The previous year the staff also focused on writing and building community. What Charles likes about this kind of professional development model is that it assumes she is a lifetime learner and that she can continually improve her teaching methodology and philosophy through interactions with her peers. Teachers also put theory into practice. Last year, as part of their community building focus, each grade taught the rest of the school a song. This year, at the school's annual birthday celebration, some classes sang some of their favorite songs that they learned from their classmates the previous year.

Interviews with Annie Charles and other New Village teachers make it clear that they feel in control of the major decisions that impact them. Having this control seems to lead to a high level of professional satisfaction. But this control does not come without a downside, namely the added burden of meeting extra responsibilities outside the classroom, while having to create a curriculum inside the classroom. Batchlore describes this pressure in terms of how things work in a traditional public school:

> The amount of meetings and things…think about a typical school. There's a principal, and an assistant principal, and 20-30 teachers doing things that need to be done. You take that down to 12 teachers doing informative meetings and parent meetings and directorate meetings, and the fall festival [a schoolwide fundraising event]…there's a pool of parents helping us now- for a long time […] there wasn't a lot of outside help.

Annie Charles recalls being overwhelmed her first year of teaching; not only by the number of meetings, but also by the fact that she was not working from any textbook or workbook. Everything she did in class was her own choice, but she also had to create all the materials she would use to teach her classes.

Since then, the New Village directorate has created a mentoring system for new teachers where a vested teacher who has been with New Village for more than two years will observe and meet with a new teacher in an effort to support them and help them meet their new challenges. Nevertheless, even an experienced teacher like Batchlore could not sustain the pace. “I was on my last breath here [before retiring and returning in an advisory role]. I even had health issues. Because it takes more energy.” As time has passed, four of the seven original founding teachers have retired or left while the school has simultaneously added additional middle school grades and hired several new teachers.

These staff changes demanded new structural changes. Lucy Thompson, a founding teacher, has taken on the role of the operations manager. She explains this transition:

> Over the last ten years as the founding teachers retired and we hired new teachers in the classroom, we found it was too high of an expectation to ask a new teacher to do administrative duties and their classroom duties. [In this position, I] do the day-to-day tasks, handle the budget and Title I, child nutrition and transportation. This position handles anything that is not related to the curriculum or inside the classroom.

The staff is careful to point out that creating this role does not mean that they have created a principal. What is notable is that one staff member had to dedicate all of her time to administrative duties, in part to meet what Rowan and Miskel (1999) describe as the evolution of managerial processes within the educational system. Thompson creates reports for federal programs like Title I and nutrition, and addresses local issues like transportation, all of which fortify the Rowan and Miskel (1999) theory that:

> Public school districts in the United States are accountable to a large variety of agencies exercising control over funding and programs, and as a result, [schools] expand their administrative components to respond to each of these agencies. (p. 370)

Batchlore has also stepped into a new role of curriculum advisor, in part to ensure that the original vision for school curriculum holds constant, despite an influx of new and

sometimes inexperienced teachers. Batchlore also finds herself thinking a great deal about how to create other support structures for the teachers:

> That's one thing we really have to think about, how to sustain ourselves and how to help new teachers, and what else we can do to support them. How can we continue what we've got and support and help sustain all of us, but especially the new teachers so we don't burn out.

Reform innovations at New Village have modified over time to suit the administrative "grammar" of schooling and to prevent the specter of teacher burnout that accompanies these real philosophical changes to the system.

New Village is not alone in its concern for job satisfaction and support for teachers. Superintendent Mitchell Henry has very serious concerns about meeting the needs of teachers in a non-supportive social climate:

> Teachers are among the lowest paid professionals. There are some craftsmen, like mechanics or plumbers, or electricians who are making more money than teachers. I don't understand this about our society. Other countries don't do this. Teachers are held in high esteem, they're up there with doctors and lawyers and Indian chiefs, not just in terms of compensation, but respect.

A legislator expresses an almost identical viewpoint, "Teachers and principals are all trying to do their jobs, whether they are in public schools or charter schools; and to maintain a professionalism that isn't being extended toward them in any monetary way." Two people who have significant powers in the hierarchy of the educational system make these two statements. They both express a confidence in teachers even as they bemoan their inability to change the prevailing conditions of lack of respect or low pay.

This portrayal of teachers as beleaguered, underpaid, and under-respected is a slightly different version of Tyack's (1994) "grammar" of schooling that is perpetuated in the media, in fictional movies, and by the teachers and administrators themselves. (In his article, Tyack focuses more on structural grammars, like age grouping by grade or subject grouping, rather than perceptual grammars like this, but both persist.) Teachers in New Village work hard and probably would be happy to receive a higher salary, but they did not

convey a similar attitude of being beleaguered and underpaid. Even when these teachers described their burdens, they maintained a positive level of excitement.

This attitude seems to stem from their overall ownership in the school. They describe having pride in “creating” something and that they can see has had an “impact” on students. They don’t always see their direct impact as individual teachers, but over the years, they feel that the unity of the curriculum can have impressive transformational results on individual students. This longevity of contact with students is an advantage of a smaller school like New Village, where it is possible for one teacher to know all 140 students in all eight grades. This is not necessarily the case with a school like Edgar Moses, which has over 400 students in five grades. (The average size of elementary schools in the state is around 500, according to the state “report card.”) Teachers also work closely with each other, where one might consult another who had the same student, maintaining a teacher’s involvement throughout the student’s progress (interview, October 18, 2006). The size of the school and collaboration among teachers at New Village seem to have a positive impact the satisfaction Annie Charles and other New Village teachers receive from their job.

CONCLUSION

I have used two methods of analyzing school reform in this article. One is to analyze reform "on paper," in a comparison study. Two schools (one traditional and one charter,) were judged by typical educational accountability standards including testing, certification (or legitimacy issues), curriculum, and class and racial integration. This head-to-head comparison is useful for illustrating how certain arguments in favor of or against charter schools can be fleshed out by data. However, the comparison is limited because it only engages schooling issues on the level of what can be quantified and reported. Across the four criteria, neither school is remarkably different. If competition implies a winner and a loser, the winner is really the "grammar" of schooling, that tendency for school reform to evolve until it once again resembles the original state (Tyack, 1994).

There are many aspects of schooling that are not quantified and not highlighted in public discourse that nonetheless have an impact on the quality of education. The second portion of the paper tries to illustrate one such issue and delves deeper into an unspoken, but important schooling consideration: how teachers responded to decision-making control in their budgets and their professional development. Teacher satisfaction data could be collected regularly and reported by the state or by other agencies, provided it were demanded by politicians or the public, but this is not the case. Instead, "cultural constructs" that define what the public perceives as "real schools" (Tyack, 1994) may prevent the discourse from addressing critical issues. In this case, "real schools" need to achieve in tests, so that measurement takes precedence over the kind of "real school" that might perform well in teacher satisfaction.

This study was not intended to address teacher leadership and control. The field research, however, indicated that these issues were important to structuring a new school (New Village) and restructuring an established school (Edgar Moses). Each school supported teacher input, but in slightly different ways. Edgar Moses followed a researched concept, the Comer process, and New Village created its own leadership structure that has evolved over time. A follow-up to this research could be a multiple-site case study and survey of teachers working in both of these environments: charter schools that were founded by teacher collaborations; or traditional schools that adopted the Comer process.

The aim of the study could be to discover if there is any noticeable difference in job satisfaction between these different leadership models. Again, both schools are reacting to similar research by Tyack (1994) and McLaughlin (1990) regarding the importance of involving teachers in reform. Both seem to have rejected a traditional “grammar” of schooling where the principal is more or less autocratic in his or her decisions. But if there is any noticeable difference, it could be due to a “within system” reform versus an “outside the system” reform.

Kolderie was one theorist who believed that reform outside the system was going to be more successful than within. We know that Edgar Moses adopted a structured and collaborative leadership approach with the Comer method. What remains to be seen is whether or not the Edgar Moses model retains any of the old “grammars” of schooling that make it less successful than the New Village form of teacher leadership. It is possible that Edgar Moses also returned to the more traditional “grammar” over time; that it could not sustain the new reform as Tyack (1994) has illustrated happens so often. Perhaps the principal at Edgar Moses still retains the kind of powers that teachers enjoy at New Village. Or, perhaps the collaborative processes at both schools in fact are very similar, and teachers at both schools are highly satisfied with the level of input they have.

The other question that remains is what limits teachers may have in accepting new responsibilities. Burnout is an ongoing threat for New Village teachers. They are not using a standard curriculum, so they are constantly in the process of "inventing" what they are teaching; they are committed to having real relationships with the families of the students; they are deciding how to raise facilities money and making other budget decisions; and they are planning the school's future while maintaining a high level of professional development. Even if teachers want more freedom and control, there may be a critical point after which teachers can do no more. If that is the case, what is that point? The traditional school hierarchy of leadership may be a highly efficient model, as well as the most sustainable model in preventing teacher burnout. These are questions that are unanswered now, but could be investigated in the future.

As many interviewees expressed, "it all comes down to what happens in that classroom between a student and a teacher." This is the idea that Tyack (1994) and McLaughlin (1990) imply when they describe the impact teachers have on the success of school reforms. If education does come down to this very simple relationship, reform ideas and accountability measurements should focus on this relationship. The charter school law led to the creation of New Village, where current teachers express a level of satisfaction and pride in their jobs and in their work; this alone should qualify this charter school as a successful reform. However, if test scores and other competitive measures continue to be the focus for all public schools, then the significance of this reform (and the reform at Edgar Moses) is lost.

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