

An Ethnographic Case Study of a School's Engagement in a School-Wide Reform

Initiative

by

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## ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of the common school in the United States (US), education has constantly been in a state of reform. Given the importance of student learning to the future state of our nation, it is important to understand how positive educational reform can be achieved. This ethnographic case study aims to try to understand how a reform effort works as an educational and a sociocultural process, and what the important contributing factors to actualizing school reform are, as well as the challenges of effective implementation. Specifically, this study focuses on a school-wide reform effort based upon Stephen Covey's Seven Habits (1989). Qualitative research methods were used to address the research questions in this study. The researcher drew upon interviews, observations, and artifact and field note collection to tell the story of an elementary school engaged in year three of a school-wide reform initiative from the viewpoint of 10 teachers involved. Three recurring themes emerged from the data. First, data indicate that school reform is most effective when a school culture is created that supports the activation of teacher voice, efficacy, and coparticipation. Second, time and support are factors impacting implementation. Third, teachers reported that the common language from the reform has impacted the culture of the school. The evolution of a school culture is not simple and is demonstrated in the different ways the teachers experience the reform. Questions of authenticity arise when the reform effort changes from a grassroots, bottom-up initiative to a more top-down, bureaucratized business model.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to the teachers who have candidly shared their experiences with me. Their commitment and quest to do what is best for their students each and every day is a true inspiration. And of course to my family, I am truly grateful for their support during this rewarding and challenging journey.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

“We only get one chance to prepare our students for a future that none of us can possibly predict. What are we going to do with that one chance?” (Covey, 2008, p. xii)

As education is under increasing scrutiny, how can a school not only adapt to these changes, but become a lighthouse for how to do education right? How can a school change its culture to one of high expectations, proven instructional practices, and collaboration while celebrating the strengths of its individual members? Sage Elementary School (pseudonym) is trying to do just that through a school-wide reform movement that involves teaching Stephen Covey’s (1989) leadership principles to students and staff.

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for this study. I begin with a discussion of educational reform, which is followed by my research questions. I then discuss the history of the school that is the focus of this ethnographic case study and the start of their local bottom-up reform efforts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the impact of school culture on education reform and an outline of the chapters included in this dissertation.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This dissertation is an ethnographic case study of a school that is in the process of reinventing itself. It is an in-depth, qualitative examination of how the staff is working together to try to improve the school’s learning and teaching environment, increase student learning and achievement, and become a school of

choice for parents and children outside the school's neighborhood boundaries. This ethnographic study aims to understand how a reform effort works as an educational and sociocultural process, and identify factors that lead to certain outcomes defined locally (i.e., by participants) as success or failure.

Since the introduction of the common school by Horace Mann in the 19th century (Spring, 2011), the field of education has been continually in a state of reform (Glass, 2008). In recent years, with the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that was signed into law by President George Bush in 2002, along with the latest efforts of current federal legislators to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act entitled *A Blueprint for Reform* (United States Department of Education, 2010), our nation has become increasingly focused on school reform by means of measuring student learning and preparedness through standardized testing (Ravitch, 2010).

Given the importance of student learning to the future state of our nation, it is important to understand how positive educational reform can be achieved. It is important to look at the different factors that impact students' learning and how reform efforts can make changes that will increase student learning. Top-down reform efforts such as NCLB and *A Blueprint for Reform* are often met with resistance from teachers and were enacted only partially due to implementers' lack of knowledge or skills, or modified locally based upon teachers' beliefs, values, and norms, along with their social and cultural capital (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). For these reasons and others, teachers often do not buy into top-down reform movements.

However, a substantial body of research indicates that in order for reform movements to be successful, teachers must, in fact, buy into the reform and feel that they have ownership over it (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Jorgensen, Walsh, & Niesche, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lipka & Mohatt, 1998). Stakeholders often need to suspend their previous ways of doing things and not only accept, but believe in the changes that the school is trying to make. These beliefs and ownership need to be spread throughout the entire organization (Hubbard et al., 2006). The present study looked deeply and ethnographically at the reform efforts at one school—Sage Elementary (all names are pseudonyms), located in the western United States (US)—in order to gain a deeper understanding of how this “buy-in” phenomenon takes place, as well as what the challenges are among the teachers themselves. This is thus a study of bottom-up rather than top-down education reform. By bottom-up, I mean a reform effort that began with teachers. In this case, the teachers at the school had the initial idea and desire to implement the Seven Habits. The teachers were the ones who went to the principal with the idea, took the idea to the staff, and began looking for the funding.

Research also shows that, in addition to taking ownership over education reform initiatives (buy-in), teachers need to believe that their voices are heard by local education leaders, and that teachers’ input makes a difference in the life and functioning of the school (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tsigilis, Grammatikopoulos, & Koustelios, 2007; Vernon-Dotson, 2008). Specifically, this body of research shows that when teachers believe they are listened to and have input into the change process then they are

more likely to develop trusting relationships in school leadership—another critical factor in the success of educational reforms (Hubbard et al., 2006). A leader’s actions influence others, while at the same time those same people a leader has influenced influence his or her actions. When responsibility for leadership is distributed among principal, teachers, and staff, then the school’s actions and interactions are valued and enacted with more care and effectiveness (Spillane, 2005). In light of this research, this study also looks at the effects of the school leader’s actions and relationships as experienced by the school’s staff and how these mutual interactions influence the culture of the school—and ultimately the viability and success of the reform.

This suggests another important dimension of bottom-up education reform: the culture of the school. A significant body of research indicates that the culture of any organization plays a central role in that organization’s performance (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Organizational culture is defined as the written and unwritten rules, traditions, norms, and expectations held by a group of people who share an experiential history and place; it is the underlying, often tacit social meanings that shape organization members’ beliefs and actions over time (Deal & Peterson, 2009). The importance of organizational culture can be seen in both the business world and in the inner-workings and potential success of a school.

More specifically “school cultures are complex webs of traditions and rituals that have been built up over time . . . cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the way people think, act, and feel” (Deal & Peterson, 1994, as cited in Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 191). Just as a positive

organizational culture can lead to increased revenue in the business world, a positive school culture can lead to increased student achievement (Deal & Peterson, 2009). An abundance of research supports an association between a positive organizational culture and the productivity of organizational members, and that a positive school culture can be a primary contributor to improved teaching and student academic achievement (Fullan, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1998; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). As members of the school culture and community, teachers in particular may be better able to form trusting relationships with each other and students and subsequently view themselves as more capable professionals (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004; Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010).

A positive school culture influences all facets of a school: it fosters school effectiveness and productivity (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Purkey & Smith, 1985); it improves collegiality, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving practices (DuFour, 2007; Little, 1982; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994); it promotes innovation and school improvement (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Little, 1982; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Louis & Miles, 1990; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004); it builds commitment and kindles motivation (Schein, 2004); it amplifies the energy and vitality of school staff, students, and community; and it focuses attention on what is important and valued (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 2004). Hence, this study investigates the culture of

Sage Elementary to determine how that culture has evolved and influenced (and has been influenced by) the education reform efforts.

Through formal interviews, unstructured and semistructured interviews, and conversations with school participants, observations, and artifact collection, this ethnographic study documents and analyzes the school culture, including the actions and relationships of the staff at Sage Elementary, during the third year of a bottom-up, teacher-initiated reform. My study does not directly address the role of the school leaders or the students, but focuses on the perceptions, actions, and experiences of teachers as key participants in this school culture.

### **Research Questions**

Developed from the statement of purpose, the research questions for this study are as follows:

1. In what ways has the school culture changed since the adoption of Covey's Seven Habits?
2. What has been the process of school change?
  - a. What has been the role of teachers in the school reform process?
  - b. What has been the role of the school leadership in the school reform process?
3. In light of this cultural analysis, what are the factors that shape a school's capacity to transform its culture by adopting Covey's Seven Habits?

The answers to these questions help us better understand the relationships among a school's culture, teacher efficacy, school leadership, and a school's capacity for change. My analysis sheds light on what factors are most significant to the success of

school reform efforts. In the process, the data also suggest certain challenges to successful school reform. The answers to these questions have significant implications for other schools as they initiate reform efforts of their own.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide background on Sage Elementary, with a focus on three elements: the staff and population of the school, the current school organization, and the events that have occurred over the past several years that have had a dramatic impact on the school's current condition. I also discuss why the school is trying to make changes and what exactly these changes entail.

### **Background Information on Sage Elementary**

Sage Elementary first opened its doors in August of 1994 to preschool through fifth grade students. This public school is nestled at the base of the mountains just a few miles south of a large metropolitan city in the western United States. Nicknamed Sage, the school is surrounded by breathtaking desert mountain views, hiking and biking trails, and well-maintained neighborhoods and gated communities, as well as by local businesses within a half-mile walk. The campus includes one main building, which encompasses 34 regular classrooms, an art room, a music room, two preschool rooms, a literacy lab, two developmentally delayed classrooms, two resource rooms, a front office with two secretaries and separate offices for the principal, student advisor, and health assistant, and finally a multipurpose room with a stage that serves as a cafeteria, physical education classroom, and assembly space.

Outdoors on the south side of the school there is a large soccer field, two baseball diamonds, an extra grassy area for running and playing, two covered



playgrounds (one with equipment geared toward kindergarten through second graders and the other with larger equipment for the third through fifth graders), two basketball court areas with eight hoops each, two volleyball courts, six tetherball poles, cement areas for hopscotch and four square, a covered ramada with 10 picnic tables, and two covered ramada areas under which physical education classes to convene. On the north side of the school is a school-wide garden, several large grassy areas, a large cement area, a long covered ramada area, and sidewalks in between it all that lead to the media center. The media center is housed in a building that is shared with the middle school that is on the same campus and serves approximately 1,200 sixth through eighth graders. The media center includes the library and three computer labs, plus additional classrooms and meeting rooms.

Recently, the school was updated and remodeled. The entrance was relocated to the east side of the main building and new, taller fencing was installed in order to close the campus and make it more secure. This change was the direct result of parents and the Parent Teacher Organization's (PTO's) reaction to an incident involving a man under the influence of drugs being able to enter the previously unsecured campus. Additionally, the preschool rooms were relocated and updated with this movement of the front office. Furthermore, new carpet was installed throughout the building, all of the bathrooms were redone with new fixtures and flooring, key card entries were installed at all doors, and security cameras were installed inside and outside the building. Finally, the staff redecorated

the entire building with creative and professional murals, quotes, and interactive student displays that reflect the school's new mission and vision.

The parents and students have been thrilled with all of the changes that have occurred over the past year. One teacher even overheard a child telling his mother, "They've made all of my dreams come true!" The community that Sage Elementary serves has changed slightly over the past few years, but would still be considered middle and upper-middle class. Traditionally, the students have come from single-family homes (there are no apartment complexes within the district boundaries of Sage) in which the father worked in a professional career and the mother stayed at home. Over the past few years, more families have become dual-income families due to the unstable economy or have become single-parent households. The population has decreased over the past several years from full capacity of over 800 students to the current enrollment of 586 students. District data from 2011 reported the population at the time of this study consisted of 96% neighborhood children and 4% open-enrollment children who chose to attend Sage over their home school.

On the outside, Sage Elementary paints an idealized picture of middle-class White suburbia. However, once inside the school, one is likely to see and feel a much different reality. Over the years, this school has had its share of turmoil with individual staff members, as well as between staff members, which has led to a highly competitive and noncollaborative culture. The fractured school culture was evoked in an informal conversation I had with the previous assistant principal about school culture and the staff's willingness to help out with extra tasks around the school. She described being new to the school and in need of some marking pens to

use during a staff training session. She walked into a teacher's classroom and asked if she could borrow some markers for the training, saying that she would return them afterwards. When the teacher refused, the assistant principal reported thinking, "Huh, so that's what kind of place this is." She also mentioned that at the other schools in which she had worked, people were very willing to help out with extra duty when other staff members were absent. At Sage Elementary, she said, only a few staff members were willing to do that.

I have not heard many accounts of the first principal and staff who opened Sage Elementary 17 years ago, but after that first group left there have been countless stories and events that have helped shape a negative culture at Sage. The second principal of Sage had a reputation for hiring employees based upon their looks, as well for having inappropriate relationships with many of the female faculty. After leaving Sage and working in another district he was relieved of his duties there because of improper use of funds. A third principal was hired instead of the assistant principal at the time, which created a very competitive and untrusting environment. Both administrators routinely badmouthed each other to the staff. The third principal was also known for playing favorites, for saying one thing publicly and something different in private conversations, and for allowing select parents and staff members to make important decisions for the entire school. Finally, the principal was forced to leave the school by a group of staff members and subsequently found to have stolen tens of thousands of dollars from the two schools in her charge (Sage and another elementary school in the same district).

In addition, one of the teachers on staff was accused of being in the escort business. Her website, along with the photos mailed to the school and district, became conclusive proof of inappropriate actions, and consequently she resigned. Another powerful member of the Sage staff was a teacher who publicly preached character and integrity, but was then relocated to another school after it was learned that she was charging parents additional fees for tutoring, clubs, and after-school classes she was running. Finally, there were two teachers who were married, and when their relationship ended on poor terms they wreaked havoc by bringing staff and parents into their dispute, which caused people to choose sides and the situation divided the school.

Culture evolves over time as people go through daily routines, deal with problems, create traditions, and mesh their values and beliefs (Deal & Peterson, 2009). So, it is no wonder that the combination of all of these incidents over an eight-year time frame has had a drastic negative impact on the culture of Sage Elementary. Currently, most staff feel that these events are behind them and want to change the school for the better. Yet, achieving a deep change in school culture will not be instantaneous. It will take staff and the community working together, rebuilding trusting relationships, providing input, and growing slowly over a long period of time (Dovre, 2007).

### **Reform at Sage**

The local reform movement that is the focus of this dissertation began when I read the book *The Leader in Me* (Covey, 2008) after it was just released. At that time, I was (and still am as of the writing of this dissertation) the school's gifted teacher. I

instruct small groups of children who have been identified as gifted as well as consult with regular classroom teachers to aid them in meeting the needs of their high-achieving students. Covey's book told the story of a school in the southern US that was failing according to its district's standards. This school researched what businesses, parents, and community members felt children needed to be successful in life; these items ended up being reframed as principles that were essentially represented by Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Covey argued that his Seven Habits are timeless principles that are practiced by successful people and organizations. The Seven Habits include:

- Be Proactive
- Begin with the End in Mind
- Put First Things First
- Think Win-Win
- Seek First to Understand Then to be Understood
- Synergize
- Sharpen the Saw (a metaphor for taking care of your mind and body).

Because of the tumultuous history at Sage and what was then a clear consensus around the need for change, I brought the ideas from *The Leader in Me* (Covey, 2008) to my principal and then to a small group of five teachers who began writing grants to obtain the funds to implement this reform initiative. During the grant-writing process, the group of people involved became very excited and optimistic for what this reform effort could mean for the school. We firmly believed

this school could be the kind of place that we not only wanted to be at every day, but that we were proud to be at every day.

While we did not receive the grant funding, we did secure financial support from our PTO. The PTO members were also very excited about creating a more positive place for their children and agreed to pay for our initial trainings in the Seven Habits. During this initial planning time and prior to our training, our small group of five also went to California to hear the Southern school principal who had reformed her school. She was speaking to a California district that was trying to adopt the Seven Habits, but was experiencing resistance to their top-down initiative. While we were in California, we met the owners and founders of the Panda Express Corporation (a gourmet Chinese fast-food restaurant), Andrew and Peggy Cherng, who believed in and fostered the Seven Habits culture at their company. In fact, the Cherngs believe in Covey's seven principles so whole-heartedly, they were providing the funding to this California school district to utilize the Seven Habits resources and teach the habits to students. Unfortunately, the reform was having minimal impact in California, apparently because it was perceived as a top-down initiative—apropos of the research literature cited above. However, after we spent the day with the Cherngs, they were so impressed with our teacher-initiated, bottom-up effort that they agreed to become our financial partners in order to help make our dream of a leadership academy become a reality. After these ideas were approved and supported by our district office and by most of the staff at Sage, we were able to begin our trainings in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989). All

of this occurred between the middle of one school year and the end of the next school year—so, over a course of one-and-a-half years.

After the initial year of training, which was focused on supporting the teachers in internalizing the habits into their own professional lives, the teachers spent a good portion of their summer redoing the interior of the school to reflect the new Sage mission: “Leaders of Today, Inspiring Leaders of Tomorrow.” This new mission gave Sage a higher calling—a greater cause, a deeper calling, a reason for the school’s existence, and a way for people to connect (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 62). This seemingly simple act of redecorating seemed to help bring people together and energize the staff with a common purpose. These efforts also continued the following summer and propelled the staff into a more positive start of the school year as they had fun together and were able to connect at a different level than is typical in the day-to-day work within the school.

At the start of the 2011–12 school year, the teaching of leadership principles at Sage was in its second full school year with students. Teachers were trying to create the foundation of Sage with The Seven Habits. This foundation is equivalent to that of a foundation of a house: The Seven Habits represent the base or the ground from which to build everything. While many things in education may change on the outside, the foundation of who we are, both within individual classrooms and within the school as a whole, is what undergirds and supports the direction of the school. Staff and students are continuing to learn and utilize the following principles: (a) be proactive, (b) begin with the end in mind, (c) put first things first, (d) think win-win, (e) seek first to understand-then to be understood, (f) synergize,

and (g) sharpen the saw (a metaphor for taking care of one's self by balancing one's life) (Covey, 1989). Staff and students drew on the principles to create missions, set goals, track their progress, and build upon their personal strengths. This is all done in the hope of increasing collegiality and collaboration between both groups and gearing instruction toward students' goals in order to increase student achievement, which were all essential parts of the reform. The staff also tried to create the reform in a way that was tailored to Sage Elementary instead of merely replicating what others had done. Research showed that if reform efforts are cocreated by all participants, then the reform was more likely to having a lasting impact (Hubbard et al., 2006).

As the staff was cocreating the Seven Habits reform, the school leadership was also adding on more components to the reform. These additional elements were observed at other schools that had embarked on a reform with leadership and the Seven Habits as a focus. The first additional component was CARES, an acronym for Cooperation, Accountability, Respect, Excellence, and Safety. The CARES common language related to the school-wide procedures put in place for different activities and environments at Sage. There was a CARES expectation for walking in the hall, using the bathroom, eating in the cafeteria, using the playground equipment, and paying attention in class, just to name a few. (See Chapter 4's discussion on common language.)

Data Passports, a reference to special notebooks used to aid students in taking ownership over their learning by setting and tracking their personal and academic goals, was a second component that teachers were expected to implement.



Teachers guided students' use of these special notebooks. Another part of the reform included holding two Leadership Days each school year. Leadership Days were held for community members to come to the school to see what the students were learning and for students to be able to show off their new leadership skills through speeches and performances. Teachers were encouraged by the school leadership to take charge of some aspect of the day and work with a group of students to help them give a speech about a Habit or how the student is a leader or to share their Data Passport or to greet guests as they arrived or to participate in a musical or dramatic performance.

During the second year of the reform implementation, a team of 10 teachers formed the Lighthouse Team. The Lighthouse Team met every other week throughout the school year with the purpose of furthering the leadership reform efforts at Sage Elementary. In the spring of 2012 this Lighthouse Team met on a Saturday to discuss applying for Lighthouse status. Achieving the Lighthouse status involved a Lighthouse visit with four evaluators from FranklinCovey [the commercial firm behind the Seven Habits] evaluating Sage's level of implementation to determine if the school met the nine criteria for becoming a Lighthouse School, which is a beacon for other schools to emulate. The nine criteria included having: a Lighthouse Team that guides the leadership model, a physical environment that promotes leadership, lessons that integrate the Seven Habits, a staff that works collaboratively to build a leadership culture, meaningful leadership roles for students, parent involvement with and support for leadership, school-wide leadership events, a system in place for tracking goals like Data Passports, and

measurable results in the form of decreased discipline and increased attendance and achievement (The Leader in Me, 2013). After reviewing all of the criteria the school needed to have in place, the Lighthouse Team decided that the school needed to deepen the implementation levels of some of the criteria and consequently decided to wait indefinitely to apply for a Lighthouse visit.

At the start of the 2012-2013 school year the school leadership announced that Sage would be seeking the Lighthouse status. Along with this undertaking, the teachers had many new components added to their teaching jobs. First there was the adoption of the new Common Core Standards, a new national curriculum reform for teaching students math and English language arts. Second, the teachers in Sage's school district started the year under a new teacher evaluation system in which teachers were evaluated more frequently and on more components of their teaching. Third, the teachers were still getting used to teaching increased instructional minutes in the core areas of reading and math, as well as having to teach instructional focus groups (IFGs) that differentiated learning for their students. And finally, six of the teachers were adjusting to teaching a new grade level that year (partly due to student enrollment fluctuations and partly due to the desire of the school's leadership.)

This was the internal school context for the reform effort and the case study that follows. I turn now to a discussion on U.S. educational reform.

## **Reform at Sage in the Larger Context of U.S. Education Reform**

Educational reform is as old as public education (Glass, 2008). The 20th century brought concern about competition with other nations. Education failures were blamed for the Great Depression, Sputnik caused Americans to think the education that their citizens were receiving was inadequate, and the whole language movement over phonics instruction was blamed for illiteracy. In the 1983 Reagan-era education reform, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), American life itself was portrayed as being at risk because of the failing schools. More recently, NCLB was passed by Congress as an attempt to increase schools' accountability for student success and to provide choices for parents whose children are enrolled in failing schools (Glass, 2008). Wherever one looks in US history, policy makers and government bureaucrats have been lamenting the state of its schools. The purpose of public education also has been debated since the beginning; is the purpose to create subservient citizens, to impose prescribed beliefs, or to provide intellectual tools to all citizens (Spring, 2011)? These urgent reasons for reform have continually changed and the idea of effectiveness is always in question (Fullan, 2001; Glass, 2008; Marzano, 2000; Ravitch, 2010).

Not only have officials and researchers investigated the causes of presumed education failures, they have also undertaken efforts to improve education, many of which “are poorly thought out and unconnected to the stated purposes of education” (Fullan, 2001, p. 9). Some attribute success in school to teachers and students interacting in a positive classroom environment where everyone is aware of their

actions and how they affect others (Godwin, 2010), as well as a classroom climate that focuses on intrinsic motivation as opposed to external rewards (Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009). Others recognized there are specific behaviors and beliefs that teachers engage in or hold that make a difference in their students' achievement (Milner, 2008). Still others (Dauksas & White, 2010; Shachar, Gavin, & Shlomo, 2010) attributed student success to a collaborative school culture in which teachers and school leaders work together to implement reform, better their teaching strategies, and develop relationships with each other and their students.

A democracy that will survive and thrive in a world that demands well-educated citizenry must build a system that can ensure all students the right to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Therefore, educational success has also been analyzed according to the extent to which schools prepare students to be democratic citizens. Citizenship education is aimed at enabling students to become actively involved in their communities and political life (Revell & Arthur, 2007). In part, citizenship has to do with being a person of good character, one who makes informed decisions and whom can contribute positively to society (Bixby & Pace, 2008). The Character Education Partnership is a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC, that advocates for character development and education in schools. The organization states that character education should be embedded within a school's teaching and culture, not as an additional separate subject to teach, but as part of the core curriculum. Moreover, it is important for character education to "respect all learners, develop their characters, and help them succeed" while providing them with opportunities for moral action (Dovre, 2007). The choices a

school makes or fails to make about what sort of moral climate to create inevitably leave lasting marks on the students who live and learn at the school (Damon, 2005).

In addition, character education policies in the US are responsive to the needs of preparing students for the workforce, which some scholars attribute to increased academic achievement, active citizenship, safe school environments, and universal values such as responsible citizenship, morality, ethics, and respect (Winton, 2008). These specific needs are what warrant this dissertation study. By reinventing a school utilizing the Seven Habits as its foundation—a foundation that is embedded in the curriculum—the hope is that relationships will be fostered and students will have the opportunity to engage in democracy (Flecknoe, 2002). The troubled times of today warrant educating students to embody good character and to become informed democratic citizens (Bixby & Pace, 2008). Covey (1989) claimed the Seven Habits are the best pathway to accomplish this; hence, the present study intends to conduct an in-depth examination of the implementation of Covey's principles in one, urban public school.

### **School Cultures and Education Reform**

Teachers bring their own theoretical frameworks into the classroom. They bring their theories of practice alongside a personal history of routines and a level of capacity for change (Hubbard et al., 2006). Consequently, this study also concentrates on the culture of Sage Elementary and asks what is the nature of the school culture, and examines how the culture impacts the school's reform efforts.

In order for reform efforts to penetrate the culture deep enough to have an impact, staff and community buy-in, widely shared beliefs, and trusting relationships need to be created (Deal & Peterson, 2009). The relationship between leaders and teachers is significant, especially during reform, and "relationships of trust provide a shared foundation from which to launch improvements to the reform" (Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 254). This dissertation explores how the formal (named) and informal leaders at Sage are attempting to establish all of the above conditions, build the capacity for change, and support the staff as they go through these changes. If these conditions occur, the hope is that teachers will stop engaging in the negative cultural patterns and traditions that have evolved over the past 17 years of Sage existence and whole-heartedly support this reform effort.

Covey (1989) claimed that the Seven Habits are timeless principles that have been characteristic of modern day society. Through his definitions and categorizations, the Habits became known worldwide as principles that help individuals be effective and enable people to attain their goals. Students not only need these leadership principles, but they also need opportunities to be leaders in action (Arensdorf & Andenoro, 2009). The theory that students need to work in a leadership capacity has long been held as true and can be traced back to Vygotsky (1962) who believed that one develops when she or he learns from experience. It is this philosophy that is helping to drive the reform efforts at Sage Elementary.

In summation, several important aspects of positive educational reform include teacher buy-in, teacher efficacy, strong leadership, and a positive school culture. In the next chapter, I examine the scholarly literature on these elements; the

study itself investigates the enactment of the principles within Sage Elementary as school participants undertake a bottom-up reform initiative centered on Covey's Seven Habits (1989).

### **Chapter Summary and Overview of the Dissertation**

In this chapter, I have looked at educational reform, the history of Sage Elementary, and the bottom-up reform initiative Sage has begun, and I have provided a discussion of culture as related to reform and the Seven Habits. This introductory chapter provides the foundation for the dissertation, which includes:

- In Chapter 1, the Introduction, I discussed educational reform within the context of the subject of this ethnographic case study, which is Sage Elementary.
- Chapter 2 is titled Literature Review and Conceptual Framework. In this chapter, I review the scholarly literature regarding three key factors (school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture) identified as critical to educational reform.
- Next, Chapter 3 provides the methodology. I discuss the rationale and methods for this study as an ethnographic case study, as well as discuss the selection of participants.
- Chapter 4, or Analysis and Interpretation of Findings, presents and organizes the presentation around the coding and themes that formed patterns from the data. The goal in this section is to create meaning from the data as I interpret the patterns and themes from the participants' words and actions.

- Chapter 5 includes conclusion and recommendations, and throughout this chapter I discuss what can be learned from the Sage case study and the data collected in this study. I also discuss the transferability of the findings to other contexts. The larger implications for education policy, practice, scholarship, and reform are also discussed.

I turn now to a discussion of the relevant scholarly literature on the topic of educational reform in general and in the context of the relationships between school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture.



## Chapter 2

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the scholarly literature regarding educational reform. To organize this review of literature, I identified three overriding themes: school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture. In the sections that follow, I also explore the Seven Habits that are at the heart of the reform initiative in this ethnographic study.

#### **Background**

Educational reform is a constant concern of policy makers, the media, education leaders, and educators (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Consequently, one of the “biggest problems facing schools is fragmentation and overload” (Fullan, 2001, p. 21) because “reform isn’t just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of the classrooms, the schools” (Fullan, 2001, p. 7). Additionally, Elmore (2004) stated that “knowing the right thing to do is the central problem of school improvement . . . performance depends on having people in schools with the knowledge, skill, and judgment to make the improvements” (p. 9). But, what exactly are those right things to do?

Over the years, there has been an abundance of research regarding educational reform, especially since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which placed emphasis on high-stakes testing as a means of increasing school accountability and, thereby, student achievement. Elmore (2004) stated, we need to “aggressively build teacher, leader, and organizational capacity” for school improvement to occur (p. 4). Reviewing this and other research on school reform, I

identified three overriding themes or factors as the most valuable aspects of reform efforts. These significant factors include: (a) the relationship between school leadership and the capacity for change; (b) the relationship between teacher efficacy and the capacity for change; and (c) the relationship between the school's culture and the capacity for change. As this dissertation delves further into these three relationships, I also consider which factors are most significant to the contribution or hindrance of the success of a school-wide reform effort. While previous research has examined some of these elements individually or in association with other factors, the research base is shallow in terms of how all of these elements together impact schools' capacity for change as well as the outcomes of school-based efforts at positive change.

Lipka and Mohatt (1998) found that empowering teachers and improving both school and community relationships were conducive to beginning school change and reform. Making changes is difficult though. What one group sees as a solution, another group may see as a problem (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Regardless of the type of change an organization is trying to make, research has shown that leadership, teacher efficacy, and organizational culture are essential ingredients in building the capacity for change (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2003). Within this chapter, I explore the research on each of these themes, and relate them to Covey's Seven Habits.

## **Leadership**

"Leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use

of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, p. 24).

While school leadership is believed to have an impact on student achievement and there is an abundance of studies on this topic, there has not been a clear understanding of the leadership-student achievement relationship between leadership and students (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Researchers, however, have recognized that the role as an instructional leader is one of the most important aspects of a school administrator’s tasks (Hoy & DiPaola, 2008).

In 2002, Quinn examined four dimensions of instructional leadership and their impact on instructional practice and student engagement. The analysis supported the idea that leadership impacts instruction, principals who are strong instructional leaders have greater impact on classroom instructional practice, and this type of leadership is crucial in creating a school that values and strives to help all students succeed. Additionally, increased levels of active teaching, as well as increased levels of student learning and engagement, were found in schools in which the principal was rated highly as a resource provider and where communication was promoted. Marks and Printy (2003) concurred that when principals obtain high levels of commitment and engagement from teachers, their school will perform at a higher level due to this shared instructional leadership capacity.

A study conducted by Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) examined eight high-quality teaching and learning professional development programs for leaders.

Through interviews, surveys, observations, and the examination of trends, the researchers built on recent evidence that a leader's primary role is to improve instruction. As leaders improved their skills as instructional and transformational leaders, it improved their relationships with teachers and improved the effectiveness of the instruction delivered by the teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2003). It has been well recognized that not only is teaching and learning influenced, but so too are the organizational conditions—by the capacity for change (Leithwood et al., 2004; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002). Teachers acknowledged that the initial changes were more difficult, but the new collaborative and vision-centered environment made them feel more supported and productive. Printy and Marks' (2006) analyses of the research confirms that how "school principals engage their teachers in school initiatives and concerns is critical in developing extensive shared leadership" (p. 128).

In a meta-analysis of more than 5,000 studies since the early 1970s, Waters et al. (2003) examined the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. Their analysis focused on quantitative studies of student achievement data in which student achievement was the dependent variable and teacher perceptions of leadership was the independent variable. The analysis suggested there was a strong relationship between leadership and student achievement. Student achievement increased 10 percentile points more when the school's leadership ability was rated as high.

Waters et al. (2003) found that in addition to a school leader's general impact, there were 21 specific leadership responsibilities that correlate to student

achievement. These principal leadership responsibilities include the extent to which the principal engages in behaviors that fit into the categories of supporting teachers and establishing a strong sense of community. The principal supports teachers by protecting them from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching, providing teachers materials and professional development that enable them to be more successful, participating in the design and implementation of the curriculum and instruction practices, and recognizing teachers' hard work and accomplishments. Furthermore, the principal builds a strong sense of community by fostering shared beliefs, establishing school goals and standard operating procedures, advocating for all stakeholders, setting strong lines of communication, and involving stakeholders in important decisions and policies (Waters et al.. 2003, p. 4)

Additionally, Waters et al. (2003) identified two variables as determining factors in a principal's positive or negative effect on student achievement. These variables include correctly identifying the focus for improvement and understanding how closely the proposed changes match existing norms and values. These are issues that need to be considered when focusing on change in school and teacher practices because further analysis of Waters et al.'s (2003) research found that school and classroom practices also influenced student achievement. At the school level these include guaranteed and viable curricula, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environments, and collegiality and professionalism. At the teacher level these include instructional strategies, classroom management, and classroom curriculum

design. Consequently, a leader needs to take into consideration how change will impact each individual and stakeholder group and subsequently adapt their leadership practices accordingly.

Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) study examined the practices of administrators in 12 different schools that had developed highly collaborative professional relationships within the context of school improvement initiatives. The researchers' analysis found that principals fostered greater collaboration through the following transformational strategies: strengthening the culture, using bureaucratic mechanisms, fostering staff development, frequent and direct communication, sharing power and responsibility, and using rituals and symbols to express cultural values. These leadership practices led to a more collaborative staff culture. A more collaborative staff culture is "most conducive to the types of both student and staff development which are the focus of current school reform efforts" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, pp. 29-30). Moreover, a collaborative culture is more likely to inspire teachers to engage in more productive and significant practices as they learn from their peers.

Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998) expanded on the idea of collaborative leadership with several other studies that found relationships between collective leadership (Leithwood's current terminology) and student achievement. Effective principals establish strong relationships with teachers as they work closely and collaboratively (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Leithwood et al. (1998) gathered qualitative data and synthesized three independent studies in order to identify

which conditions fostered organizational learning. Their research clearly indicated that school leadership and school culture were the most influential conditions affecting learning and reform efforts at the schools.

Most recently, Leithwood and Mascall's (2008) analysis of a subset of data collected in 2004 looked at responses from 2,570 teachers in over 90 schools to measure collective leadership and teacher performance antecedents. The analysis suggested that collective leadership does explain significant variation in student achievement across schools. This influence on student achievement comes from collective leadership's direct influence on teacher motivation and work setting. Teachers' perceptions of their school's success in regard to higher achievement stemmed from all stakeholders having a greater degree of influence on the workings of their school.

A four-year longitudinal study conducted in Chicago by Spillane et al. (2001) examined the leadership activities that occurred as schools attempted to change curriculum instruction. Through observations and interviews of both formal and informal leaders, as well as a social network analysis of the Chicago area schools, Spillane et al. found that while the skills and actions of a formal leader are important, other school leaders and followers make important contributions as well. According to Spillane et al., "Leadership practice is constituted in the interaction of leaders and their social and material situations" and "working together lead to the evolution of a leadership practice that is potentially more than the sum of each individual's practice" (pp. 24, 27). This distributed leadership perspective indicates that the sole leader of a school is not the only focus and it may be more resourceful

during reform movements to develop teachers' leadership expertise. It also defines a way of thinking about the practice of leadership: "Leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of the school leaders, their followers, and their situation" (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). This interaction leads to new and better things, not just the same old ideas.

Lipka and McCarty (1994) also found in their decade-long ethnographic and action-oriented research that administrators played a vital role in the professional development of the teachers at schools serving Yup'ik and Navajo students. In turn, teachers' professional development led to positive outcomes for Native American students. Specifically, the creation and influence of teacher study groups successfully impacted school-wide cultures. Teachers interacted with each other, outside consultants, and teachers at other schools to exchange ideas and teaching strategies appropriate for Native American students. This led to teachers feeling empowered and invigorated by the new pedagogy and curriculum, and it facilitated their ownership of the changes occurring as they worked collaboratively with their administration on their school's reform.

Data obtained from another ethnographic study (Jorgensen, Walsh, & Niesche, 2009) suggested that a collaborative style of leadership helped stakeholders recognize their colleagues' strengths and allowed teachers to take ownership of and experiment with their teaching. They also discovered that teachers were more engaged in reform efforts when their administrations treated them with respect and as professionals. A high degree of mutual trust was also found to be conducive to reform efforts in a case study conducted by Penuel, Riel,



Krause, and Frank (2009). During their analysis of two schools, Penuel et al. (2009) found that the school with the more trusted leader had greater success in implementing reform; instead of feeling pressured to perform, the teachers expressed satisfaction that there was shared responsibility and accountability.

A longitudinal study by Hallinger and Heck (2010) confirmed the assertions presented by Leithwood and colleagues, as well as Jorgensen and colleagues, regarding collaborative leadership. The confirmation occurred when they analyzed data on student and teacher perceptions of collaborative leadership and school improvement capacity, as well as student achievement in reading and math collected from 198 western primary schools in the United States (US) over a four-year period. When leadership is a mutually influencing process, the analysis confirmed that a change to collaborative leadership was positively related to school improvement capacity and student growth in reading and math. While Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that collaborative leadership is important to school improvement, they also noted that “while leadership is important, by itself it is insufficient to bring about improvement in learning outcomes—the school’s culture, or capacity for educational improvement, becomes a key target for change interventions in concert with efforts to strengthen leadership” (p. 107). Teachers’ beliefs about themselves and the school also affect their capacity for improvement.

### **Teacher Efficacy**

Efficacy is a teacher’s belief about her or his abilities as a teacher, and it has been tied to student achievement. Efficacy directly relates to the efforts teachers invest in their teaching, their interactions with students, and the pedagogies they

implement within their classroom (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Efficacy includes two elements: first, the teacher's beliefs about her or his teaching capabilities and second, her or his beliefs in the outcomes of their behaviors (Tsigilis, Grammatikopoulos, & Koustelios, 2007). While there is generally a consensus among scholars and practitioners that efficacy is difficult to measure, there are various instruments available to do so. When measuring efficacy, it is important to consider a teacher's efficacy regarding her or his instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tsigilis et al., 2007). Efficacy is related to how individuals and groups view themselves and their capability to achieve certain goals. If they believe that they are capable, then they are more likely to "approach goals with creativity, effort, and persistence required to attain success" (Goddard & Skrla, 2006, p. 218).

When Darling-Hammond (2007) conducted an analysis examining the effects of race, poverty, and school resources between the states of Massachusetts and South Carolina, the study surprisingly found that school resources alone accounted for more than half of the variance in student achievement. Additionally, among school resources, teacher qualifications were the strongest school predictors of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Darling-Hammond reported that "To improve achievement, school reforms must assure access to high-quality teaching within the context of a rich and challenging curriculum supported by personalized schools and classes" (p. 329). Accordingly, in order to have an impact on student achievement, teachers need to believe that they have the skills to do so.

According to Goddard and Goddard (2001), strong leadership that empowers teachers helps build collective efficacy. In order for positive change to occur, teachers need to change their perceptions of themselves and others, as well as change their relationship with their schools and the communities (Lipka & Mohatt, 1998). Recent qualitative studies (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Vernon-Dotson, 2008; Zion, 2009) have not only supported the notion of individual efficacy in which teachers believe they themselves have the capability to educate students, but that teachers as a greater entity within the whole school have the power to make a difference in student achievement. In other words, “collective efficacy is the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010, p. 1136).

Goddard and Goddard (2001) collected data for 438 teachers at 47 different schools in a large urban district regarding collective efficacy and student achievement. Goddard and Goddard’s analysis determined there was a significant variation between schools and their level of teacher efficacy. The data indicated a positive correlation with student achievement in schools where teachers believed highly in their collective capabilities and had higher teacher efficacy and expectations for their own teaching. These feelings of higher expectations consequently influenced teachers to work harder at their teaching.

Subsequent studies built upon the idea of collective efficacy and assessed the factors that influence a school’s level of collective efficacy. Goddard and Skrla (2006) obtained data from almost 2000 teachers in 41 kindergarten through 8th grade (K-

8) schools and examined the experiences that influenced their levels of confidence. The study investigated both the teacher-level and school-level predictors of collective efficacy through the use of Goddard's Collective Efficacy Belief Scale, as well as questions about their race, gender, and teaching experience. Minority teachers and experienced teachers reported great levels of perceived collective efficacy. Furthermore, schools with students who had higher levels of reading proficiency also reported higher levels of collective efficacy. So while prior achievement predicted collective efficacy beliefs in schools, the effect of any experience was fueled more by what the group members made of those experiences.

Additional studies found that by including all stakeholders in a school reform initiative, teachers and students felt more empowered, which increased their collective efficacy. Vernon-Dotson's (2008) multiple case study followed three teams of teachers from three schools in three different districts as they attempted the same reform initiative. The data showed that the teams of teacher leaders that were the most successful at implementing the reform at their respective schools were the teams that felt empowered and trusted; they believed that they had the skills and the power to make the necessary changes. Additionally, teachers marked communication, collaboration, and building trusting relationships as important factors in becoming leaders and having the efficacy to make a difference.

Self-efficacy was also found to be a significant predictor of a teacher's commitment to her or his school, as well as to teachers' organizational citizenship behaviors (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Organizational citizenship behavior and commitment were measured through a quantitative Likert scale questionnaire. The

findings implied that teachers who felt they were respected, were effective, performed well, and had opportunities for professional growth were more committed to their job and consequently exhibited more organizational citizenship behaviors. The research also found that teachers who had a higher sense of status in their work displayed more organizational citizenship behaviors and were more committed to that organization.

Again, the idea of efficacy and being able to make a difference by successfully implementing reform movements surfaced, but this time from the students' perspectives (Zion, 2009). Through Zion's focus group methodology, she interviewed students to gain their understandings of reform efforts happening in their schools. Zion's research found that students, like teachers, were often frustrated with or not fully aware of reforms teachers were engaged in. Just as teachers have identified leaders as good leaders when they were collaborative (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jorgensen, et al., 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 2000, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), students identified teachers as good when they too were collaborative as they listened and took students' opinions into account. Furthermore, students were willing to be involved in reform efforts and believed they had the power (collective efficacy) to help reform efforts succeed if the environment were more collaborative and students were included in the decision-making process. The idea of efficacy is one that can be seen and felt on student achievement at all levels of the school.

Efficacy percolates throughout the school culture; it filters up from teachers to administrators and down from administration to teachers. In a study conducted

by Winter, Rinehart, and Munoz (2002), these researchers found that self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of teachers' perceptions that they were able to accomplish their job as well as apply for other jobs. Winter et al. also found that helping prepare teachers and supporting them increased their efficacy, which in turn decreased turnover and helped to foster reform efforts.

Parker, Hannah, and Topping (2006) found that collective teacher efficacy was strongly correlated with student achievement, even more so than students' socioeconomic status. Their survey of 66 teachers from 15 schools in a small district within Scotland asked teachers to reflect upon the whole school staff's efficacy on a nine-point Likert scale and also respond to open-ended questions on a school effectiveness questionnaire. Parker et al. found four factors that influenced teachers' beliefs that could make a difference in student learning: mutual respect between staff and students, a positive culture within both the school and the classroom, a motivated staff, and valuable professional development.

Interestingly, Parker et al. (2006) found that despite teacher stress over concerns with discipline, low parent expectations, and students' low socioeconomic status, the teachers also believed that good relationships, respect, and a positive culture were instrumental to achievement. This emerging theme of having a positive school culture was deemed by all respondents as the most important factor to impact a school's efforts to reform and improve. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the literature on this important element of school reform: school culture.

## **School Culture**

Research has long sought to establish a connection between school culture and the process and outcomes of educational reform (Lance, 2010; Tondeur, Devos, van Houtte, van Braak, & Valcke, 2009; Tubin, 2009; Weston & Bain, 2009).

According to Lipka and Mohatt (1998), culture involves:

the customary ways of relating (including such as taking turns speaking, forms of speech, and nonverbal behavior), organizing space and time, and values. Culture is the frame of reference that creates boundaries, categories, and rules in which meaning is negotiated . . . includes the regularities, rituals, norms, values, and content of schooling . . . and an evolving culture of school and community . . . the culture of schools includes the way time and space are organized, typical ways in which lessons are presented (both their form and content), and the knowledge that is considered part of the cultural system.

(pp. 23-24)

Culture can also be defined by the tacit and declared norms that are found in schools such as treating others with respect, willingness to take on responsibilities, initiating change to improve performance, encouraging others, consciousness of costs and resources, having pride in one's school, enjoyment and enthusiasm in one's work, being helpful and supportive, sharing ideas and information, solving problems together, placing student needs first, expanding one's own learning, and being trustful, authentic, and honest (Deal & Peterson, 2009). As Goodwin (2010) stated, "effective schools ensure high-quality learning experiences in every

classroom. At the same time, they develop a culture of high expectations for learning and behavior,” which is a powerful predictor of success (p. 9).

The data from Vernon-Dotson’s (2008) case study indicated that, before any reform effort is considered, the culture of the school must be addressed. In order for change to flourish, an atmosphere of trust and positive relationships must be present (Vernon-Dotson, 2008). Fink and Resnick (2001) agreed with this approach and stated that the principal is responsible for “establishing a culture of learning” at the school (p. 600).

A recent mixed-methods study conducted by Tubbs and Garner (2008) analyzed the influence of school climate on school performance at an elementary school in northwest Georgia to determine the level of dissatisfaction within the school. Tubbs and Garner collected data using 29 Likert scale questions and three open-ended questions in which a mean above a 3.0 would be considered satisfactory. Additionally, when analyzing the open-ended questions, any topics that were mentioned by at least 20% of the population were ones that the researcher deemed worthy of further analysis. Overall, the data indicated that the school climate was in an early toxic state and was beginning to negatively impact student performance. Half of the staff expressed negative responses about their work environment and leadership. Statements supporting their dissatisfaction included “not feeling valued or respected,” “lack of communication,” “low morale,” and “hostile work environment” (Tubbs & Garner, 2008, pp. 22-23). These researchers’ recommendations included establishing a positive climate prior to focusing on changes aimed at increasing student achievement.



Subsequent studies have presented similar findings regarding the necessity of a positive culture being in place prior to implementing change. In a case study of four schools, Weston and Bain (2009) analyzed the levels of commitment and engagement of staff members. Through written response surveys, interviews, observations, and artifact collection (such as mission statements and job descriptions), the data clearly demonstrated that only one of the four schools was able to turn its aspirations into successful practice. The cultures of the schools impacted the levels of engagement of the staff, which in turn generated their level of commitment to the change that occurred within each school.

Tondeur et al. (2009) examined the characteristics of a school's structure and culture in relationship to implementation of a reform movement. Data were gathered from 68 primary schools with a questionnaire utilizing a five-point scale. School culture was specifically evaluated on the three dimensions of innovation, goal orientation, and supportive leadership. After a cluster analysis was performed, a one-way analysis of variation (ANOVA) was computed to find that those schools reporting higher scores on the structural and cultural school characteristics reported a higher engagement in the reform efforts. Conjointly, both structural and cultural characteristics influence each other; therefore, a school must have both the infrastructure and an innovative culture in order for change to occur.

An ethnographic case study conducted by Jorgensen et al. (2009) also found that a supportive culture was an essential component to the success of this school's reform movement. The staff felt valued and supported as they engaged in weekly optional forums, engaged in professional conversations, attended workshops, and

collaborated with each other. The collaborative culture permeating this school was highly conducive to their reform efforts.

With a supportive, engaged, and innovative culture, it has been demonstrated that educational reform is more likely to occur and be successful. This supportive culture, along with collaborative leadership and teacher efficacy, has recently been found as instrumental in building capacity for change.

### **Building Capacity**

As a sense of trust emerges among the staff, so do new possibilities in curriculum and pedagogy (Cosner, 2009; Lipka & Mohatt, 1998). The culture of a school needs to be open to change and must include rewards and recognition for trying new things and working together (Goh, Cousins, & Elliot, 2006). A school with capacity is able to take charge of change because it is adaptive (Stoll, 2009). Additionally, “the principal’s attitude toward innovation is also a critical factor” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 130) because, as the leader of the school, the principal has two core functions: providing direction and exercising influence (Wahlstrom, Seashore, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010).

Stringer’s (2009) case study of a New Zealand primary school provided valuable insight regarding what schools could do to “meet challenges of building capacity and improvement” (p. 164). The idea of building capacity has become synonymous with school improvement and can be defined in relation to capacity, empowerment, needs, equilibrium, vision, culture, professional development, and stakeholders as change agents (Stringer, 2009).

Stringer's (2009) data demonstrated that vision was fundamental to capacity building. Additionally, shared language, efficacy, commitment, wide and varied networks that support community life, distributed leadership practices, data analysis, and a supportive culture were most conducive to building capacity. Stakeholders also saw professional development as an important aspect for mitigating change because it builds efficacy through a community of learners.

Cosner's (2009) study supported and extended these previous research findings, particularly in regard to trust. Cosner interviewed 11 principals who were reported by colleagues as having success in building capacity and implementing change. Ten of the 11 principals reported cultivating collegial trust as a significant factor in building capacity. These principals reported that restructuring both the daily school schedule and the monthly staff meetings to involve more collaboration (like a cooperative-learning approach) was highly beneficial in building trust among teachers. In addition, principals that involved teachers in problem solving and work projects in order to increase teacher interactions were able to increase trust also.

Teacher's trust in their leader's decision-making capacity matters a great deal (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). The six year study by Wahlstrom et al. (2010) and funded by the Wallace Foundation incorporated data from nine states, 43 school districts, and 180 schools. The data suggested that a collective leadership is significantly correlated to teachers' work setting, teacher motivation, and teacher capacity.

Because reform efforts rely on teachers, "the need for high teacher capacity is paramount for successful school improvement" (Kaniuka, 2012, p. 328). In his case

study, Kaniuka wanted to understand how a group of eight teachers experienced school reform as they implemented a research-validated reform. The teachers received 10 hours of training, feedback on their teaching effectiveness, and biweekly meetings to discuss program implementation. The teachers also kept a log of their instructional experiences and observations as they taught using the program. The data showed teachers' progression from having doubts in their ability, to having anxiety, to being optimistic and having higher expectations for their students. The research indicated having effective leadership and successful experiences for teachers could increase teacher capacity.

A quantitative study conducted by Chang and Lee (2007) investigated leadership and efficacy effects on organizational learning. After examining the 134 valid employee responses through Multivariate Analysis of the Variance (MANOVA), Scheffe Test, Cluster Analysis, and *t*-test, Chang and Lee found that transformational leadership and an adaptive culture focused on shared vision and personal mastery led to greater job satisfaction, which in turn led to greater organizational learning and higher performance—all conditions necessary for building capacity for change. These are also conditions that Stephen Covey (1989) claimed are positively impacted by The Seven Habits. The following section discusses Covey's framework.

### **The Seven Habits**

Stephen Covey (1989) identified seven principles for “effective human being and interacting” (p. 42). He stated that principles are “guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring, permanent value” (p. 35) and habits are “the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire” (p. 47). Therefore, the Seven Habits are

habits of effectiveness because they are based on principles that become the basis of a person's character. They enable the individual to operate effectively in life and continually learn and grow in an upward spiral as they move from dependence to interdependence.

Habit 1 is *Be Proactive*. This means a person should be responsible, take initiative, choose one's own actions, attitudes, and moods, not blame others, and do the right thing when no one is looking. Habit 2 is *Begin with the End in Mind*. Habit 2 means one should plan ahead, set goals, do things that have meaning, and make a difference as well as be a good citizen. Habit 3 is *Put First Things First*. This means it is important to set priorities, get important things done first, and be organized (Covey, 2008).

Once an individual has achieved what Covey (2008) calls personal victory in terms of these three principles, she or he is ready to move on to the next three habits, which Covey refers to as a public victory. Habit 4 is *Win-Win* in which one balances courage for attaining a personal goal with consideration for what others want. When conflict arises, the individuals involved look for a third alternative that allows everyone involved to win or walk away content. Habit 5 is *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*. Habit 5 involves listening to others first to try to see things from their viewpoint. Habit 6 is *Synergize*. Synergizing involves valuing other people's strengths, getting along well with others who are different, and working well in groups to create better solutions to problems together.

The final Habit is *Sharpen the Saw*. Habit 7 is based upon the principle of taking care of one's greatest asset: one's self. It is about preserving and enhancing

one's own physical, mental, social or emotional, and spiritual body. This should continually occur, Covey (1989, 2008) stated, to keep one's life in balance. According to Covey (2008), businesses, parents, and leaders primarily value character and competence. And, Covey argues, while competence (knowledge and skills) can be taught; it is more difficult to teach character.

Covey's (1989, 2008) principles have been taken up and utilized by individuals, businesses, and organizations worldwide. In Covey's book *The Leader in Me*, he tells the story of a school and its community as they prepare their students to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century through the teaching of the Seven Habits. This school in the Southern US is not alone in its journey; worldwide, there are over 960 schools engaged in the Leader in Me process and 27 Lighthouse schools who shine as a beacon for other schools to use as an exemplar (FranklinCovey, 2012).

### **The Business Model Transferred to Education**

The Seven Habits is a business model that has recently entered the field of education. The education system has been the recent recipient of many business models that are intent on bettering the education system (Peck & Reitzug, 2012). They explored how business management concepts emerge in the education field, the nature of the temporary fashions, the life cycle of these fashions, who the actors are, and what the cumulative effects are. They argued that, "the promotion of fading business management concepts as important new school leadership innovations has become a sustained school leadership fashion trend" (p. 352). Peck and Reitzug analyzed more than 200 primary documents as well as educational leadership

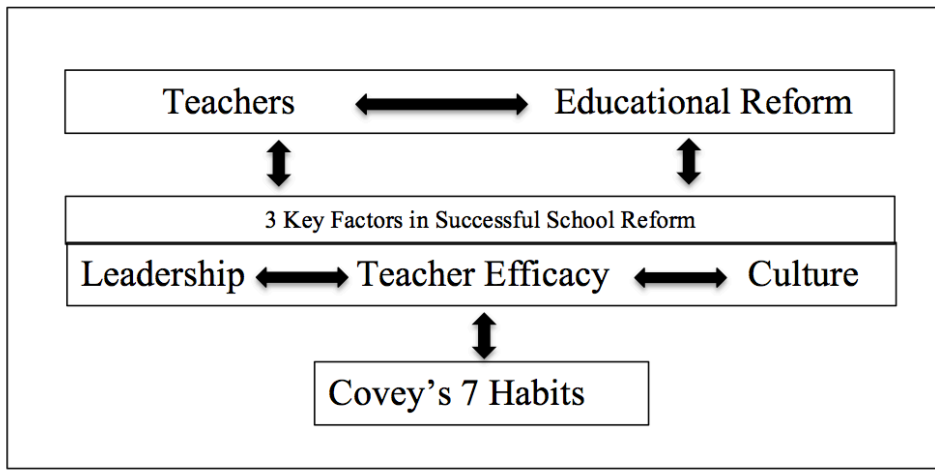
textbooks to find a cyclical model of how education ends up implementing business models. The business model begins in Stage 1 with a new organizational management concept being created for the business world. As the model rises, peaks, and begins to decline, there is a time lag before it emerges in education in Stage 2. At Stage 3, this new school leadership innovation “achieves wide-spread institutional attention, benefits from increased popular publications and generates scholarly study” (p. 371). Finally, the “business-influenced leadership fashion declines and fades away” (p. 371) in Stage 4 and restarts in Stage 5 as some still hang on to the outdated fashion and others search for a new management idea to implement in education. Peck and Reitzug believed the central factor “contributing to the frequent re-emergence of business-inspired school leadership fashions” (p. 373) are the fashion setters and the fashion followers “who are constantly seeking new solutions to the problems of schools” (p. 373).

This cycle continues with each new reform and the ideas are temporary, because they are concepts that are already in decline in the business world. Peck and Reitzug (2012) wondered if educational leadership can “foster real and locally sourced innovation that prioritizes and attends to the unique circumstances of leading schools, rather than relying on and promoting the tenets of existing and possibly outdated, business concepts” (p. 375).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Education reform and improvement initiatives are intended to empower schools and educators to improve their students’ learning and achievement. When examining the Seven Habits, one can readily see how these principles have the

potential to impact school leadership, teacher efficacy, and the culture of a school, and in so doing, to contribute to successful reform. Leadership, teacher efficacy, school culture, and the Seven Habits provide the framework from which I examine their interwoven relationships and their impact on building capacity for change (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* The three key factors that impact educational reform and their relationship to the Seven Habits developed by Covey (1989).

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the three key factors, Covey's (1989) Seven Habits, and the teachers are all influencing each other as well as the educational reform. The teacher-initiated (bottom-up) reform is their dream, while Covey's Seven Habits are the avenue for achieving the dream. As the teachers at Sage collaborate in their reform efforts, school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture will impact their actions.



## **Chapter Summary**

The review of the research has established a positive relationship between capacity building and implementing change. Capacity building involves increasing teacher efficacy as well as transforming the school culture. The research also suggested that collaborative leadership practices have a greater impact on building capacity with the ultimate goals of improving teachers' efficacy and professional practice and increasing student achievement. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that both individual and collective efficacy is important for teachers to feel empowered as agents of positive change. Finally, years of research have shown that having a trustful and supportive school culture in place is an essential ingredient for implementing change. However, "much remains to be understood about the nature, causes, and consequences" of school reform (Leithwood et al., 1998, p. 273). Digging deeply into the nature, causes, and consequences of the interaction of these key factors in school reform constitutes the rationale for my research questions and this dissertation. I turn now to an in-depth discussion of how the research was carried out.

## Chapter 3

### **Methodology**

As discussed in Chapter 2, prior research shows that teachers respond to educational reforms based on their sense of ownership over the reform initiative, and that this process is influenced by school leadership, teacher efficacy, and the overall school culture. How school leadership and teacher efficacy develop within the cultural milieu of the school, and how that potentially transformative culture in turn influences the success of the reform, constitute the focus of this case study. In this chapter I explain the methodology for understanding the dynamic interaction among these elements of a school reform based on Covey's (1989) Seven Habits. I begin with a discussion on the genre and rationale for this study, continue with a discussion of a previous pilot study I conducted, and further discuss the context of Sage Elementary in relation to the participants of the study. The chapter concludes with a section on Gathering and Interpreting the Data followed by a discussion on the researcher's stance and the process of writing the research.

As noted in Chapter 1, three questions guide this study.

1. In what ways has the school culture changed since the adoption of Covey's Seven Habits?
2. What has been the process of school change?
  - a. What has been the role of teachers in the school reform process?
  - b. What has been the role of the school leadership in the school reform process?
3. In light of this cultural analysis, what are the factors that shape a school's

capacity to transform its culture by adopting Covey's Seven Habits?

### **Genre and Rationale**

This study is a qualitative case study. My literature review on educational reform uncovered three critical elements that contribute to a reform effort's success: leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture. In light of these findings, a qualitative case study offers a framework for "understanding the meaning(s) people (i.e., school participants) have constructed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 13) in the context of school reform. Specifically, I am interested in looking at how these meanings both reflect and shape a school culture that is being rebuilt around Covey's (1989) Seven Habits principles.

Qualitative research is interpretive research that "relies heavily on observers defining and redefining the meanings of what they see and hear . . . that give emphasis to human values and experiences" (Stake, 2010, pp. 36-37). This qualitative research focuses on a group of professionals in terms of their professional identities as teachers, the pedagogical beliefs, values, and attitudes they hold, and how these shape their interactions with students within the classroom, as well as with colleagues (Merriam, 1998). These factors, in turn, are important influences on teachers' efficacy—a key element of successful school reform. In addition, this case study examines the meanings and understandings of school leaders in the process of school reform. As indicated in Chapter 2, these understandings, meanings, and enactments are central to the school's culture; my

goal here is to describe and interpret that culture as it relates to school participants' efforts to implement a successful reform effort.

This focus leads me more specifically to an ethnographic case study approach. As many scholars note, ethnography is rooted in cultural interpretation (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 2008). An ethnographic study is one in which the underlying purpose is:

to describe what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to the doing, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process. (Wolcott, 2008, pp. 72-73)

According to Wolcott (2010), four categories of description and interpretation are critical in a well-rounded ethnographic study: environmental factors, social factors, cultural factors, and individual behaviors. Environmental factors are the historical and physical aspects of the school. The social factors include how people group and align themselves. Cultural factors comprise people's belief systems, their expectations, and their reasons for doing things. Individual behaviors encompass how individuals both affect and are affected by different aspects of an interactional system (Wolcott, 2010). In this case, behaviors are affected by the school leadership, the school culture, and the school reform efforts.

Ethnography has its roots in the discipline of cultural anthropology where it is understood to be holistic in nature (considering multiple contexts), cross-cultural (often studying the "Other"), and comparative (looking for relationships across contexts and through time) (Wolcott, 2010). With these three defining

characteristics, Wolcott (2010) identified nine other attributes that are important to an ethnographic study. The first of these characteristics is authenticity, meaning that fieldwork and data collection should be obtained firsthand by the ethnographer. Secondly, ethnography must be real, meaning it must occur in a natural setting (like Sage Elementary). Third, the ethnographer should have an intimate and long-term relationship with the place of study so that she or he is better able to interpret the rounded realities of participants' experiences within the site, and the meanings they make of those experiences. Fourth, the ethnography should be nonjudgmental; that is, rather than evaluate, ethnographers seek to understand why things occur as they do within a given cultural context, and how different elements of that context interrelate. Fifth, ethnography is descriptive; the description should be rich and based upon what the ethnographer observed. Sixth, ethnography is specific to a local place and the people in that place. Seventh, it should be adaptive and flexible in nature. That is, while ethnographic studies are informed by theory, the data should also shape an inductively emerging theory. Eighth, ethnography is corroborative; triangulation is important and more than one source of data are necessary. Finally, ethnography is idiosyncratic and individualistic; typically one person is the researcher (and, according to Wolcott, the research instrument). Given this condition and ethnography's naturalistic focus, no two studies are ever exactly alike. The present study incorporates all of these elements in the overall research design.

This ethnographic study aims to analyze and interpret the culture of school reform within a single school (Preissle & Grant, 2004). I aspire to document and

analyze how the culture of Sage Elementary has evolved, what the role of teachers and leaders are in this cultural context, and what factors are most significant to a school-wide reform effort. Here, my goal was to achieve a depth of understanding rather than the breadth associated with experimental designs. At the same time, however, I expected that there to be some transferrable lessons from this research to inform the scholarly literature on school reform, and from which to draw implications for education policy and practice.

### **Previous Pilot Study**

Wolcott (2008) said, “Ethnographers need to adopt a matter-of-fact attitude toward time, appreciative of and realistic about whatever time can be devoted to the research” (p. 178). One way in which to approach an ethnographic study is through a preliminary examination followed by a more detailed inquiry (Wolcott, 2008). This is the path I have taken over the past three years. As part of a graduate seminar on qualitative methods, I originally completed a pilot study on this bottom-up educational reform effort focusing on Sage's use of the Seven Habits.

During the pilot study, I conducted a combination of participant and nonparticipant observations of two teachers at Sage Elementary, along with interviews of the two teachers and the assistant principal. I also collected artifacts related to the school's leadership changes. I utilized a modified version of Seidman's (2006) three-part interview sequence, condensing the three sessions into a 60-minute interview. All three interviews were conducted on the Sage Elementary campus in the respective teachers' classrooms and in the assistant principal's office. I audiotaped and transcribed each interview, as well as took notes during the

interviews. I began each interview with a brief description of my class and how the pilot study was looking at the progress of the reform efforts at Sage thus far.

Afterward, I began asking questions. In the beginning, participants would answer a question and we would then move on to the next, but as the interview progressed some of the answers were so in-depth that they provided answers to other questions. As we continued, I would either insert part of another question into the participant's current answer so that they could just elaborate on the current topic rather than artificially coming back to it a couple questions later. Or I would skip a question entirely because the respondent had given me so much information in a previous question that asking that future question would be redundant.

I interviewed the assistant principal, a fourth grade teacher, and a first grade teacher. These staff members were chosen because of their varied experience and roles, their teaching styles, and their willingness to try to help reinvent Sage Elementary. These three were also representative of the population Sage serves. They were all Caucasian and the two teachers live within the school community boundaries and their children were attending or had attended the school. The assistant principal was a critical person to interview because she had just joined the staff at Sage and had a good objective pulse on what was occurring in everyone's classrooms and she also had knowledge on how teachers truly felt about the goals the school was trying to accomplish. The fourth grade teacher was interviewed because she was in her 40s, had been in the field for 16 years, was National Board Certified, was confident enough to take risks in her teaching, and had the ability to come up with creative ways to teach things instead of just teaching straight from the

book. The first grade teacher was chosen because she was also willing to try new things. Math was her forte, while classroom management and building a community was something that she was hoping to improve through the use of the Seven Habits. Both teachers evince a positive demeanor and attitude and are well loved by students, parents, and other staff members. After interviewing the teachers, I also observed their classrooms on three different occasions in order to gain more insight into their teaching philosophies and to deepen my understanding of what they discussed during the interview. Additionally, I collected artifacts from the classrooms that related to what the school and the teachers said they were doing in terms of the reform efforts.

The pilot study suggested that the school culture had improved a small amount since the staff and administration introduced the Seven Habits (then in its first year of implementation). While the three staff members interviewed all noted improvements and believed that these were related to implementing the Seven Habits, they also attributed these improvements to the turnover of some staff members. Additionally, the interviewees mentioned that there were more school-wide expectations about procedures and common language being utilized, as well as pockets of teachers who were more deeply engaged in the reform efforts than others. Finally, the two teachers believed that the school administration could be more supportive of teachers' efforts. These teachers felt that there simply was not enough time in the day for them to do everything that was expected of them, and they did not always feel comfortable implementing all of the new elements of the school reform.



These findings from the initial implementation period of the reform efforts, along with my longstanding relationship, both as a participant and an observer at Sage Elementary (see discussion in the following section), provide an empirical foundation for the present study. The pilot study added depth of experience and time, and it afforded me a baseline I could use to assess the school's efforts to implement reform and transform the school culture over time. Thus, while the length of many ethnographic studies encompasses the typical ethnographic year, the present study builds on the pilot study and my long-term participation in the school.

### **Research Context**

As stated in the first chapter, Sage Elementary serves a suburban population of middle and upper income families, many with stay-at-home moms or professional dual-income earners. Of the 586 students, 96% are neighborhood children and 4% are open enrollment children who choose to attend Sage over their local neighborhood school. Although the school enjoys a very high rate of parent involvement, the involvement has decreased in the past several years as some parents have had to go back to work because of the economic downturn. Homes in the neighborhood are a mix of single-family developments and custom-built gated communities; there are no apartment complexes within the school boundaries.

Data were gathered at Sage Elementary during the 2012-2013 school year between October and February, which was the third year of the formal reform efforts. This school was selected due to the reform efforts that were in the beginning stages at the school and because of my continuous relationship with the school for the eight years leading up to this study. Therefore, much of this research comes

from an emic, or an insider's perspective (Wolcott, 2008; see the discussion of researcher role).

**Participant Selection.** To provide further context for the research, the demographics of the 23 regular classroom teachers were also examined. This data revealed that the average teacher had 11 years of experience and had been working at Sage Elementary for an average of 9 years. Fifty percent of the teachers held a master's degree and 13.6% had earned national board certification.

A total of 10 teachers were recruited for interviews; of these, I observed four teachers' classrooms for over 35 hours within a seven-week span. Teachers were selected based upon my previous experience as an eyewitness to their teaching, and this ensured that a cross-section of teachers was interviewed. I selected the teachers so that there was a representation of both sexes, various years of experience, and a span of high-, mid-, and low-level implementers of The Seven Habits. The original research design included an interview with the school principal; however, scheduling conflicts ultimately precluded conducting that interview. Thus, analysis and interpretation of Research Question 2a (leadership role) is derived primarily from teacher interviews and participant observation. This is an acknowledged limitation of the study.

The participants who were interviewed and observed were specifically selected to obtain a cross-section of teacher backgrounds and experiences, including considerations of sex, years of teaching experience, grade level, and intensity of their efforts at implementing the reform (high-, mid-, low-level implementers of the Seven Habits). This enabled me to develop a more clear and comprehensive picture

of this small group of individuals. Within these considerations, each participant's *implementation level*—the intensity and fidelity with which they implement major characteristics of the reform—was a crucial factor in participant selection.

Interviewing teachers who were all high implementers (those who utilize the Seven Habits to a high degree and with significant observable fidelity within their classrooms and in professional interactions within the school) would lead to a false perspective of the reform efforts, just as would interviewing only those who were low implementers (those who have not fully integrated the Seven Habits in their teaching and collegial interactions).

The participants I characterized as being high implementers of the Seven Habits include teachers who have been informal leaders at the school who were engaged in implementing the Seven Habits inside and outside of their classroom. This included teachers who: (a) held a position on The Lighthouse Committee (a committee whose goal is to ensure the school, as a whole, is implementing the necessary pieces so that the school may achieve Lighthouse status as a school to visit and study as a way to implement leadership); (b) planned for and taught at school-wide Leadership Nights for Sage families to learn about using the Seven Habits at home; (c) planned and participated in Sage's biannual Leadership Day, which showcased the students' use of the Seven Habits for community members; or (d) trained new staff members in the Seven Habits. Low implementers of the Seven Habits included teachers who used the Seven Habits minimally in their classroom. These were the teachers who used phrases like "I'm a leader when..." or "My goal is..." or "Are you being proactive right now or reactive right now?" but who did not

build a deep foundation of the Seven Habits with their students. They are the teachers who might close their door or think this too shall pass or that there just is not enough time in the day. Midlevel implementers fall somewhere in between the high and the low implementers. Teachers who were midlevel implementers taught lessons about the Seven Habits and used the language of the principles consistently with their students, but their engagement with the reform was confined to their classrooms. They were not engaged in activities that promoted leadership about the reform on a larger scale.

Data gathered during interviews (see the discussion in the following section) allowed me to create categories from “the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). These meanings further led me to refine the selection of participants whose classrooms I then observed. I now turn to a fuller discussion of these data gathering methods.

### **Data Collection Methods**

An ethnographic case study of this type utilizes a combination of observation (participant and nonparticipant), in-depth interviews, and artifact collections (sometimes called document analysis). All three sources of data are necessary in order to obtain the breadth and depth needed to aid in a comprehensive understanding of the entire situation occurring at Sage (Merriam, 1998). Observations are a primary source of data collection and are beneficial because they take place in the natural field setting, therefore providing a firsthand account of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998).

In the present study, observations consisted of nonparticipatory and participatory observations of classroom lessons, teacher meetings and professional development, and community events at the school. Nonparticipatory observations consist of mainly classroom observations. It was important for me to remain in the nonparticipant role during classroom observations so that, to the extent possible (given the fact that teachers may alter certain behaviors in my presence), I may not unintentionally and unknowingly alter what is occurring in the classroom. Participatory observations occurred during teacher meetings, professional development, and community events. During these times, I was a participant in my role as the gifted teacher at Sage in order to balance my responsibilities as a teacher and a researcher. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) noted, the researcher role includes the role of a learner, and in this respect, I view the role of teacher and researcher as complementary. Each of these types of observations is important for developing a clear picture of the reform efforts and is described more fully below.

During both participatory and nonparticipatory observations, I took note of the physical setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, and the conversations occurring in order to gain a highly descriptive picture of activity and of the relationship of this activity and the interactions to the school reform effort (Merriam, 2009). These observations “help us make sense of our world and guide our future actions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 117).

Nonparticipant observations were conducted in the classrooms of four of the 10 teachers interviewed for the study. The observations consisted of eight to 10 hours in each classroom. This level of observation provided a good mixture of data,

which allowed me to get a realistic picture of what was occurring in each classroom, as opposed to the teacher showing me what she or he thought I wanted to see.

During these observations, I used an observational protocol for recording information in which I took descriptive notes regarding what occurred during the observation, and I recorded any reflective notes I had as I observed (Creswell, 2008; see Appendix E for the Operation Protocol). This process assisted me in the collection of rich, thick descriptions, which contained interconnected details (Stake, 2010).

Participant observation field notes were also gathered as I participated in monthly staff meetings and professional development, bimonthly leadership team meetings, and community events such as parent leadership nights, Leadership Day, and social events. During these observations, I also used the observational protocol (Appendix E) for recording what occurred during the activity along with my reflective notes.

Another primary source of data in qualitative ethnographic research is in-depth interviews. Interviewing is “the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). It was necessary to interview the teachers so that I could better understand the history of Sage and discover how the staff interpreted their professional world (Merriam, 2009). Data was gathered from interviews during both formal structured interviews (see Appendix D for the interview questions) and more informal, impromptu conversations with teachers and staff members that occurred in a natural context.

Specifically, formal interviews consisted of face-to-face interviews that were semistructured, audiotaped, and transcribed. As noted in the participant selection criteria, I interviewed 10 teachers, including one to two teachers at each grade level between kindergarten and fifth grade (this represents 43% of the regular education teachers employed at Sage). I also asked one of the teachers to interview me. I felt this was an important part of looking at the reform process given that I was the teacher who initially brought the idea to the school, am a participant on the Lighthouse Team, and consider myself to be a midlevel implementer.

Because I already have a relationship with the teachers and staff at Sage, I believed that a modified version of Seidman's (2006) three-part interview sequence would be most appropriate. That is, I condensed Part 1 of Seidman's sequence (focused life history) and to concentrate more fully on Parts 2 and 3, which include details of experience and reflections of meaning (see Appendix D). Additionally, I selected questions from McCarty's study of *Promising Practices* in a trilingual Navajo-Spanish-English school (T.L. McCarty, personal communication, 2009; McCarty, 2012). I interviewed each participant two times; the first interview incorporated questions designed to gather data on the participant's background, current teaching assignment, and implementation of the Seven Habits. The second interview followed up on what occurred during the classroom observations along with the focus on the culture and reform efforts being implemented at Sage Elementary (see Appendix D). Data from more informal conversations that I had with teachers and staff members were also recorded in a field journal, with the information documented as soon as possible after the conversation occurred.

Artifacts are “things or objects in the environment . . . including official records, letters, newspaper accounts, photographs” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 139-140). Artifacts were collected from the lessons, meetings, community events, and communications from the school as related to the school’s reform efforts. Through gathering the data, I was better able to better understand what the staff at Sage Elementary did and the meanings and importance they ascribed to their actions (Wolcott, 2008). For the present study, artifact collection consisted of collecting qualitative documents—both public and private documents (Cresswell, 2008)—and included items such as newsletters, flyers, meeting minutes, emails, student work, and archival photographs. The artifacts helped to create a pictorial representation of what was occurring as well as to add to the overall picture and understanding of Sage Elementary.

The triangulation of these data sources (interviews, different types of observations, and artifact collection) helped me build a more robust descriptive and interpretive ethnographic picture of the culture of reform at Sage Elementary. Triangulation of the data was important “in order to increase confidence that we have correctly interpreted how things work” (Stake, 2010, p. 37). The analysis of these three data collection methods created patterns and categories for coding that enabled a better understanding of this phenomenon of school reform in this educational context (Creswell, 2008). The combined data from observations, interviews, and document analysis provided information about the practices and the culture of Sage Elementary that ultimately guided the primary purpose of this study:



to determine how a school embarks on reform efforts and what characteristics and practices influence the school's ability to reinvent itself and its culture.

After Arizona State University's (ASU) internal review board (IRB) approved my Social Behavioral Application, I personally approached 10 prospective participants with my Recruitment Letter and Consent Form in hand (see Appendices A, B, and C). I explained that I was in the final steps of my doctorate program and how information gathered from interviews regarding the process and progress of the Leadership Academy would be discussed in my dissertation. All 10 of my initial contacts willingly agreed to participate in the study, signed consent forms, and the first round of interviews was scheduled for the following school week during each teacher's individual lunch or lesson planning time.

The 10 teachers were each interviewed within her or his classroom on the campus of Sage, and each of the interviews conducted was guided by the interview protocol listed in Appendix D. As stated earlier, because of my longstanding relationship with the teachers and this study's focus on the specific reform efforts occurring at Sage, the interviews concentrated more fully on Parts 2 and 3 of Seidman's (2006) interview sequence exploring "details of experience" and "reflections on meaning" along with selective questions from McCarty's study of *Promising Practices* (T.L. McCarty, personal communication, 2009; McCarty, 2012). Ten of the 25 questions were asked during the initial round of interviews and focused more on the teachers' history at the school and about the school itself. The interviews were audiotaped, and I took notes regarding the teacher's responses as well as the interviewee's demeanor. These interviews lasted between 12 and 45

minutes depending on the depth of the participants' responses. As the interviews were completed, I emailed the audio recording to a hired transcriptionist, who then transcribed each of the interviews and sent the transcribed text back to me within a few days. I read through the transcriptions and compared them to my notes and memory to ensure accuracy.

The interview process was very enlightening for both my participants and me. Many of them commented that they had not been interviewed since they were interviewed for their current job and that they enjoyed the reflective nature of the questions to help them put a more verbalized perspective on what they were doing and why. One teacher commented when the audio recording was turned off that it felt good to vent about the reform efforts in a safe and validating environment—to know her discontent would become part of the whole picture painted in my dissertation. As I began to organize and code the interview texts for themes (see more in the Interpreting Data section), I also moved on to my next task of data collection: the observations.

I chose four of the 10 teachers to observe based upon several rationales. The first rationale came from my pilot study. Two of the teachers were participants in my pilot study; including these teachers would allow me to use these initial interviews as baseline data for comparison. The rationale for the other two teachers I chose to observe stemmed from their level of implementation and my relationship with them. One of the teachers would be considered a low-level implementer, but she is also a teacher who is open to change and has a willingness to try new things. Over the past 18 months we have developed a very close, mutually respectful

professional relationship as I have helped her not only with the gifted children in her class, but also with her transition from teaching second grade to teaching fifth grade. My observations were also beneficial to her in that I was able to offer her teaching ideas and strategies based upon what she was doing that were more challenging to her fifth grade students. A similar rationale was utilized with the fourth teacher selected for observation. I labeled this teacher as a high-level implementer based upon the teacher's positively spoken words about and examples of leadership within his classroom, along with his participation on the Lighthouse Team and in Leadership Day. This teacher and I consulted over the teacher's students, and as with the previously discussed teacher, this teacher has also switched grade levels this year, so my observations were also beneficial in that I was able to offer the teacher suggestions for challenging students more.

The observations in all four classrooms occurred over a seven-week period between the last week in October and the second week in December. During my daily lunchtime and teacher preparation times, I would drop in on the different classrooms depending on their daily schedule. I tried to observe the classrooms at varied times so that I would be able to see different content topics and procedures, although this was a limitation that occurred within my study because I still had my own full-time job responsibilities and needed to collect data during the times when I was free from teaching a class. While I tried to vary what I observed, I often saw the same subjects being taught in the same classrooms and the same types of transitions occurring.

I utilized the Observation Protocol (see Appendix E) for each of the observations. I made a running record of what was occurring, what the teacher was saying and doing, and I made comments when applicable. I also specifically looked for evidence of the school's reform efforts in relation to school leadership and the Seven Habits. As I observed, a few trends began to emerge in the classrooms. At the end of each day, I went through all of the Observation Protocols I had completed and coded their contents for the trends that had emerged early on. These trends included times when the teachers utilized language or engaged in activities that dealt with the Seven Habits; the Cooperation, Accountability, Respect, Excellence, Safety program (CARES, discussed more fully in the chapter that follows); goal setting; or leadership. Additionally, as I was observing and rereading the Observation Protocols, there were some very specific points during the observation in which it seemed to have been a natural place for reform efforts to have occurred but did not. Recognizing that ethnographic observation involves both what is observed and what is not, I began to make note of these instances within my coding system.

In the middle of conducting observations, I contacted all 10 teachers to schedule their second round of interviews. This set of interviews contained 12 questions and focused more specifically on the use of the Seven Habits, their perceptions of the reform efforts, and their views on school leadership. Once more, the interviews were scheduled during each teacher's individual lunch or lesson planning times and lasted between 15 and 50 minutes depending on the extent of their responses. During this round of interviews, I had originally planned to ask the

four teachers I observed for clarification on anything I observed in their classrooms, but decided not to do this during this round of interviews given that I was still in the middle of observations. I decided to wait to ask any clarifying questions until after all observations were complete, because I did not want the questions to influence their teaching practices in any manner.

After all observations were complete and interviews were coded, I felt like I needed three topics clarified. Therefore, I went back to the participants and informally asked them three follow-up questions. First, I asked the teachers, “Do you believe that you have everything you need (skills, knowledge, ideas, materials, support, time, etc.) to implement the leadership model?” Additionally, in light of alternative understandings, as discussed by Rossman and Rallis (2003), I added the question, “Is there anything that has occurred since beginning the leadership model that has made it more difficult to implement it?” Lastly, I asked the teachers, “In all my conversations with people and throughout the Lighthouse process, people talked about a common language and how having this common language has been one of the things that is working well in the leadership model. During my observations and field notes, though, I didn’t encounter a lot of common language. What do you think about this? Do you have any ideas as to why this might be?”

Throughout the data collection process, I went back through old emails collecting official communication from Sage to the community they serve along with interschool communication, meeting agendas, and school-wide lesson plans. When applicable, I also collected copies of documents teachers used within their classroom when I observed. I coded these artifacts in the same manner as the

observations with the emergent themes of language relating to Seven Habits, CARES, goal setting, and leadership.

### **Analyzing and Interpreting the Data**

Interpretation is “an act of composition” (Stake, 2010, p. 55) growing out of data analysis. I utilized the observations, interview data, and documents to assist me in finding relationships as I documented and analyzed the norms, values, and belief systems of Sage Elementary as they related to school reform. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Seidman (2006), data analysis is ongoing and begins even before the collection of data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) “believe that analysis starts when you frame the research questions,” (p. 272). Similarly, Seidman (2006) stated that, “Even before the actual interviews begin, the researcher may anticipate results on the basis of his or her reading and preparation for the study” (p. 113). Thus, data analysis in this study is envisioned as ongoing and recursive with the data informing the analysis and the ongoing research informing the gathering and interpretation of data.

In analyzing the data, I followed Rossman and Rallis’ (2003) six phases for qualitative data analysis:

1. *Organize the data:* As I gathered data, I organized it and cleaned up the information, while writing down analytic hunches and ideas as I went. “We cannot emphasize enough,” Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated, “how important it is to do this cleaning up and organizing as you go along” (p. 280). Using note cards as well as an electronic and hard copy filing system, the data were organized

into major topics that were arranged into appropriate clusters in a fitting sequence (Wolcott, 2008).

2. *Familiarize myself with the data:* Rossman and Rallis (2003) instructed to “Read, read, and once more read through the data,” and they explained, “this intense and often tedious process enables you to become familiar in intimate ways with what you have learned” (p. 281). I read and reread through both the transcribed interview texts and the observation protocols along with the artifacts collected in order to gain a deep familiarity with and understanding of the data. For every day spent on fieldwork, I spent one day organizing and writing about that data (Wolcott, 2008).
3. *Generate categories and themes:* According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), this “phase of data analysis is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun” (p. 282). As I gathered data, I began to develop categories for the data (with a category considered as “a word or phrase describing some segment of [the] data that is explicit”) and what other data I may need to gather as a result (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 282). As I analyzed the data, I looked for themes that emerged from within the categories. Rossman and Rallis (2003) defined a theme as “a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes” (p. 282). Wolcott (2009) suggested beginning the initial data-sorting task with “identifying

a few of the broadest categories imaginable” (p.37). I expected this part of the process to be primarily inductive, identifying what Rossman and Rallis (2003) called “indigenous categories . . . those expressed by the participants,” as well as “analyst-constructed categories” that emerged (pp. 282-283). Concept mapping, or brainstorming the important ideas, was one strategy used to identify themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 284-285).

4. *Code the data:* I took these recurring themes and created codes into which I categorized all of the data. For this process “coding entails thinking through what you take as **evidence** of a category or theme” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 285; emphasis in original). The mechanics of this part of the process involved both the formatting of word-processed data “with wide margins on the right-hand side” of transcripts and observation protocols, as well as bracketing data “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 286). As I did this, I was mindful of Wolcott’s (2010) four critical categories for a well-rounded ethnography: Social Factors, Environmental Factors, Cultural Factors, and Individual Behaviors. As the data were gathered, it was also imperative for the ethnographer to sift through the data “identifying and enhancing (its) unique properties” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 243) to find patterns. These patterns then became the codes for which the data were



organized. The data were coded for “topics that readers would expect because of previous research . . . codes that are surprising . . . codes that are unusual . . . and codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research” (Creswell, 2008, pp. 186-187).

5. *Interpret the data:* Data was interpreted with the consideration that “interpretation is an art,” and “it is not formulaic or mechanical” (Enzin, 1994, p. 504, as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 287). Interpretation is a “complex and reflexive process,” and from this perspective, “interpretation is storytelling” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 288). Based on the coding and generation of themes, I crafted the story of what the phenomenon of school reform looks like at Sage Elementary and how it fits within an overall school culture. This involves what Rossman and Rallis (2003), following Clifford Geertz’s classic usage, called thick description. To obtain a thick description, it is necessary to provide sufficient “description to allow the reader to understand the interpretation, to see how you made it” (p. 288). I paid especially close attention to the “critical importance of context” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 251) while examining the reform efforts and the social behaviors taking place so as to better understand the culture of the group.

6. *Search for alternative understandings*: Rossman and Rallis (2003) recommended asking several key questions to “challenge the very patterns that seem so apparent” in the analysis and interpretation process (p. 289). These questions included asking what other plausible interpretations are, considering how the researcher’s argument stands up to these alternatives, looking closely at the ways in which the argument (or storyline) is supported by the data, and making certain that the argument is credible (p. 289). As I interpreted the data, I looked at the patterns and explored other possible interpretations or reasons for the understandings I reached.

During the fourth phase, the data were analyzed and coded based upon Creswell’s (2008) recommendations to allow the codes to emerge inductively from the data collected. As Wolcott (2008) further explained, “The first thing the ethnographer does is something we all do . . . make sense of things in terms of our own cultural frameworks” (p. 247). My emic role as the researcher in this study afforded me some possible benefits, as well as some obstacles. The biggest benefit was my longstanding relationship with the school. According to Creswell (2008), being present in the research setting for a prolonged period ensures that “you have more than a snapshot view of the phenomenon” (p. 69).

### **Researcher Stance and Role**

This study is both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) in nature. As a vested insider in Sage Elementary School, I have an emic perspective on those efforts and

the larger school culture, including the research participants. As presented in the following discussion, there are concrete benefits to this self-positioning as a researcher. Moreover, in any type of qualitative ethnographic research, the researcher is also “the instrument of the study” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 35). Rossman and Rallis (2003), however, argued for going beyond the instrument metaphor, to an understanding of the researcher as learner (p. 35). From this perspective, I believed I was able to assume both an emic and an etic researcher stance. This can be accomplished through the process of reflexivity.

Reflexivity refers to “looking at yourself making sense of how someone else makes sense of her world” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 49). Reflexivity should be a conscious act in any type of qualitative research, particularly teacher research of the type proposed here, as the researcher is both a participant in the unfolding processes and interactions *in situ*, and an observer striving to interpret those processes and interactions. As a reflexive teacher-researcher, I was constantly filtering (editing) data for its significance, even as I gathered and began to process (analyze and interpret) that data. This process involved combining perspectives based upon my own personal knowledge and experiences as well as my reading of the scholarly literature and my conceptual framework. In this case study, reflexivity entailed assuming both an emic and an etic stance.

I believe that using the observation protocol and using audiotaped recordings and archival photographs to accurately record the data assisted me in moving from a more emic to a more etic stance (see Appendix E). I also strove to be reflexive in interpreting the actions and response of participants interviewed and

observed because “the mere presence (of the researcher makes the researcher) a part of (the participant’s) social world; therefore, they modify their actions accordingly” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 50). Again, because of my primary role as a teacher and my long-standing relationship with the teachers at Sage, I believe that these relational factors were beneficial. However, reflexivity demands that I also was able to step back from those relationships and assess, as objectively as possible, their impact on the data and the study as a whole.

During my eight years as an educator at Sage, I believe other teachers have come to know me as knowledgeable, helpful, honest, and forthright. Lipka and McCarty (1994) found that in order for methods to be effective “there must exist a mutual and trusting relationship that is collaborative rather than hierarchical and that values the personal and group relations upon which the community-based research can proceed” (p. 267). Therefore, I believe that given our long history of working at the school, Sage staff were comfortable enough to be candid and forthright in their interviews and casual conversations. I believe that I also have extensive background information on the culture and staff that enabled me to ask more specific questions throughout their interview responses and casual conversations, as well as to look a little deeper during my observations and artifact collecting. I also believe that when it came time to analyze all of the data, I had a greater understanding of not only how to code the data, but also of what were relevant data, which were the “images, sounds, words, and numbers . . . that when grouped into patterns they become information” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4).

Of course, with my vested interest in Sage, it could have been easier to look for what I wanted to see or to find data that support any preconceived notions I had. Additionally, although I have a reputation as being trustworthy, I recognized that it was possible that some staff might feel uncomfortable honestly sharing information with me out of concerns that the information may be shared with others, especially leadership at the school and district level. Therefore, I needed to be cognizant of (reflexive about) this possibility and reassure my participants that the information they shared would be strictly confidential. In this regard, being able to take a reflexive stance, as previously discussed, facilitated my awareness of both my own and my participants' assumptions, with their "built-in interests, biases, opinions, and prejudices" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 36).

### **Writing Up the Case Study**

Many qualitative researchers agree that data analysis and interpretation are coterminous with writing up the final report. I view this as a recursive process; as I coded and analyzed the data, I also began writing up drafts that comprised segments of the case study. The final culmination of the data collection and analysis resulted in a fully developed case study. I envision this as a comprehensive case study of a bottom-up educational reform effort that examines the potential school culture change in the school in which it occurs. The written summation of what I found in the data was both descriptive and interpretative so that others may understand the complexity of the reform efforts that are occurring (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 278-290).

The systematic analysis of the data allow me to make recommendations at both the school and district level regarding what was effective at Sage and what areas the teachers felt they needed more support in. I also provide implications for policy and practice in other local reform efforts.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined who the participants in the study were and how they were selected. I also reviewed the data collection methods and how the collected data would then be interpreted. Finally, I discussed my role within this research study. In the following chapter, I turn to an in-depth look at the findings of this ethnographic case study.

## Chapter 4

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Findings**

This study was a qualitative ethnographic case study, which examined the ongoing reform efforts of a local school as they sought to improve the culture of their school through the use of Stephen Covey's Seven Habits and a school-wide leadership focus. In this chapter, I present and analyze the data I collected from the interviews with the teachers, classroom observations, the field notes and the artifact collection. I begin with brief introductions of the 10 teacher participants whose experiences with and perceptions of the reform constitute the heart of this case study. I then examine each of the three themes that emerged from the data supporting this thematic analysis with the interviews, observations, field notes and artifact collection. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the relationship between the three themes.

#### **Introducing the Teacher Participants**

The following provides a narrative for each of the 10 participants who were interviewed along with my own narrative. The narratives serve as background information about each participant in order to provide a context and reference point. The names within the narratives are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

**Pam's profile.** Pam was a middle-aged female who had been teaching first grade at Sage for one-fourth of her teaching career. She originally came to Sage because of the location and convenience it brought her as a mother. She was friendly, optimistic, and willing to try new ideas. Pam felt that the culture of Sage

was “warm and friendly . . . welcoming . . . including others.” She was one of the original teachers who read the book *The Leader in Me*, was part of the road trip to California to see the inspirational speaker, and as she put it, “I was one of the first ones involved with it, I’m a leader in that way and I just feel a part of that team.” Pam was also a participant in my pilot study two years prior to the current study.

As an initial proponent of the leadership model and participant in my pilot study, Pam purported the same love for the leadership reform efforts then that she championed at the time of the interview and felt that the school’s culture had been positively impacted by its use. She believed that “kids are showing leadership in different ways because they’re exposed to it” and that “some of the kids have become leaders at things they may not have been acknowledged for before.” Accordingly, she noticed one thing different during the year this study took place: “Since [students] already had it in kindergarten, they’re coming with a lot of that. It doesn’t take as much time at the beginning of the year to introduce the Seven Habits.” Pam viewed herself as a leader and said “I’m a leader in Data Passports, so I’m helping with that, that’s what I’m strongest in.” She did not doubt that “everyone has leadership going on in their classrooms, especially data walls and Data Passports.” Finally, Pam thought “it’s a good place to be,” and she felt supported in her aspiration to help her students “be successful, at grade level, and to know what they are a leader in.”

**Lee's profile.** Lee was a middle-aged male who held a master’s degree and had only taught at Sage. He was part of the Lighthouse Team for the two years leading up to this study, and he was quiet, kind, and thoughtful. After seven years of



teaching on a very close-knit and collaborative team, he changed grade levels due to a change in student enrollment. He believed the Sage culture “has been pretty friendly and professional,” and while he knew that “there are some unprofessional things that have happened in this school, I haven’t had to really experience a lot of it.” He had “just heard about a lot of it secondhand.” “Overall the change has been beneficial for students,” said Lee. “I think more of the attention is on the students than it was before.” In addition, he thought:

More people are involved overall with the day-to-day operations . . . people feel more invested as a whole. It felt more cliquy when I first started; now it feels like more people are taking part and interacting with one another. That may also have to do with the fact that we all have to be on committees to earn points [to keep our jobs].

In general, Lee believed that while things were “working pretty well . . . there can be improvements made.” He stayed at Sage because he “really like[d] it here. I think my colleagues are very professional, friendly. It’s a beautiful campus.”

**Art's profile.** Art was an experienced teacher with a master’s degree who came from a small town with hopes of working in the district that Sage Elementary was in. He was introduced to and hired by the original Sage principal to teach kindergarten, where he spent two-thirds of his career. He said the culture at Sage was “very unique” and comprised of “our traditions . . . and high expectations.” He said, “There’s always been high expectations. We’ve always been a top three school in the district. And so that expectation, that attitude’s been a big part of our culture.” Art added, “And now the leadership component is another aspect of it as well.”

Art's long-time experience at Sage developed into a sense of connection with the community, and that is what kept him teaching there. He says of the community:

I'm appreciative of them and I kind of feel in a lot of ways they've been very kind to me as well. You can't get that just going anywhere. Sometimes that just takes a long time to create. I know that whenever I do decide to not do this anymore and move in another direction that's going to be a sad day. It'll be because I've left the community and not that I left a school.

**Donna's Profile.** Donna spent all but one of her teaching years at Sage. She had a master's degree, was National Board certified, and had recently changed grade levels due to enrollment numbers and the current principal's desires to create different grade level teams. Donna believed that the "subculture" among teachers and peers "is warm, supportive, very caring, helpful. That subculture feels good." These qualities, she believed, were not as evident in the "main general [school] culture." Although the focus of the Seven Habits and the ideas of leadership are to help children develop their strengths and become leaders in those areas, Donna did not necessarily believe that leadership "should be the focus of the entire school, of everything we do." She did believe "the Habits are good to know and live by," but felt that one should really take the whole child into account when doing anything.

**Rose's profile.** Rose came to Sage after a single interview enabled her to transfer schools within the school district. She had taught kindergarten for half of her career at Sage. She was a mature, sensitive, forthright person who held a bachelor's degree and was a member of the Lighthouse Team. Rose believed that the culture of Sage had changed "in some ways for the better and some ways for the

worse" She elaborated on this statement in the context of discussing the leadership reform efforts:

Originally, it started off because a group of teachers went and came back and said, "What a great thing it is." I'm old enough that a lot of these things I just grew up with. A lot of these things were things I just thought everybody did at home. You had to begin with the end in mind, you had to make win-win situations. I think probably times have changed a lot and it doesn't happen anymore. So I think the reason it started was good.

**Karen's profile.** Karen was a younger teacher who came to Sage via a personal contact and had spent all of her teaching years at Sage. She was a quiet, driven, and serious person with a generally positive attitude about the idea of leadership. She felt the staff culture was "coming together to push our school further and do what we can to help everyone out, help the kids." She continued:

The culture here is that, I don't know how to put it, the administration wants something and you're expected to help the school get that . . . they want the school to get their Lighthouse status, get the Leadership Academy in [the] expectation [is] that you do what you can to get it there.

Overall, Karen thought the school had "gone more student oriented" and "the kids are more geared at knowing where they are and knowing where they need to go." She felt that they were more aware in both their academics and in how they interacted with each other. She explained further:

The students are just more aware. I think the Data Passports [a notebook used for tracking students academic and personal goals along with their

current academic progress, which will be discussed in greater detail] are a big piece. The students are aware of their scores and where they need to go. They're also more aware of how to treat each other. It seems like they're more conscious of kindness.

**Shelly's profile.** After substitute teaching at Sage, Shelly was hired on for the following school year. She changed grade levels during the year of the study. She described her personality as “a little more laid back,” a person who “doesn't like to step in and voice my opinion.” Shelly viewed the culture of the school as “very privileged,” with an abundance of resources, supportive parents, and a “big push for challenging students” so that she often felt she was “skipping over things too quickly.” She described herself as a person who did not immediately “dive in” with the leadership and use it all day long because, “I'm an intimidated person and I have to get used to something first and it takes me a little bit longer.”

During the interview, Shelly said that it:

Seems like we've always kind of had a system or an adopted program . . . something that we use to shape [the students'] character and stuff. So the leadership, I feel, is another program for that but it does have other aspects like tracking their learning.

She thought that “there is something very telling about a student watching their grades progress or watching in first grade how many sight words, they can see that, take ownership, feel proud.” Additionally she said that, “Before, when [students] didn't have those Data Passports and ways of recording, they maybe wouldn't have

seen their progress.” She thought, “that’s a big part of it, kind of making the kids more aware of things, of themselves, of responsibility.”

**Christine's profile.** Christine was an upper elementary teacher at Sage Elementary where she had been a highly respected teacher by both the staff and community members for two-thirds of her career, which took place at Sage. She was one of the initial pioneers advocating for the leadership reform at Sage and continued to be one of the biggest proponents propelling it forward. She had held a position on the Lighthouse Team since its inception, collaborated on leadership parent and family nights, and truly believed that the leadership model made a positive impact on Sage. “I feel that there’s a respect among colleagues where there wasn’t necessarily before, so I’ve seen a shift in that culture,” she said. She continued:

I see it as a happy and friendly place that’s somewhere where people like to be and where colleagues and not only colleagues but students encourage each other to achieve their personal best and support one another as they’re doing so.

Christine also stated that some of this change over the years was due to a change in staff, and so there “isn’t as much gossip or trying to bring people down” as there used to be.

Christine's belief in and dedication to the leadership reform efforts was evident and mirrored her actions and discussions from her initial implementation and participation in my pilot study. She continued to work diligently on applying the Seven Habits with her grade level team and they often “update assignments with

Seven Habit and leadership language.” She stated that her team “collaborates on how to implement the Seven Habits into the lessons that we teach so that the language is being used so the students are seeing it, so they can walk the walk.” This coincided with Christine’s ultimate goal for her students: “If they leave [this] grade a better person, then I’ll feel I’ve done my job.”

**Violet's profile.** Violet was middle-aged, held a master’s degree, and was hired after student teaching at Sage. Violet switched grade levels recent to the time this study was conducted, and she was very organized and concerned with covering the entire curriculum so that her students “will be successful in third grade and the rest of their lives.” She felt the school culture was very leadership driven, with the expectation that “anything and everything [should] be tied into leadership.” She said she would like to focus more on academics, or to put it in her own words, she was “kind of over leadership.”

Violet felt the Seven Habits reform was “basically like a business model applied to education and of course, with that comes tracking data and having the kids be more responsible for their goals and behaviors and things like that.” Violet added she did not “know how helpful it is when it comes to consequences and stuff . . . it’s empowered the students that do what they’re supposed to do every single day.” This teacher was unsure whether the reform was “positive for all students that maybe fall on the behavior intervention spectrum.”

**Quinn's profile.** Quinn was a male who, after nine years at Sage, had just moved grade levels during the year of this study. He was a well-respected and highly requested teacher within the community. While he was a member of the Lighthouse

Team and a proponent for the leadership model, he was less involved than some of the other members. He believed the culture at Sage was one of “high expectations . . . with the teachers, their goal isn’t for their own success as much as it is for the kids . . . they will do everything they can to bring out the best in everyone.” Additionally, he stated, “It’s a positive culture where everyone is trying to help each other . . . I think people are truly trying to do what’s best for everyone.” Quinn went on to say:

I honestly don’t think I see a huge change from before the Leadership Academy to now. I think I see it in some kids, but I don’t see it as every single kid all of a sudden has a completely changed attitude.

However, he did feel a good portion of the kids:

feel better about themselves because they may not be good at math, but they realize they’re a leader, they’re talented in some other way. So I see people’s self-esteem coming up. I see there’s kids in the class that step up and take action because they want to be a leader. Before this whole leadership came up, they probably just would have been quiet and didn’t think they could be a leader. I do see a change. I just don’t see a drastic change in every single student. I see a lot of those shy kids maybe having more self-confidence in themselves. And you see some of the kids that are taking responsibility for their actions as opposed to blaming their parents or stuff like that. But I do think there are still some kids that maybe don’t grasp it as well. They don’t feel themselves as a leader yet. Hopefully, in time that will change.

**My story.** After nine years of teaching at another school within the same district, I transferred to Sage in order to be closer to my home. I taught preschool,

first grade, third grade, fifth grade, and for the eight years leading up to the study, I taught gifted education at Sage. I originally found the *Leader In Me* book, loved the ideas, and brought it to the staff. I had hopes of it making a real change in the culture of the school as well as make a real difference in the lives of the children that attend Sage. Still, at the time of this study, I continue to believe in the Seven Habits principles and the leadership model, but I have begun to question the model's implementation.

I have been an active member of the Lighthouse Team for the two school years prior to the study. My official role on the Lighthouse Team is photographer; it is my job to record the history of the school through photographs. While all members of the team have an area he or she helps with more than others, the team collectively works to further leadership at Sage. Additionally, at the time I'm writing this, I lead three after school clubs, and because of recent budget cuts to the gifted program, I also teach one class at another school close by. I believe my colleagues regard me as a professional, creative thinker who is collaborative and trustworthy.

### **The Recurring Themes**

In Chapter 3, I described the process used for deriving recurring themes. Here, I draw on data from interviews, observations, field notes, and artifact collection to support the emergent themes of (a) utilizing a common language, (b) time as a barrier, and (c) programmatic and leadership supports. As I discuss the themes, various facets of the reform effort emerge, which I augment with photographs. From the discussion and the photographs, an overall "portrait" of the reform and the school culture can be derived. Analysis of these three themes leads



to consideration of a further, more encompassing interpretive domain, which I have termed *authenticity*. This is discussed following the presentation of the three themes.

**Theme I: A common language.** The development of a school-wide common language emerged as a recurring theme throughout the data collection. Common language as part of the reform efforts at Sage includes: The Seven Habits, leadership language, CARES procedures, and Data Passports. As stated earlier, the Seven Habits consist of seven principles founded by Stephen Covey (1989), which are: Be Proactive; Begin with the End in Mind; Put First Things First; Think Win-Win; Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood; Synergize; and Sharpen the Saw. The Seven Habits common language is meant to be spoken between all members of the school and utilized during lessons with the students and within school documents. Leadership language is meant to be integrated throughout the school environment and the classroom instruction. This involves students knowing the qualities of a leader and what they themselves are a leader in, as well as holding meaningful leadership roles.

The CARES common language relates to the school-wide procedures put in place for different activities and environments at Sage. CARES is an acronym for Cooperation, Accountability, Respect, Excellence, and Safety. There is a CARES expectation for walking in the hall, using the bathroom, eating in the cafeteria, using the playground equipment, and paying attention in class, just to name a few. An example is “CARES in the Hallway” (see Figure 2). The C stands for “Cooperation: Walk in a single file line.” The A stands for “Accountable: Use a hall pass when you

are not with an adult." The R stands for "Respect: Walk Quietly" and "Be Proactive." The E stands for "Excellence: Acknowledge and greet others with a smile" and "Say 'Hello.'" The S stands for "Safety: Walk on the right side, keeping your hands to yourself."

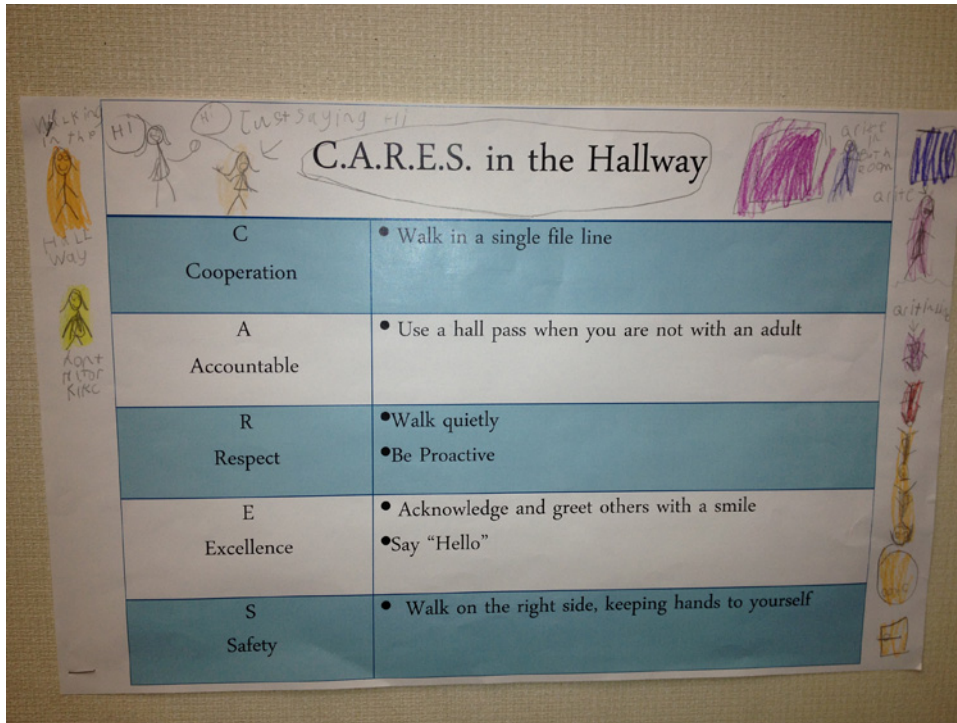


Figure 2. Applying the CARES common language in the hallway.

Data Passports are notebooks the students use for setting and tracking their personal and academic goals. The students set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely), come up with action steps to help them meet their goal, track their goal, and finally reflect on their goal and either adjust the current goal or set a new goal. An example of a SMART goal would be: the student will increase his or her weekly spelling test scores by 10%. An example of an action step

the student might take: I will practice spelling the words each night for five minutes. Pre- and posttests of subject content taught, along with graphs charting the student's progress, are also contained inside the Data Passports. Additionally, Data Passports are shared with parents occasionally and at student-led conferences each semester.

In the following section, I examine the common language theme as it relates to the physical environment, teacher-student interaction, reports of the students' use, the school documents, and staff interaction.

***Physical environment.*** Since Sage embarked on the Seven Habits reform, the main hallways had been redecorated throughout the school. The majority of the bulletin board displayed relate to being a leader, the Seven Habits, or setting goals. The wallpapered walls were painted solid bright colors in certain sections and in other areas large murals were painted.

In the front office, there was a large tree painted with each of the Seven Habits listed on it; leaving the office, in the hallway, there was a long mural of the mountain range against which Sage is nestled (see Figures 3 and 4). This is the backdrop for staff group photographs and for photographs of current school events such as Leadership Day, the first day of school, fifth grade versus staff football game, and so on.

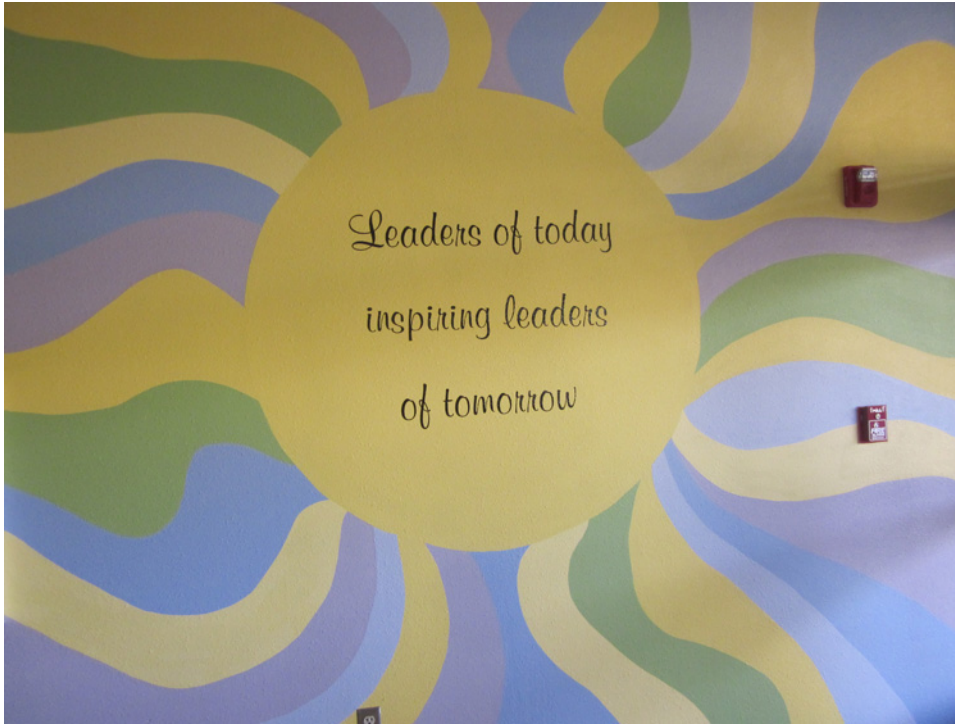


Figure 3. The leadership tree in the front office of Sage Elementary.



Figure 4. The mountain mural in the hallway leading from the front office of Sage Elementary.

At the end of the hallway a giant sun covers the entire wall with the school's mission statement: "Leaders of today, inspiring leaders of tomorrow" (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* The Sage Elementary mission statement.

Turning the corner, the next hallway is filled with posters of the Seven Habits. When one enters the main hallway, which runs from one end of the building to the other, the displays include: a framed blackboard with a quote that changes periodically (see Figure 6); a larger mural stating "The sky's the limit at Sage," with a rainbow made up of the Seven Habit names and small buckets under painted rain drops to represent "filling someone's bucket" (see Figures 7 and 8); a large wall with framed awards, newspaper articles, and photographs of staff members and students with awards; a large paper bus in which the windows change to track the data of a school-wide goal such as attendance or student-led conference participation; and a

reading wall showing students racing to the finish line as their grade level and entire school compete to meet the school-wide goal for reading. Regarding the reading wall, every student had a runner posted on the school-wide reading wall that is adjusted as the student read, which signified the goal to have read a specific amount of minutes during the semester. One teacher noted, "Like our reading wall, you can tell the kids are being proactive . . . the language is on the walls and the students are interacting with it." (see Figure 9).

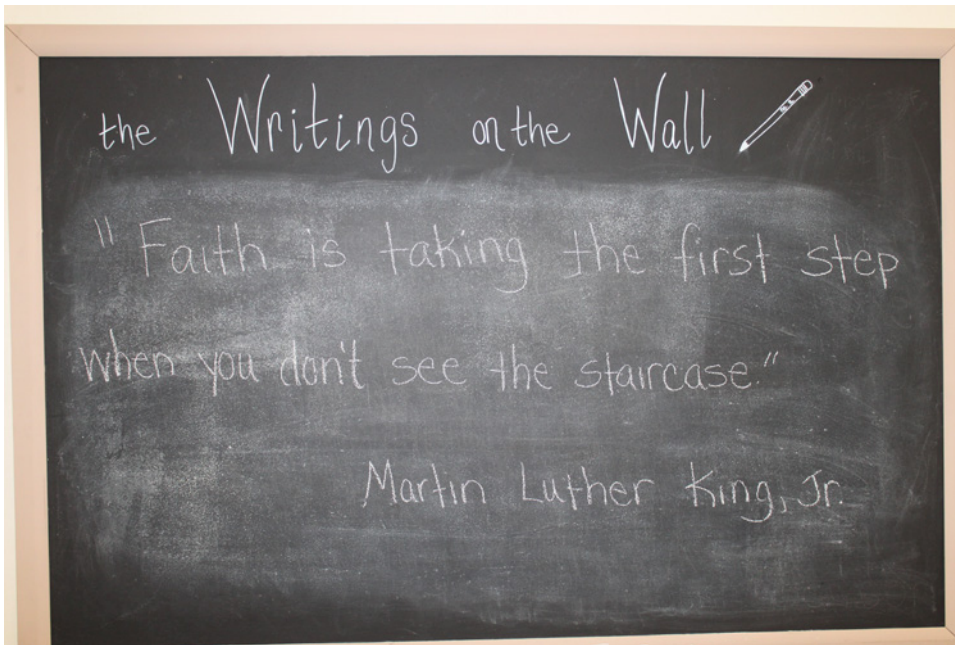


Figure 6. "The Writings on the Wall" changing quote board.



*Figure 7: The Seven Habits rainbow.*



*Figure 8: Did you fill someone's bucket today?*



*Figure 9.* The Race to Success reading wall.

The other bulletin board displays in the main hallway changed two or three times during the year and typically included a whole grade-level display of something related to the Habits. For instance, every year first grade put up a board titled Synergize with circle maps that each student had created to define himself or herself. The students then connected content in each map to other maps to show how they have things in common (see Figure 10).





*Figure 10.* “First Graders Can Synergize” hallway bulletin board.

Kindergarten put up an “On Track for First Grade” display each year. Each student created a train with a beginning, middle, and an end to represent the goals they were working on in order to be ready for first grade (see Figure 11).



*Figure 11.* “Kindergarten is on Track for First Grade” hallway bulletin board.

Fourth grade put up a leader wall where each student illustrated a picture of a historical figure they had completed a biography report about, and each student wrote a short paragraph telling how the person was a leader. These grade level displays generally changed over the weeks and days before a school-wide leadership event such as Leadership Day or the Lighthouse evaluation visit. Teachers made reference to this occurrence during our interviews. The changing displays were reiterated as a priority with an email sent out by the principal prior to the Lighthouse visit. The email reminded teachers to post something related to leadership on the walls. Other, smaller displays changed more frequently, tended to be a single classroom’s work, were typically more artistic in nature (for example, artwork created during a class lesson), and usually appeared in the side hallways near the classroom in which it was created.

Within each classroom themselves, there was evidence of the Seven Habits and the leadership focus. For example, teachers were required to have three core items on their walls. Each classroom contained a poster of the Seven Habits tree that used the tree as an analogy to help students see how the habits applied to their life. (see Figure 12). Additionally, each classroom had a set of seven posters with the name of each Habit and a picture representing that habit. During our interview, one teacher noted the environment as a place where she saw the common language. She explained the Seven Habits posters in her classroom and elaborated on how the students referred to them frequently. In this teacher's class, the posters helped guide the class discussions of the characters they read about; she tried to "stick it into something at least once a day, where it fits naturally."

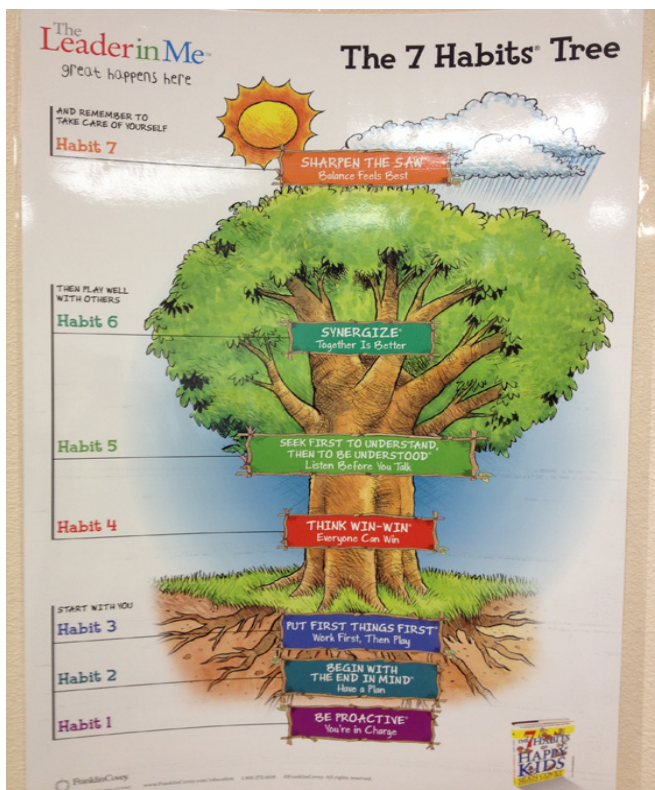


Figure 12. The Seven Habits Tree in classrooms.

A *data wall* was the third required item teachers displayed on their walls (see Figures 13 and 14 ). In this display, a class-wide goal was posted and data related to reaching the goal was documented. The school-wide expectation was for teachers and students to actively use the wall to engage in class-wide goal setting and data collection. One teacher’s data wall, for example, included a goal and a graph regarding how quickly students were able to transition from one subject to another. Another teacher’s data wall charted how many students met the goal of 80% or higher correct on their morning work. In my classroom, we charted the number of shout-outs students have per class and for every day they had two or fewer shout-outs, they received a Sharpen the Saw party (based on the seventh Habit), which allowed them to play games together for 15 minutes. During the Lighthouse Team meeting in September 2012, the team discussed preparations for the Lighthouse visit and reference was made to making sure “all data walls were updated.” When a document titled My Lighthouse Survival Checklist was distributed to staff, one of the reminders on the document said, “All data walls should be updated with current information and goals. If you need ideas or help, please let a Lighthouse team member know.”



Figure 13. Classroom data wall 1.

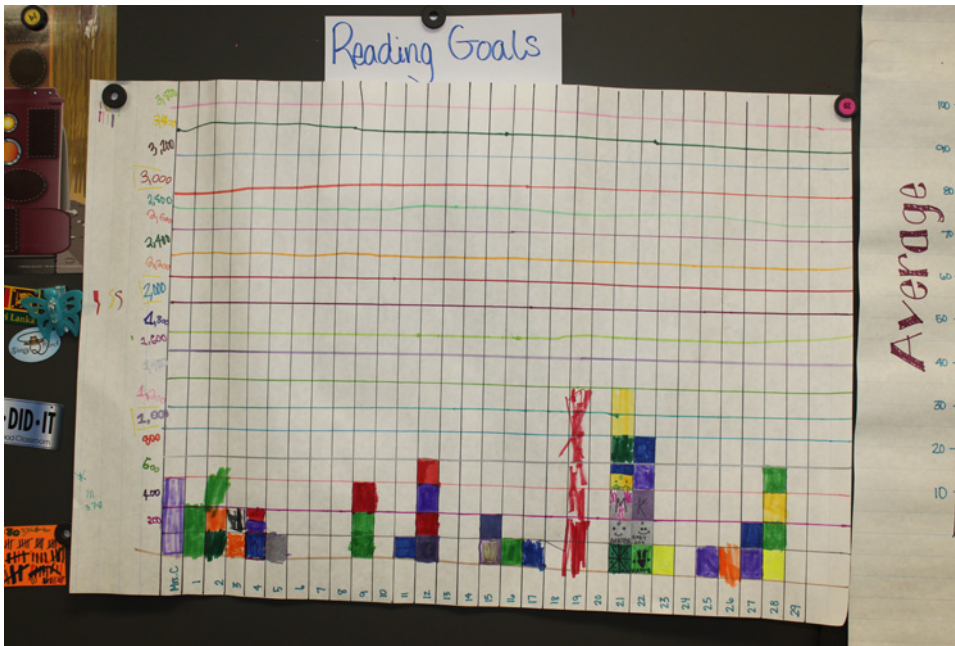


Figure 14. Classroom data wall 2.

Beyond these requirements, evidence of a common language was found elsewhere in school artifacts and the physical environment. Examples of this

included: a teacher's homework assignment heading "Ends in Mind" and "Synergize with Math" in the day's agenda; another teacher's projected slide with the morning procedures titled, "Begin with the End in Mind"; a teacher's "Lighthouse Table Points" or "Synergize for Table Points" title, which kept track of table groups' points for good behaviors; and yet another teacher's whiteboard section title "Leaders in Division" with students names signed underneath.

While these physical displays served to foreground the school-wide reform, teachers expressed some concern that an overuse of the key terms associated with the reform seemed to make the common language less meaningful. For instance, teachers expressed frustration with classroom jobs being posted and every student needing to hold a job (per the school leadership and the Lighthouse requirements). A teacher related that labeling everything a leader as part of the common language seemed to diminish the significance of leadership. She explained that "Classroom jobs are no longer that, they're 'leaders at work,' it's leader this, leader that, everywhere you look . . . it's overkill . . . it becomes meaningless after a while."

***Faculty and student interactions using a common language.*** During the interviews and the observations, examples of the Seven Habits and leadership focus were also evident in teacher-student interactions and daily classroom lessons. During my classroom observations, I observed 23 occasions that directly engaged the reform efforts. Nineteen of these included references to goal setting, the Seven Habits, the school-wide CARES procedures, and leaders. An additional four instances included three separate occasions when another individual and I were greeted by a classroom greeter when we entered the classroom. The classroom greeter is one of

the official leadership roles students engage in. It is the greeter's job to stand up, walk over to the incoming visitor, and welcome him or her to the class with a handshake and statement about what the class is currently learning.

Goal setting events were observed five times during over 35 hours of observations. The first instance was in a teacher's classroom agenda for the day. The agenda included, "We will color scores, reflect, and set goals." On this day, the class had updated their Data Passports with recent scores and set new goals based upon those new scores. Another example of goal setting was demonstrated twice in this same teacher's classroom. Both times, the class did not meet their goal for unpacking, turning in folders, sitting down, and working on their morning warm-up within six minutes. One morning the teacher said, "We did not hit our goal; we are at six minutes 32 seconds. Tables 3, 4, and 5 get a point, though, because they hit the goal in under six minutes." Another morning, the teacher made a similar remark, "We are at six 22. We did not make our goal. However, Tables 2, 3, and 4 are unpacked and ready to go, so they get a table point." Goal setting was also evident in another teacher's classroom when students were told, "Keep your Data Passports on top of your desk after you stack your chair because we have more tests to pass back tomorrow." This use of goal setting and Data Passports was the type of common language that was part of the reform efforts.

The word leader (or some form of it) came up five different times during my classroom observations. For instance, one teacher was having a discussion with a female student about the work she did with a small group of students. "You did a

really great job at leading the way in your group,” the teacher said, “You explained your thinking and also held back a little at times so your partners could get it.”

This teacher utilized the term leader twice in the same context saying, “Table leaders please collect the papers and put them on the rocker” and “Table leaders go get scissors for your table.” Another time the word leader came up in this teacher’s classroom was when the students were assigned to create a self-portrait and label the picture with their area of leadership. The students were asked to take their time and do their best, because the portraits were going to be hung in the hallway for the Lighthouse evaluation visit.

During a social studies lesson prior to the 2012 U.S. presidential election, another teacher was showing a video about past presidents. Students were asked to, “Think about what a good president needs to be and what would you do as a president.” The teacher stopped the video every few minutes for class discussions with questions such as, “What leadership qualities make a good president? What are the characteristics or qualities that make a president a good leader?” At the end, the teacher asked the students to create a circle map to define what leadership qualities the next president should have. The video and class discussions focused on things like nice dress; being professional, honest, and patient; the person’s name, a person who is calm, kind, and nice; a person’s size; someone who is respectful, fun, and has a good personality; they discussed all the past presidents are all different, their appearances, and their likes.

During an interview, the teacher who used this lesson said the most significant strategy used in teaching the Habits and leadership was “the terminology



during lessons or just in every day dealings . . . everyday jargon.” “We discuss what habits they are showing at the time,” the teacher added, “mentioning to them how they are leaders and stuff like that.” Another teacher concurred:

Before it was “Let’s just do this” and I didn’t really give a reason. I think I make a point of saying “Let’s solve this problem, let’s make it a win-win for both of you.” Or “Why are we doing this? We’re sharpening the saw.”

This teacher also noted a change in her pedagogy by utilizing the common language while she was reading out loud to her students: “When I read stories and stuff, we try to pull out some of the Seven Habits; where before I’d read the story, we’d talk about it, but never tied it to anything.”

Another teacher viewed the common language as “eye-opening,” and stated that both she and the students now better understand “what a leader is and what the different habits are.” This teacher said the common language came out when she was reading with the students. Her current focus was on seeing examples in what they read or in the historical figures they were learning about. She explained, “I have them look for the Habits in people in literature.” Yet another teacher agreed, and said, “The language has changed. We see it in everything we do, whether it be social studies or a story that we’re reading in language arts, we see leadership roles.”

During my observations, the occurrence of a common language encompassing Data Passports and forms of the word leader were noted. Additionally, during interviews, teachers reported on their use of the Seven Habits as indicated in the previous section above. However, I only observed four instances of the Seven Habits language firsthand. Explaining an assignment to the class one

teacher said, “It sounds like a Win-Win to me,” in relation to how a group of three students could equally share the work and split the job into three parts. Another example occurred when the class was reading a story out of their reading anthology. This teacher asked, “So far, can anyone see an example of how one of the Seven Habits could help Tom’s behavior?” Students raised their hands and replied: “Begin with the End in Mind by making a plan,” “Put First things First because the aunt needs to live somewhere,” “Synergize and work together with Aunt Lindsey,” “Sharpen the Saw to figure out the situation so it doesn’t become too big,” and “be Proactive.” The teacher had all of the students finish and told them, “Turn to a partner and tell them what you were thinking.” Later in the same reading lesson, the teacher asked, “Look at it from the aunt’s point of view instead of your own. Raise your hands if you think Tom could Seek First to Understand?”

Similar to the use of the common language in the reading story above, another teacher said, “I try and incorporate [the Seven Habits] as much as I can by using the lingo.” The teacher expressed some lack of confidence in her abilities, however, saying, “I probably don’t do the best job of it . . . I tie it in when I can, but don’t always use it.” The teacher added, “I talk about it the first two weeks of school, but then what else should I do after that? I try when I think of it.”

The school-wide CARES expectations were also observed on four different occasions during my classroom observations. The first instance was brought up by a student and related to an assignment the teacher was explaining: “So the acrostic poem is like the CARES: cooperation, accountability, respect, excellence, and safety.” On another day, I observed a reading lesson in which the students were all working

on different things in small groups and individually. The teacher approached three students working at a computer and asked them what they were doing. The students said they were planning an assembly. The teacher asked the students if they had already talked with the principal to see if it was okay. When they answered no, she sent them to the office to talk with the principal about it. This teacher later told me that it was in response to a comment on the announcements that students were forgetting to use CARES in certain areas, and so the three students decided they were going to put together a presentation for the school. They were given the green light by the principal to proceed with their presentation for an assembly that would occur in about seven weeks. Another teacher made reference to the CARES expectations on two different occasions as the class was moving from one location to another. "You should be using your CARES right now," the teacher told students, "quietly coming into class, sitting in your seat, and getting to work." And again, "Who's showing CARES right now? Thank you [student 1], thank you [student 2], thank you [student 3]. Who else is showing CARES?"

When I followed up with this teacher regarding the use of common language at Sage, the teacher said: "I think of the common language more as the CARES, that's the common language I was talking about. I still see that as part of leadership. It's taking charge of yourself, of being responsible." During the interviews another said she "uses the language" of CARES procedures and felt that "everybody for the most part through the school" used it as well. The teacher confirmed that having these school-wide CARES expectations in place makes it easier to talk with students about behaviors they are expected to utilize and to give them quick reminders. This

teacher said, “It’s just a lot easier to say, ‘Are we following CARES right now?’ than going through the whole dissertation.”

After the classroom greeter shakes the visitor’s hand, she or he also introduces him or herself, welcomes the visitor to the class, and tells the visitor what the class is learning at that moment. An example of this was seen in one teacher’s classroom when the principal and a male guest entered the room. The greeter walked over to them and said, “Welcome to [teacher’s] classroom. We are currently working on math.” Out of the 46 times I entered a classroom in my role as an observer, I was greeted a total of three times, and all the occurrences were in one teacher’s classroom.

The Seven Habits and leadership were consistently used during the morning video announcements. I observed on six different occasions which contained a total 22 references to the Seven Habits, being a leader, and setting goals. Three teachers who are members of the Lighthouse Team, including one of the teachers in this study, wrote the news for the student newscasters to read from the teleprompter. This teacher responded to my follow-up question regarding the common language with an explanation of how she tried to help make it a common language not only in her classroom but school-wide also. She stated, “Well I do the announcements and the Broadcast Club uses the language daily to help make it consistent, a common language.”

The video announcements follow the same format daily beginning with, “This is (name) bringing you your leadership news today.” It is followed with new daily updates on events within the school such as “Black out day is on Friday,” “the Cares

Club needs more fleece to make blankets,” “running club is during lunch today, set a goal for how many miles you want to run,” “remember to follow CARES in the hallway to your after school activities,” “remember to keep reading to help meet our goal of everyone having a runner up on the Reading Wall by the end of the quarter,” “in the Leader’s Café [specific teacher’s] classes are sitting at the round tables during lunch today,” “in CARES, the E stands for excellence, so be sure to keep your hands to yourself in the hallway,” and “show your (mascot) pride and wear your Sage spirit wear on Friday.”

After the changing updates, a character called Habit Hero came on the announcements to remind the students about one of the Seven Habits. During these segments, I observed the Habit Hero discussing habits such as, “Today’s habit is Synergize. When you are working in your class, think of new ways to work with a group to get better ideas,” “Today’s habit is Put First Things First. Be sure to read tonight so that you can put a runner up on the wall and help us reach our second quarter goal,” “Today’s habit is Be Proactive. If someone does something to annoy you, check your reaction, ask them to stop, and walk away,” and “Today’s habit is Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood. Try to walk in another person’s shoes, try to see from a teacher’s point of view, this might help you have a better day at school.” Daily announcements concluded with the newscasters reminding students to “stand to say the pledge and your class mission statement.” They signed off with, “Have a great day and remember to be a leader today.”

The same teacher who wrote the morning announcements said she also heard a lot of the language “being used in discipline situations, not in a negative way,

but in a 'Did you think about how to Seek First to Understand to help you solve your problem?' kind of a way." She continued, "I think there are other teachers who don't talk about it at all . . . maybe the common language is just understood, not spoken." Similarly, another teacher said that the common language had become an "integral part of how we communicate." This teacher would ask the children things like, "Are you thinking win-win?" or "Don't forget to put first things first and get your homework done." The field notes I recorded on October 25, 2012, echoes these sentiments as this teacher passed in the hallway with the students on the way out to recess. The teacher said, "If you want to be quiet you are quiet. If you want to be awesome you are awesome. (Student), are you being a good back of the line leader?"

***Teachers' observations of the students' usage of a common language.***

During the interviews, six of the teachers who were interviewed reported that they heard the students using the common language throughout the school. One teacher also believed that the Seven Habits were widely used throughout the school and it was demonstrated when, "I hear the kids using the language . . . I hear Win-Win at recess if they're having a conflict." Additionally she "hears Synergize a lot," and she, "sees kids being Proactive." Furthermore she adds that she saw "kids becoming leaders."

Another teacher stated the "kids have a common language to interact with each other on." A third teacher agreed that, "It seems like it's becoming a common language" because it is evident "in kids' conversations." Yet another teacher commented about the students' use of the vocabulary: "I hear the students saying it more often. It's in their language a little bit more than we first started." Additionally,

another teacher also believed a common language existed because, “As kids come up from other grades they know the Habits . . . they use the terminology properly.”

During our interview, one teacher gave several examples of the students using the common language that wouldn’t have occurred prior to implementing the Seven Habits. One example occurred in social studies just prior to our interview. The teacher shared the story: “We were talking about the ancient people that came to Arizona. One of my students said, ‘Wow, they were really proactive when they decided to choose farming over hunting and gathering.’” She thought, “That never would have happened a few years ago before we implemented the Seven Habits . . . all that language was brought here from *The Leader in Me* and the Seven Habits and our goal setting.”

Additionally, the teacher said she did not hear as many students saying “I can’t” anymore. Instead, she saw students celebrating each other’s strengths and hears students saying, “Oh my gosh, you’re a leader of art!” She then related the story of a boy who was very quiet and who did not like to raise his hand very much and participate. She said, “He’s very shy, but instead of my students seeing that as a negative, they see it as a leader of manners.”

Another report of students using the common language comes from an artifact collected. It was an email the principal sent to the staff September 21, 2012, which described what happened during a student-led assembly. She said:

A very special thank you to our Lighthouse Student Team. They wrote and performed a great skit to show Win-Win and Synergy! If you have students who now come to you to ask about performing a skit, please let me know! I

encourage more student participation! During the first assembly, after the Lighthouse skit, I asked the audience what Habits they saw being performed. [The assistant principal] and I took the microphone around and had kids answer. At the second assembly, our kindergarten Lighthouse student finished her part and had the microphone. She looked around and then said, “Boys and girls, what habits do you think you just saw?” and then walked around and had kids answer! It was adorable! Talk about taking charge! What a leader indeed! ☺

***Common language within artifacts.*** Artifacts collected as part of this ethnographic case study included school-wide newsletters, staff emails, archival photographs, classroom lesson plans, student work, and meeting agendas and notes. The artifacts are rich with language about the Seven Habits and leadership ideas that suggest Sage is a school with leadership as its foundation.

For the first week of school, a group of teachers put together a 12-page document entitled “School Startup.” This document is a set of lesson plans rich with language and intent for “community building and for teaching classroom procedures, school procedures, 7 Habits principles, and Data Passports.” These lessons include classroom procedures such as how to work cooperatively, transitions, listening effectively, entering and exiting the classroom, and managing classroom materials including where papers are turned in and where supplies are located. School procedures include a “school-wide assembly to go over the CARES rules” as well as “practicing CARES” Lessons about the Seven Habits include “learning everyone is an important part of the Leadership Academy” by “talking



about people we know who are leaders” as well as finding examples of leadership within the students themselves. As the lessons continued, the document says students will understand, “leadership means to influence . . . leaders do not mean, in charge . . . Be Proactive, I am in charge . . . begin with the end in mind, have a plan . . . Put First Things First, work first then play . . . the idea of Seven Habits dependence (private victories).”

The first week of school was also spent setting up the students’ Data Passports with school-wide lesson plans that included knowing that:

A mission statement is a guide to reach goals . . . our goals are measurable and have a plan . . . our goals lead to success . . . goals are achievable . . . we need to reflect on our goals . . . the data wall is a place where we can see and measure our class goals . . . tracking our progress helps us reach our goal.

As the students went through these lessons, they were creating class and personal mission statements, setting class and personal goals, and reflecting upon these goals as they collected data on them.

When the students and parents returned to school for the new year, they were greeted with the Curriculum Night PowerPoint that was created by a group of teachers to help standardize the information parents received during the 30- to 45-minute classroom presentation about school- and classroom-wide curriculum and expectations. The title slide, “Welcome to Curriculum Night,” had an image of the Seven Habits posters that all teachers had posted in their classroom. The topics of the Seven Habits and CARES were addressed in a school-wide, 15-minute

presentation that parents attended prior to individual presentations. In this way, the parents were hearing the same information about what the school values.

Parents and community also received information about the school values in the monthly school-wide newsletter sent home by Sage around the middle of each month with content from the principal and assistant principal as well as information on grade level happenings and upcoming events. In the October 2012 issue, for example, the principal discussed the Common Core Standards on one page of the newsletter. She wrote, "I am confident that you will see parallels between the leadership principles students learn at Sage and the objectives of the Common Core Standards." The assistant principal discussed "Who was caught showing CARES in August and September" and said:

Each month, all students who have received a CARES slip during that time period are put into a drawing. One student is randomly chosen to have his or her picture taken for display in the main hallway of our school! The more CARES slips you get each month, the greater chance you have to be the one who was caught for this special honor. We are so proud of all of our students who consistently display leadership in their behavior at Sage by following our school wide expectations.

The students who were caught showing CARES were listed. The newsletter continued with other news such as grade levels happenings for the month. This included content that each grade level was working on. Second grade, for example, stated they were "working hard on setting SMART goals and creating routines and Habits to meet those goals. All of the students have set a personal or academic goal

to work on over the next several weeks.” They also said, “We are using our Data Passports to keep track of our goals and record our progress. Keep up the good work!”

The common language and school values are also communicated to the community with school-wide functions that focused on leadership. For example, an invitation was sent out via the school listserv, which invited parents to, “Please join the Sage staff as they welcome Sage parents to give an overview of different leadership ideas that you can start to implement at home.” At this event, attendees received two handouts. The first handout included an agenda titled “The End in Mind for the Evening” with a “7 Habits and Leadership overview, presentations about the 7 Habits and how to implement them at home, and synergize with the Sage staff and fellow Sage families.” On the handout, there was a place for taking notes and for writing down questions to ask. The second handout for the evening was “Books that will help to reinforce Leadership and the Seven Habits.” (Though inconsistent, all quotations retain the original manner in which the Habits were written, whether that be Seven Habits or 7 Habits.) The handout listed each habit along with five books to read that incorporated that habit. The final handout was four pages long and included, “Ways we use Habit (X) in the Classroom/School” and “Ways to Implement at Home.” Ideas included: “Help your child to determine how they can be proactive when facing difficult tasks,” “family mission statement,” “help your child prioritize their tasks at home,” “enable your child’s natural ability to communicate through the use of notes,” “engage in conversations, ask questions,” and “working together on chores.” Other ideas listed included “allow time for the

family to do something that you all enjoy to do together,” “reading books and talking about good character and good leadership skills,” and “allow the leadership skill to shine through. Every child is a leader!”

There were often articles in the local community newspaper about what was happening at the schools in the area. An email sent by one of the Lighthouse team members in October 2011 contained a draft of two articles this teacher was guest writing for the newspaper and contained the common language. The first article summarized a recent “Parent Leadership Night” held at Sage, and said that “Parents heard how the 7 Habits help students: understand the value of setting goals, take personal responsibility, be proactive, and monitor and assess themselves and their personal progress.” The article went on to say:

Students have already begun to adopt 7 Habits ‘Leadership Language’ as short-hand for leadership concepts they experience at school . . . . Parents learned not only how the habits and Leadership Language are incorporated into academic lessons and school activities, but also how they might be used at home to further encourage academic success.

The second article for submission was for Leadership Day. Community members were invited to attend the school’s second Leadership day, and article shared that “The school’s motto ‘Leaders of Today, Inspiring Leaders of Tomorrow’ is the theme for the day.” The activities include a “tour of the Leadership Academy, an opportunity to meet and speak with student leaders, a Leadership Luncheon, and presentations from the student leaders.”

The biannual Leadership Day was rich with common language throughout the day, as evident in the program for the day. The fall 2012 Leadership Day included the lyrics to the school song with phrases within the song, “we are a leadership academy . . . sharing all our talents as we find our way . . . . sharing our potential everywhere we go . . . leaders of tomorrow start right here today.” The agenda for the day is provided in the following list.

- Welcome: Color Guard, Pledge, Video Announcements, School Song
- Leadership in the eyes of our students: Student Speeches
- School and Classroom Tours
- Highlighting our Leaders: Student Speeches about the Seven Habits, Data Passports, I’m a Leader
- Student Lighthouse Panel
- CARES Expectations
- Student Presentation
- What is your MISSION?
- Teacher/Parent Panel
- Our School Tradition

Although the program ended at 12:30 p.m., visitors were invited to stay for a student-led assembly at 1:00 p.m. In one section of the program, the following statement was highlighted:

Today has been brought to you by our future leaders and dedicated staff. Every staff member has played an important role for today. They have worked tirelessly to give our students the opportunity to shine and spotlight Their talents! We all believe in the potential of every child. Students at Sage discover their dreams and aspire for personal success each day.

Classroom newsletters were another area in which the common language of the reform was evident. One teacher's classroom newsletter from November 1, 2011, had sections entitled, "Learning Objectives, Happenings, and Reminders." There is one reference within the document to a Leadership calendar that reminds parents to "Look for home/school binder every night, check and initial the Leadership Calendar" and to "Check the Leadership Calendar for the following notation 'Math HW.'" Two months later, that same teacher's newsletter incorporated more common language. The class mission statement was at the top of the newsletter under the January 17, 2012, date: "We are all leaders. In our classroom, leadership is doing the right thing even when no one is watching." The main section headings were the same as the November newsletter with the addition of Seven Habit language as subheadings: "Learning Objectives: Synergize – Habit 6; Happenings: Begin with the End in Mind – Habit 2; Reminders: Put First Things First – Habit 3." The same reminder for parents to, "Look for home/school binder every night, check and initial the Leadership Calendar" and to "Check the Leadership Calendar for the following notation 'Math HW'" existed in this newsletter. One other change in the newsletter is the addition of a section titled "7-Habits Corner." This section said,

We are re-energizing with the 7-Habits in our classroom over the next several weeks! Habit 1: Be Proactive, I have a “can do” attitude. I choose my actions, attitudes, and moods. I don’t blame others. I do the right thing without being asked even if nobody is looking. Visit <http://www.theleaderinme.org/students/> for student activities that reinforce [Seven] Habits principles (kids love this web site).

The agendas for staff meetings followed the same template with the common language incorporated each month. For the meeting on September 13, 2012, the agenda began with “10 minutes” to “Sharpen the Saw” and included “celebrations/announcements, birthdays this month, 7 Habits video, Thank you board.” Next on the agenda under the topic of Communication was “Lighthouse Team updates” and “Student Lighthouse updates,” followed by “CARES on the bus” under Expectations. The meeting ended with time to Synergize by playing a game called “Would you Rather?” The October 2, 2012, meeting was similar in format as well. The meeting began with 10 minutes to Sharpen the Saw and included a “Proactive Language Video.” During the Communication block of the meeting, the staff discussed “Sharpen the Saw Ideas” they could partake in together. The meeting ended with a “Paper/rock/scissors tournament” to Synergize as a staff. The following statement by one teacher confirmed the common language evidenced in meeting agendas. This teacher felt the administration “[tries] to make it a normal part of how we communicate with each other.” The teacher saw it in the meeting agendas and heard it when the staff interacted at meetings. For example, at a

meeting there would be a Sharpening the Saw activity the staff engaged in or a discussion would be led with “How can we synergize to meet this goal?”

Students worked with various documents that contained the common language as well. Students used the Leadership SMART Goals goal setting sheet to set an academic goal, set a target date to meet the goal, and to create action steps of what they will do to reach the goal. There was also a chart for students to record the dates they engaged in their action steps that would help them reach their goal. On the back of the SMART Goals is space for drawing a picture and writing a reflection about working toward and achieving their goal. There is a second rendering of the Leadership SMART Goals for students to use to set a personal goal. Teachers and students use both of these forms (or a modified adaptation) to put into the students’ data passports.

Students also used classroom-created documents that integrated the common language such as the Seven Habits Book Report Card. One grade level team used this two-sided worksheet to grade a book character’s use of the Seven Habits. On the first side the students examined the scoring criteria for each Habit and assigned the book character a grade of 1, 2, or 3, based upon those criteria. The report card contained three columns with the headings “Habit, Scoring Criteria, and Grade.” For example, one grading scenario had “Be Proactive: 3. My character consistently made proactive choices. 2. My character made both proactive and reactive choices. 1. My character consistently made reactive choices.” In another example, the worksheet had the options, “Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood: 3. My character understood that it is more important to listen first, 2.



My character was a decent listener, 1. My character never listened well.” On the reverse side of the worksheet, the students were asked to, “Please defend two of your grades by providing a thorough explanation of why you chose a particular grade. Be sure to include examples that clearly support your choice.” The students named the Habit and the grade they would give the character, followed by a written explanation with specific examples from the story that supported their opinion.

***Common language within staff interactions.*** With one exception, most teachers felt that the common language was not used, as they put it, “authentically” among the faculty in their day-to-day discourse. The exception was a teacher who stated that the common language had improved staff interactions: “it’s more positive . . . it’s brought our staff closer . . . there were some issues with some staff members, so I’ve seen that our staff’s become more friendly and grown together.” Other teachers, however, acknowledged that, “I don’t see [the common language] as much with the staff as I do with the children.” This teacher added that in staff interactions, the common language “seems so artificial.” The teacher described this as “back labeling, after the fact” and did not believe teachers “do it firsthand as much.”

Other teachers went further, describing the common language as “phony” or “fake.” One teacher said that “people do it just because school leaders push it.” This teacher added that “the staff consider it something we have to teach to the kids and sometimes talk about with the kids,” and not something for the staff to use with each other. “It might be jokingly brought up among staff members, almost sarcastically sometimes.”

Another teacher said that the Seven Habits had not impacted staff interactions: “If the staff uses the language, I’m not familiar with it.” When discussing the impact of the Seven Habits on staff members’ interactions with another teacher, she said she didn’t think that, “just using the vocabulary, I don’t know that it’s changing anyone’s personalities.”

***Reflections on a common language.*** Data from observations, teacher interviews, and artifacts all indicate that there has been a change at Sage with regard to a common leadership language that is used throughout the school. Yet it was clear that, among faculty at least, there were differing experiences and perceptions about the use and value of a common language. One teacher who needed to focus on new curriculum responsibilities described being “focused on learning the curriculum, not the Seven Habits.” After returning from winter break, this teacher began making a more concerted effort to add in the common language into instruction, but noted that, “Honestly, I think people are burned out right now.” Another teacher thought, “maybe teachers are overwhelmed by what is going on,” and suggested this was the reason there was not as much common language occurring as people believed. This teacher also stated that because the emphasis on a common language “comes from the top, . . . things that sound good . . . aren’t really kid friendly or appropriate.”

Another teacher reflected, “I don’t think everyone is fully on board anymore. I think in the beginning people were interested but then when stuff is shoved on you and it started off in a manipulating way, it was all very misleading.” This teacher indicated that originally, teachers were asked to try and use the vocabulary and to

go at their own pace, but that the pace had quickened dramatically with the distribution of checklists and the goal of achieving Lighthouse status, which was something that “was never brought to the staff.”

Another teacher stated that the Seven Habits “are used enough so that the kids have the lingo,” but that same teacher felt that the “kids [are] saying things that aren’t natural.” She believed that students are “behaving in unnatural ways” and are “stressed out about this idea of leadership.” The teacher did not know what other language people could be referring to other than the Habits. She elaborated, “The kids are already taught it at home, the bulk of them.” She also felt that, “People said common language because when something is said over and over again you believe it or it’s an easy answer . . . you go with it because it’s been said so many times— yeah, it’s a kind of brain washing.”

Four of the teachers commented that the common language required a kind of retraining of the brain. One teacher said, “It’s easy to forget to tie in the language every day.” Despite liking the reform efforts, this teacher indicated that the frequency of the common language had diminished within his or her own classroom. As another teacher elaborated, “[It] hasn’t changed the way I instruct, [you] just frame questions utilizing the resources you have.” In essence, this teacher felt that the teaching was the same, but the vocabulary utilized while teaching was altered. When I followed up later, this same teacher stated that the common language referred to in interview responses resulted from the staff’s ability to “talk about it in the same fashion . . . we all have the same definitions for the words.” When teachers are in the “common language mode,” they are all “bullets and glossary,” the teacher

added. Although all faculty members have the same definitions and frame of reference, this teacher explained that when a teacher is in the midst of teaching they “have all these old mindsets that are on autopilot” and their natural ways to talk and react are more likely to come out, not the new common language.

Another teacher acknowledged, “I think old habits die hard.” As a high implementer, this teacher believed in the reform efforts, but wondered how everyone could possibly use the language all the time and then gave the example of the support staff who turn over each year and of the newly hired teachers, none of whom have gone through any training yet and so have no real point of reference for using the Seven Habits language. This teacher concluded, “I try really hard to use it, but it’s easier to go back to what you do best.”

Another teacher made comparable remarks regarding the common language. This teacher felt that the language “isn’t consistent; we have a common language but it isn’t used.” The teacher added that, “you get stagnant if you don’t keep revisiting it.” Additionally this teacher felt that because “now that the kids know it, we don’t feel the importance to keep revisiting it.” Yet another teacher specified, “It’s the vocabulary that’s the biggest part,” after reflecting on how a typical day has changed since the inception of the Seven Habits and leadership. This teacher had tried to “retrain myself—it’s not necessarily what I’m saying to [students] that’s changed, it’s how I’m saying it.” One of the examples this teacher gave related to the students following the CARES procedures in the hallway. “Instead of saying walking in the halls quietly because it’s expected and it’s the rules, it’s the CARES.” The teacher felt the vocabulary connected it all together and was a positive change since

implementing the Seven Habits. When following up with this same teacher, the teacher added: “It’s a retraining of the brain . . . trying to think of how to say things like being a leader means.”

Altogether, the teachers reported that a common language was used at Sage. The common language was observed in the environment, documents, and classroom interactions. Additionally, the teachers reported various levels of a common language being utilized. In the end, teachers stated a case for needing to “retrain their brains.” They indicated that their teaching had not necessarily changed, but the vocabulary associated with what they taught did and it was difficult to overcome old mindsets.

**Theme 2: Time.** A second recurring theme was the challenge of finding time to implement the Seven Habits reform. In general, teachers expressed frustration over not having enough time to plan for lessons and not having enough time during the day to implement them. One teacher stated simply:

I think the biggest thing, the hardest thing, is time . . . I have to find time for like the Data Passports, to make sure they’re tracking it, finding time to have lessons on, to understand the different habits.

This teacher felt that while teachers are getting better at all of it, there is still needed growth “so it’s second nature . . . and I don’t feel like I have to have a separate lesson for that.” This same teacher added, “There is not enough time to do all the lessons . . . the expectations of the district and what you’re doing with the content, it makes it harder to add in leadership, to do that effectively.” These sentiments are indicative of the feelings that other teacher participants stated in relation to the theme of not

having enough time. Teachers felt they needed more planning time, and just more time in the day in order to fit in Leadership and Seven Habits lessons; they also felt they needed more support and resources and fewer structural constraints in order to improve their implementation of the reform.

***Time to “fit it all in.”*** Initially, there was one exception to the “not enough time” sentiment by one teacher who did not believe that adding leadership into her day took that much time. This teacher stated, “We can incorporate it in a lot of things like morning meeting and in reading books.” After further reflection, however, this teacher acknowledged that the recently lengthened reading and math blocks with additional Instructional Focus Group times imposed on the time for other things such as the Seven Habits and leadership focus of this reform.

Another teacher felt that time is a challenge as “we struggle with balancing leadership and academics.” The teacher wondered, “is leadership unto itself something that can detract from your daily schedule or should it very easily just mesh with your daily schedule?” This same teacher also felt that “we have to be more and more efficient at incorporation of leadership skills, tactics, and procedures.” This teacher’s beliefs were reiterated during our follow-up conversation:

Implementation is a difficulty because it’s part of who we are but not part of the curriculum. So I’m from the stance of fit it in when it’s appropriate, whereas some teach full lessons. I don’t know how they do it though with so much curriculum to cover.

Another teacher believed in the leadership model and therefore wanted to make sure it continued, but at the same time expressed concern that “a lot has been put on a few teachers.” This teacher, who is among those few, continued, “Some of us can handle that and some of us can’t. I’m at a point in my life where it’s very difficult to handle all the extra stuff.” The teacher also thought “time is difficult, to get everything taught.” The teacher tried to incorporate the Seven Habits and leadership where it naturally occurred, but also cited an increase of parent emails and added job responsibilities that impacted time. More specifically, she went on to say:

The curriculum we have to teach, the minutes given to specific subjects like IFG [Instructional Focus Groups that regroup students to work on specific needed skills], reading and math blocks, so other areas are impacted and shortening other subjects and breaks. They continue to add things to our daily schedule and it has made it really difficult.

Yet another teacher concurred on the amount of time the reform efforts take:

It does take up a lot of our time. I mean, everything, everything has to go back to leadership, a class mission statement, the children have to have a mission statement, everything has to be called leader in some way.

Additionally, this leaves “no time for creativity or impromptu teaching or learning.”

Another teacher stated that a barrier to the leadership efforts “is time.” The idea that it was “hard to get all of this in and integrated” was reiterated on several different occasions throughout the interviews.

The teachers also frequently mentioned that finding the extra time for Data Passports was a challenge. One teacher felt completing Data Passports was most difficult because of the district's required schedule, yet this teacher made time "every Monday during my science and social studies block to do Data Passports." The teacher added: "I've occasionally done it during reading groups but that takes too long. It's much better as a whole class with a parent helper." Another teacher echoed this same feeling about working on Data Passports: "they do their data notebooks, but with a great deal of help from me. A lot of times it becomes my hand on top of theirs going so we can get it done quick."

Another teacher also agreed that Data Passports consumed a lot of time to set and track students' goals:

I think setting goals is another thing I'm trying to manage too because I feel like it's already very task consuming assessing their academic progress and meeting with kids and keeping them moving academically and then take extra time and sit and meet on their goals, both personal and academic, and whether or not they've met them, and what steps they're going to take. It's hard for me to manage the time. I'm ok with class and school goals; setting individual goals is harder.

**Time to plan.** The element of time is more than just fitting lessons in with students; it is also a challenge when it comes to planning for lessons. This is why several teachers loved when Sage employed the leadership consultant part time because "he came into your classroom with great ideas." One teacher said this was beneficial because "[you] didn't have to find the time to plan those lessons."



During my follow-up interview, one teacher made similar comments about liking the year when Sage had a leadership expert employed at the school part-time, because he came in and taught lessons. The content of the lessons was beneficial; teachers didn't have to spend the time planning for them, and the ideas could be extended into new lessons or embedded within future lessons. But, the leadership expert had not been on site for the year and a half prior to the study. The teacher also asserted that "we need more sharing time within our school" to collectively come up with better ideas.

For another teacher, it had been a challenge to plan for the Seven Habits and leadership because her "teammates haven't bought into the leadership" and they did not plan lessons together. The teachers on this team began the school year with the intention of planning weekly together for the first time ever, but every Monday when that planning period was scheduled, someone was busy with something or had a meeting. According to this teacher, they are not "big on planning all together." This situation made it more difficult for this teacher to incorporate leadership because all of the ideas needed to be thought up alone and solely on this one teacher's time. Another teacher made similar remarks when asked if everything necessary for implementing the leadership model was available: "No, no, I do not have time, it is not provided." This teacher believed that sufficient resources were not sufficient to do all that was expected.

Teachers often stated that more recently, other changes had caused them to not have enough time for planning and implementing lessons. One teacher, who had changed grade levels the year the study was conducted, had to learn the new

Common Core Standards, and put a new evaluation system in place. The focus had been on those new things, and in order for more Seven Habits and leadership to be added, the teacher would need to be given more time to do so. Another teacher expressed concern over the time needed for learning these new things and for planning and incorporating the reform elements. This same teacher said, “I was confident in what I taught before, but now all the new Common Core and evaluation system, a lot of change and I’ve got to spend way too much time on it.” Yet another teacher echoed this same sentiment about spending time learning the Common Core and the new evaluation system; consequently, those were the areas where this teacher was focused.

One teacher elaborated on the idea of time and too much to do when she said, “It would be nice if they just toned down some things and let us perfect one thing at a time instead of putting everything on our plate at one time.” This teacher felt that “it’s causing burnout in a lot of teachers and I know that teachers are getting frustrated and overworked.” Time spent as a staff (for example, the fall staff development day) could be used to provide teachers more time to work on their curriculum, and this same teacher said, “Using seven hours to sit and go over the habits again I think was a waste of time.” The teacher believed “we could definitely [have] been doing other things like talking about the Common Core, even giving us time to work with our teams on IFG, which has totally been pushed aside.” These same feelings were revisited in the context of achieving Lighthouse status: “We need to tackle fewer things at the same time.”

*Reflections on the theme of time.* Based on my personal experience as a teacher at Sage, I concur with the teachers' sentiments about lack of time. With additional job responsibilities emanating from the district, an increase in teaching times for core subject, the implementation of a budget-driven reduction in force process that requires teachers to take on added committee work to earn points in order to keep their job, the adoption of the Common Core Standards, and a new evaluation system, more time is required for planning and learning new roles, and yet the new roles and responsibilities leave very little time. As more and more of these items came into play, I found myself with less and less time to focus on the Seven Habits and leadership implementation.

**Theme 3: Programmatic and leadership support.** The third recurring theme that emerged from the data was related to leadership and programmatic support for implementing the reform. As noted in Chapter 2, research on effective school reform documents the importance of school leadership taking on the role of instructional leader (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Ott, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Quinn, 2002; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), providing teachers with materials and professional development, building a strong sense of community, setting strong lines of communication, and involving stakeholders in important decisions (Waters et al., 2003). While I was unable to interview the school leadership, these were areas raised in teacher interviews.

One teacher felt that the school was "about half way there" in regard to the reform efforts. Collectively, teachers felt they were in need of more social, material, and cultural resources. Several teachers thought Sage began the reform at a good

pace and had valuable initial training. One teacher commented that Sage “started off really strong with implementation.” Another teacher similarly stated that the school administration “did a good job at getting the staff trained initially.” Yet another teacher felt that “the materials and trainings” the teachers received did support classroom instruction.

Beyond the initial implementation period, however, teachers felt they were in need of more support. One teacher stated the need for “more additional help” related to lessons and implementation ideas. Another teacher concurred and said it would be helpful to have more of “an idea of how we’re supposed to do it.” This same teacher expressed a desire for administrative help so that “the teachers get the resources we need to apply [reforms] in the classroom” and also to “find ways to help us implement them.”

Several teachers felt there could be more support for engaging in the Seven Habits and leadership reform efforts related to the curriculum and evaluation system. One teacher felt that the reform components needed to be “tied into the curriculum” or it might reflect poorly in the new evaluation system. Another teacher similarly commented that tracking data with students was part of the new evaluation system but that teachers felt unsure about this in relation to their evaluations. One teacher expressed the desire for greater administrative support “in giving us ideas, better examples of what’s expected, or how they’d like things to be done” with “more ideas to integrate [the Seven Habits and leadership] into the content areas.”

Teachers emphasized strong communication as a necessary component of feeling supported. "Communication is extremely important," one teacher shared, and "that communication piece needs to be concrete and strong so that nobody is feeling left out or left questioning." This same teacher explained this was important "so nobody has to hear events that are taking place or expectations through the grapevine." Two teachers wished for greater communication and another felt that at school, "it's supposed to be open communication." A fifth teacher expressed concern over communication beyond the Lighthouse Team. Two other teachers elaborated on the desire for increased communication, and both made similar remarks about the importance of administrative follow-up.

Teachers also conveyed feelings that Sage has seemed to become more like a "business" in recent years. One teacher recounted the many different business models the school had tried in the past six years and said, "I feel that we are moving away from the art of teaching, even from the science of teaching, to a more business model. It's like we're a business instead of an educational institution." Similarly, another teacher said the school culture is "more businesslike . . . [it] seems less personal for the staff." Yet another teacher expressed concern that "we've got to the point where we're all business and there are [is little] interaction . . . it's always hurry up and go on to the next thing." This same teacher felt that people needed human interaction in order to feel supported, and stated: "There has to be enough of the human component in how you interact." Another teacher wished for "a real

feeling of caring and support." Yet another teacher expressed a similar desire for "a connection with . . . staff and students."

Teachers were confident, however, that if they approached the school leadership for help they would receive it. One teacher believed "if a person needed assistance [the administration] would offer that assistance. Generally speaking, I think they would." Another teacher reiterated these sentiments: "I think they are there to help us whenever we need it." Yet another teacher concurred, "In certain situations, if I go to them, I feel like I get a good response." Another teacher added, "I think that if we need to talk to them their doors are open." At the same time, this teacher wished for more opportunities for leadership to "check in with us to see how we're doing." Another teacher expressed a desire for more "checking in" and suggested that teachers would welcome it if the school administrator would "ask teachers, 'How can I help you? How can I help you do what you do because I trust you and I know that you're doing your best? How can I support you?'"

A few teachers shared feelings that they would like to see all staff members included in the decision-making process and that "everybody [should be treated] the same." Another teacher felt "that definitely there are certain teachers that do certain things [i.e., a small group is involved in the reform]." This teacher expressed concern that the voices and perspectives of the entire staff should be represented in making decisions. Two other teachers indicated they would like to see support for all staff and did not want to see favoritism.

Concerns of what teachers referred to as "burnout" came up within the discussions surrounding leadership support and heightened expectations and

responsibilities. The continued additions to "our daily schedule . . . has made it really difficult," one teacher said. Another teacher echoed the sentiment, and explained dealing with:

too much at one time . . . it would be nice if they just toned down some things and let us perfect one thing at a time instead of putting everything on our plate at one time. It's causing burnout in a lot of teachers

During a grade level lunch, two teachers made concurring comments: "I think there's a lot of burnout," one teacher said. "There's a certain level of burnout . . . at our school I think," said another.

#### **Reflections on the theme of programmatic and leadership support.**

Based upon my experience as an educator at Sage, I had many of the same desires that were expressed by the teachers in this study. The initial trainings were very helpful for learning about the Seven Habits and also for uniting the teachers with a common vision. I shared the desire to have more training to embed the Seven Habits and leadership components into the Common Core curriculum and to help us make Data Passports more meaningful, as well as more manageable. Over my 17 years of teaching, I've seen teacher's levels of involvement ebb and flow, dependent on the stage of their career and status of their personal life. Despite this natural occurrence of varied levels of participation, I do feel there is greater value in having all stakeholders' opinions solicited and that this facilitates teacher buy-in. I think the same sentiments regarding greater teacher buy-in also relate to communication. Strong communication aids teachers in the feeling of being a part of something. I appreciate knowing what is going on and why; as a teacher, it has helped me stay

organized and on track with day-to-day teaching and our greater mission. Lastly, I concur with teachers' statements and feelings of burnout. Undertaking any reform is labor intensive and stressful at times, but with all of the additional changes that have coincided at the district and school leadership level have made it even more difficult to implement this reform. These implementation difficulties have triggered some questions in relation to the reform's authenticity.

### **Authenticity**

When the Seven Habits reform began at Sage, it occurred as a bottom-up, grassroots effort. This was an authentic reform initiative in that it had considerable teacher buy-in and ownership—qualities that research shows are necessary for sustaining successful reform (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Jorgensen, Walsh, & Niesche, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lipka & Mohatt, 1998). Three years into the reform, as I reflected on the formal and informal interviews, observations recorded in field notes, as well as the documents and artifacts collected, I began to question how deep the reform efforts ran. I wondered, just as one teacher did after the Lighthouse visit, “how authentic it is when everyone . . . kept using the word authentic. If something is really authentic, you don’t have to say it is, you just say what you do.”

One of the documents that caused me to wonder about authenticity was the “My Lighthouse Visit Survival Checklist” distributed to the teachers after a staff meeting to help them prepare for the Lighthouse visit. The Lighthouse visit checklist stated, “As the date nears, we wanted to make you aware of this visit, and also give you a list of reminders that will make it a lot easier on you and your classroom.” The reminders included:



Every student should have a data passport and be able to explain the contents . . . every student in kindergarten should have at least one goal, and in 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> should have a personal and academic goal . . . every kindergarten classroom should have a class mission statement and 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade should have a class mission and a personal mission statement . . . the students in all classrooms should know their class mission. This is a great thing to start practicing after morning announcements. This is the reason why morning announcements have recently changed . . . All classrooms should have 'Leader' Roles. If you need these words cut out, please let us know, and the Lighthouse committee would be happy to provide you with the proper wording for your roles . . . Every classroom should have a greeter for the guests. We will not know the classrooms that they will be visiting that day. It is completely random when they walk around for classroom visits . . . All data walls should be updated with current information and goals. If you need ideas or help, please let a Lighthouse team member know.

One month prior to the visit, one grade level team was eating lunch in the pod and discussing the above reminders given to them at the staff meeting the previous day. They were specifically discussing all of the items they were told that needed to be done for the Lighthouse Evaluation visit. Two of the teachers appeared to be upset and one said, "I don't know what other jobs I can come up with. I like having Leader of the Day where one kid helps with everything for that day." Another teacher stated, "It was, 'Do it at your own pace, what's comfortable,' and then all of a

sudden, right before the Lighthouse visit, we had a checklist of things we had to be doing." The reminders distributed to teachers were items that the school should already have been implementing as part of the reform efforts. When teachers are just beginning to implement the activities required for Lighthouse status a month prior to the school being evaluated, it brought the reform's level of authenticity into question.

Other events surrounding the Lighthouse visit reiterated the feeling teachers communicated as "things being put into place" just for the review. Two weeks prior to the review, an email was sent from the principal with a message that said, "In case you are having difficulties logging in to the website:" The email contained an entire staff code for logging onto the Leader in Me website to access lesson plans and upload lessons plans. Sharing leadership lesson plans on the website is one of the requirements for obtaining Lighthouse status.

Six days prior to the Lighthouse visit, the Lighthouse team met and finalized plans for the Lighthouse Evaluation visit, as well as put documents into a binder that the evaluation team would look at as evidence that Sage was authentically implementing the reform. As the team gathered documents, there were requests for "more mission statements, more student examples." One teacher asked, "Does the marquee have Habits language on it now?" and the principal replied, "Yes." One team member was looking for concrete evidence to show that Sage had become a school of choice, but enrollment was actually down and open enrollment had decreased from the year before. As the meeting continued, teachers pulled up

documents on their computers to print out and take back to implement in their classroom before the review visit so that they could then be entered into the binder.

The following day, one of the teachers came into my classroom and initiated a conversation about the Lighthouse meeting the previous day. This teacher expressed concern that teachers were "pulling out lessons to quick teach and put up on the walls for the evaluation next week." The teacher noted that she had gone back to her team and asked if they could do a lesson that was suggested at the meeting and both of them expressed doubts. This teacher worried that "nothing has changed since last spring when we went through the documents and decided we needed to put more things in place before having the [Lighthouse] review."

Two more incidents, which furthered the questions about authenticity, stemmed from emails sent out to the staff by the administration. The teachers were offered help by the assistant principal to ensure they had everything from the Lighthouse visit checklist in an email stating:

If anyone would like me to stop in and take a quick look around your room before Wednesday, just let me know! I am more than happy to be a 2<sup>nd</sup> set of eyes if you want to make sure you have everything from the checklist!

The second incident occurred when an email was sent out in the middle of the Lighthouse evaluation visit by the principal entitled "every room!" This email was sent out at 9:45 a.m. during the Lighthouse Evaluation visit by the principal stating, "Hi, Everyone, Please be sure to have a greeter. The Lighthouse Eval Team is going into every room!"

On the day of the Lighthouse visit, as I passed through the hall, a teacher said of the Lighthouse evaluation interview:

Those were some intense questions. You could tell they were looking for some very specific answers . . . . But what are they going to do, not give it to us? We make them look better by giving it to us because we're using all of their materials.

The next day, another teacher made comparable comments, and noted the evaluation questions seemed "nitpicky." Questions such as, "Does every kid have a leaders job and how often do you change them?" were asked. The teacher explained this was because, "They went into some rooms and talked with kids and they didn't know what jobs they had." This teacher also commented on what appeared to be disinterest on the part of the evaluators. This teacher surmised that the school would achieve Lighthouse status, primarily because "we're promoting their materials and [the school leadership] went to do trainings for them." At a meeting a few days later, a teacher commented that the Lighthouse Visit "didn't feel like it was a celebration about what was going well. It was more like no matter what answer you gave their questions it wasn't good enough or right." The principal added she "felt bad for the kids during the kid questioning part. . . . One student really tried to fill all the air and none of the other nine on the Student Lighthouse Team said anything."

Once the Lighthouse visit was complete, teachers scrambled to prepare for Leadership Day. The main topic for discussion at the November 1, 2012, Lighthouse Team meeting included preparations for Leadership Day two weeks ahead. The

question was asked, “How do we decide who’s going to participate in Leadership Day?” One teacher responded, “At this late date, we just need teachers to pick kids who will be able to do it with their eyes closed because there’s not a lot of practice time.” Another teacher added, “And teachers need to practice with kids during their prep and lunch; there’s not time to send home permission slips [to practice before or after school].” These comments also generated questions of authenticity. Four days later, a teacher stopped me in the hall and, looking down at a list in her hands of things to complete for Leadership Day, said, “We need to get this all done and put together for next week . . . the only way I’ll get all this done is to not teach all day for the next week.” Several other teachers commented that they were participating in preparations for Leadership Day because it was an expectation to help with something.

**Reflections on authenticity and bottom-up school reform.** These incidents raise questions about the authenticity of the reform efforts. If a school is authentically engaged in reform, then do teachers need to be told to have certain elements in their classroom that should already be present? Should only a handful of carefully selected students be able to discuss the topic of the reform and give speeches about it? Should teachers have to be told to assume certain roles in the reform? And if teachers are being told to do specific things, is it still a grassroots, bottom-up reform effort, or has it evolved into a top-down reform movement?

These questions suggest the challenges of sustaining a bottom-up, grassroots school reform effort as the pressures on the school—its students, faculty, and administration—to perform grow ever greater with each year of implementation

and as the school is also required to implement other state-level reforms at the same time. The responses of school participants—those who create and share the school culture—are all intelligible and understandable in light of these pressures. The fact that the pressures existed at all, however, suggests that as the school reform got further underway, it began to take on a more bureaucratized, top-down structure. The quest for Lighthouse status created certain rules for Sage as it tried to achieve all nine of the necessary criteria to gain recognition. This, in turn, began to reshape the culture of the school. These processes, and the constraints as well as the possibilities for sustaining authentic, grassroots school reform, are discussed more fully in the final chapter.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the teacher participants were introduced and emergent themes were developed as a result of the analysis of data from the interviews, observations, and school documents. These themes were common language, time barriers, and programmatic and leadership supports. A common language was found to be present at Sage. This common language was evident in the physical environment and in official school documents and communication. The teachers reported varying levels of the common language used among themselves and with students. One of the biggest challenges to implementing the reform, not surprisingly, was having enough time to plan lessons and to teach those lessons. The significance of this challenge was heightened by the introduction of new Common Core Standards and added teacher responsibilities as a result of district-wide budget cuts. Finally, teachers expressed their desire for greater support from school leadership,

including the desire for greater resources, communication, stronger personal relationships and, in the words of one teacher, they wanted "less on their plates." After four years on this reform path, did Sage reach a level of authenticity worthy of Lighthouse status? In what ways might the nature of the reform itself—in particular, its bureaucratization in structures that emanate outside the school (e.g., the Lighthouse evaluation)—affect authentic implementation of the reform?

In the following chapter, I answer my original research questions and relate the results of this study back to the literature review. Additionally, I will include a few implications and recommendations for practice and future research.

## Chapter 5

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This ethnographic case study examined a school-wide reform effort to implement the Seven Habits and foster a leadership culture within an elementary school. The interviews, observations, artifact collection, and field notes all took place on the Sage campus during the 2012-2013 school year. Once the data were collected, they were analyzed and coded to find themes; the data were then related back to the research questions.

It is important to understand that this study cannot be generalized to all educational reform movements. It is unique because the participants and the context of the study are unique. It is also unique because I had a long and trusting relationship with my participants. At the same time, I am hopeful that this study provides some lessons for schools embarking on a similar path of education reform. This study has highlighted the voices and perspectives of teachers who were “on the ground” implementers of the reform. I believe the teacher's responses, for the most part, reflected what the teachers truly believed and were not altered for the sake of being considered politically correct or to intentionally make the reform and school look like something it was not.

It is also important to note that this study is from the perspective of the teachers. The information contained within involves the teachers' views of their experiences as well as their view of the roles of others (school leadership, parents, and students) during the implementation of the school's current reform efforts.



Therefore the conclusions drawn are related and limited to understanding the reform from the teachers' perspectives.

## **Conclusions**

**Research questions.** This study was designed and data were collected in hopes of answering the initial research questions. Each of the questions will be discussed individually as the analyzed data from the study proposes to answer them.

***Research Question 1: In what ways has the school culture changed since the adoption of Covey's Seven Habits?*** The ethnographic data reveal the complexity of undertaking a school-wide cultural change such as that at Sage. On the one hand, the observational, interview, and artifact data demonstrate significant changes in the school culture, as manifested by the common language that teachers stated as the biggest change. The common language was evident on the walls of Sage, within school communication such as newsletters, and in student speeches on Leadership Day. On the other hand, the data illuminate the implementation challenges associated with reforms and suggests that the initial proponents of the reform may have been overly optimistic about how quickly and deeply the school would embrace the reform

Challenges surfaced such as teachers expressing the need for greater material and professional support in implementing the reform, time constraints that grew ever-greater with increasing demands placed on their time, and efforts to implement the reform at a deep level school-wide. Teachers gave mixed reports of

the school culture, some stating it was warm, friendly, and professional, while others noted a business-like quality. Teacher participants believed that teachers were doing everything they could to bring out the best in each other, were respectful of each other, and were willing to help each other out. The feelings of support expressed here coincided with Deal and Peterson's (2009) research, which found encouraging others and being helpful and supportive important to a school's culture. Additionally, Tondeur, Devos, van Houtte, van Braak, and Valcke (2009) and Jorgensen, Walsh, and Niesche (2009) found that a supportive culture was an essential component to the success of a school's reform movement.

The culture of Sage was also described as one of high expectations. A few teachers felt that the culture had always been one of high expectations for student academic success. This finding corresponds with Goodwin's (2010) data that a culture consisting of high expectations for learning and behavior was a powerful predictor of success. Placing student needs first is another norm in positive school cultures according to Deal and Peterson (2009), and this norm aligns with the findings in this study. Such a correlation was seen when one teacher stated that the "culture for the kids is excellence" and another teacher said, "with teachers, their goal isn't for their own success as much as it is for the kids to succeed."

Yet, the data also show that school-wide culture change like that being implemented at Sage is not a simple or easy process, and that individual members of the cultural community are likely to experience the change process differently and sometimes in contradictory terms. For example, while one teacher described the teacher subculture positively, another teacher described the general school culture

as cold and uncaring. Some teachers expressed concern that a small group of faculty decision makers may have “divided the school more now than in previous years.” Others expressed concern about what they perceived as the top-down nature of the school reform. According to the data gathered during this study, the changes in the culture (among the faculty) over the years were not attributed to one single factor. Some teachers believed the Seven Habits had impacted the culture, others believed the exit of certain staff members triggered a cultural shift, and still others felt that the school leadership had been the cause of cultural change.

The concerns expressed by teachers in this study were similar to ones in a study by Tubbs and Garner (2008), which led them to recommend establishing a positive school climate prior to focusing on changes. Teacher concerns were reflected in statements such as: “It’s possible to feel more supported than I am,” “I’m feeling really a huge amount of stress on my shoulders this year and I’m not getting any help,” “Putting everything on our plate at one time, it’s causing burnout,” “I’m not feeling a lot of support,” and “Sometimes they throw stuff on our laps and just say go do it and don’t really give direction or give us an idea of how we’re supposed to do it.” Data gathered from field notes indicated a similar story to the interview responses. Because culture can be defined by the actions within a school along the lines of support and trust (Deal & Peterson, 2009), the data from informal conversations suggested a slightly less supportive and trusting culture at Sage than appears on the surface.

In sum, the data are mixed on how the school culture had changed since the implementation of the Seven Habits. While most teachers believed the school had a

culture of high expectations for students, they disagreed about whether the reform was the source of this aspect of the school's culture. There was also a considerable amount of disagreement about the extent to which the school culture was collaborative and supportive for the teachers.

***Research Question 2: What has been the process of school change?*** The process of school change has been full of challenges as well as achievements. In the very beginning of the school change, there was the excitement on the part of a small group of teachers who fueled the quest for funding, spurred a road trip, and created excitement within the rest of the staff as well. Staff and students were motivated by the transformation of the school's physical environment, working collaboratively to achieve something, and by the prospect of what the reform could mean for the students and their future. Achievements included forming a staff and a student Lighthouse Team to help guide the school, holding Leadership Days for the community that included state senators and congressmen as attendees, and having educators from around the US visit the Sage campus to see the great things that were happening. Another great achievement was the recent recognition of becoming a Lighthouse School.

It seemed that with every achievement there also was a challenge. Some of the challenges included: finding the time to train the staff at times that were mutually acceptable, maintaining the school's physical environment with new Seven Habits and leadership displays, achieving and maintaining buy-in from the community and some staff, and keeping the level of excitement up during some very difficult financial and programming changes in education.

A more overarching challenge in implementing the reform stemmed from its teacher-initiated origins and the required criteria from a commercial reform for achieving Lighthouse status. While these contradictions always existed, these conflicting positions became increasingly evident during the year of this study, as reflected in the teachers' responses. As teachers were asked to take on additional reform initiatives during this school year, the reform became more difficult to manage. These additional demands on the teachers' time had the effect of decreasing their buy-in, as they faced the pressures of juggling new Common Core standards, a new teacher evaluation system, and, in some cases, new grade levels to learn.

***Research Question 2a: What has been the role of teachers in the school reform process?*** The role of the teachers was varied throughout the reform process at Sage Elementary. The teachers interviewed in this study viewed their role somewhere along the spectrum of “I’m a leader” to “I only do what I can do.” Three teachers suggested that teachers are of utmost importance to the reform efforts because they were responsible for implementing the reform. One teacher viewed the teacher's role as “a facilitator of knowledge,” another teacher said, “I’m that foundation,” and yet another teacher said, “it’s important that [teachers] take it seriously and give 100%.” Teachers who were part of the Lighthouse Team believed their role was “just encouraging other teachers” and “to pass the information.” At the same time, teachers who were members of the Lighthouse Team expressed concern that if they were not on the team they might “have no clue what’s going on,” which suggested the need for greater school-wide communication mechanisms

about the reform. Teachers who were leaders were also unsure as to how their communications were being accepted. "I'm not going to try to change all their minds on [the reform]," said one teacher, "'cause they're pretty strong personalities." Because of this, teachers who assumed a leadership in the reform effort may have seen their main role as a messenger. Another teacher thought her role "depends on what the reinvention is." While this teacher indicated she always wanted to be a part of whatever the school is doing, she said she always had to ask herself, "Is this what's best for students? . . . it's a job on some level so I go along if it's something that I'm not totally in agreement with." This teacher would prefer to:

take a few good things that work for your kids and your school and then you take a few things from somewhere else . . . I've never been a person that is all about one thing . . . so my role is to try to go along.

The Lighthouse Team was at the heart of the reform efforts, helping to propel it forward. This team of 10 teachers was in its second full year of existence at the time of this study. The original intent with the Lighthouse Team members was to have teachers rotate through the committee every year or two so that other teachers had a chance to participate. Several teachers were willing to move off the committee. The principal sent out several invitations at the end of the 2011-2012 school year and at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year inviting other teachers to join the team; however, at the time of this study, no other teachers had been willing to join the team and so the same 10 teachers continued to participate. The fact that these same 10 teachers had been willing to meet every other week for two years is an indicator of their belief in the reform. This coincides with the

research on teacher efficacy (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Vernon-Dotson, 2008; Zion, 2009), that when teachers believe in themselves, they have the capability to educate students and make a greater collective difference in the school.

Four of the teachers on the Lighthouse Team during the time in which the study was conducted were the initial teachers spearheading the grassroots effort. The other members were all active participants in fostering leadership efforts at Sage in this role and in preparing for Leadership Days. Specifically the three fourth grade teachers on the Lighthouse Team completed the majority of the tasks together and were the main organizers for Leadership Days. These teachers' beliefs in themselves as being capable to implement the reform coincides with Goddard and Skrla's (2006) findings that when teachers view themselves as more capable, they will "approach goals with creativity, effort, and persistence required to attain success" (p. 218).

The data in this study suggested that teachers who were stronger believers in the Seven Habits reform were also Lighthouse Team members, felt slightly more supported by the school leadership, were more positive about the reform in general, and were generally more positive about the school culture. This coincides with Weston and Bain's (2009) findings in which they stated that the culture of a school impacted the levels of engagement in the change behaviors of the staff, which in turn generated their level of commitment to the change occurring within the school.

Even the teachers with a stronger commitment to the reform efforts, such as those on the Lighthouse Team, struggled with balancing Sage's reform efforts along

with all the new state and district mandates. Additionally, several teachers questioned why the school had become increasingly business-like over the past several years. These positions illuminated the conflict occurring as the teachers tried to negotiate what began as a bottom-up effort to transform the school culture with the fact that the reform was based on a corporate model.

***Research Question 2b: What has been the role of the school leadership in the school reform process?*** Wahlstrom, Seashore, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) said, “Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions” (pp. 9-10). How the principal provided direction and exercised her influence had a great impact on the reform efforts at Sage.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the data in response to this research question derived primarily from teachers and from observations, because it was not possible to interview the school principal. In the beginning stages of the reform, there was a sense of collaboration among the school leadership and the teachers as they collectively made plans to better the school. A strong sense of community was evolving as shared beliefs, school goals, and standard operating procedures were established together. There were strong lines of communication during this time, and everyone was involved in important decisions. These behaviors are consistent with Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) findings on how school leaders’ responsibilities impacted student achievement.



Waters et al. (2003) found that teachers were more successful when provided with materials and professional development. Most teachers at Sage Elementary felt that they did not have all of the resources necessary for planning and teaching leadership lessons to students. Lipka and McCarty (1994) concurred with findings that professional development led to positive outcomes for students. Some teachers in this study felt that the initial training was a great start, but that more trainings, planning, and collaboration were necessary in order to keep the reform moving.

Half of the teacher participants in this study felt the reform efforts started off well. The administration did an effective job of getting the staff trained, encouraging the staff to use the Seven Habits in their personal lives prior to teaching them, and trying to make them a normal part of how Sage communicated in documents and meetings. This concurs with data by Printy and Marks (2006), which confirms that how a principal engages teachers in school initiatives is important to developing shared leadership. After the initial trainings at Sage, the teachers said they would like to see a more hands-on and mentoring role from the school leadership. This data matches with findings by Hoy and DiPaola (2009), which recognized the role of instructional leader as one of the most important aspects of a school administrator's tasks. Fink and Resnick (2001) agreed and stated the principal is the one responsible for establishing a culture of learning at the school. The development of high expectations for learning and behavior is a powerful predictor of success (Goodwin, 2010).

As the reform rolled out, teachers began to perceive that it was “rushed”; the efforts and actions, they indicated, did not feel “natural.” These feelings again reflected the intruding contradictions between a bottom-up, grassroots school change effort based on a corporate reform. While the reform at Sage was initially led by teachers, the corporate aspect of the reform became more salient over time as more components were added and required of the teachers, culminating in the application for Lighthouse status.

The data from the teachers’ formal interview responses and informal conversations suggested that during this crucial period of increased implementation, teachers need additional levels of support to implement the reform efforts. Teachers commonly said that they needed more time, ideas, and resources for implementation. This correlates with Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond’s findings (2001) that, “leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (p. 24). Similarly, Quinn’s (2002) research suggested that when the principal was rated highly as a resource provider, the school experienced increased levels of active teaching and increased levels of student learning and engagement.

Additionally, the teachers in this study expressed their desires for a school culture that was less business-like and involved more of a human component. Teachers felt there needed to be a “real feeling of caring and support . . . a true, genuine caring for other humans at this school.” Jorgensen et al. (2009) found that a supportive culture was an essential component to the success of a school’s reform

movement. When the staff felt valued and supported, a collaborative culture permeated and was highly conducive to reform efforts. Research has found that effective principals establish strong relationships with teachers as they work closely and collaboratively (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Research by Leithwood and Mascall (2008), Wahlstrom et al. (2010) and Waters et al. (2003) concurred, and added that a principal's influence on the teachers' motivation and work environment impacts student achievement. Effective principals promote strong communication (Quinn, 2002). Communication was another area the teacher participants cited they would like to see increased; they said they would like more timely and stronger communication.

***Research Question 3: In light of this cultural analysis, what are the factors that shape a school's capacity to transform its culture by adopting Covey's Seven Habits?*** Peck and Reitzug (2012) investigated the notion of business management concepts moving from the business world to the education field. This was particularly interesting given the topic of this reform effort as well as the participants' responses that indicate that, as the reform got underway, the school culture took on elements of a business model emanating from the Seven Habits reform structure itself.

This idea of a business model trying to "fix" education was addressed in the book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (Ravitch, 2010), which systematically looked at public education reform efforts over the past 20 years that have influenced our country to currently look at the educational system from the business model perspective. Ravitch provided examples of districts around the

country that became national symbol for reform as they saw dramatic increases in student achievement through the implementation of their reform efforts. However, what was projected to the public as a huge success was in fact a different story when other pieces of the puzzle that were not reported were taken into consideration. Moreover, in some instances the gains in achievement were actually greater before the reforms were enacted. Additionally, Ravitch reported that teachers engaged in some of the reforms felt that their opinions, skills, and efforts were not valued; they consequently became increasingly disheartened with their jobs.

When looking at the reform efforts at Sage in comparison to other schools implementing the same reform, data were directly acquired from FranklinCovey's Leader in Me website. The data painted a picture of schools much like Sage with an environment that reinforces the Seven Habits, a ubiquitous approach to leadership that pervades the culture, the assignment of leadership roles to all students, the use of data notebooks to track academic and personal goals, and annual Leadership Days (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012). Many of the comments and language that came up in my study were also found within the documents from FranklinCovey's Center for Advanced Research. However, given the amount of mixed teacher responses (positive/negative) that I documented, it causes me to wonder if I have all the pieces to the puzzle, as Ravitch (2010) indicated.

A recent doctoral dissertation (Anderson, 2011) stated that teachers in the study reported students appearing less quarrelsome over toys and using the Seven Habits vocabulary in their conversations with each other after having participated in leadership lessons using the Seven Habits. Similar statements were recorded in a

survey of Lighthouse Schools by Hatch and Covey (2012). Hatch and Covey reported teachers indicating that they had strongly observed the following: “The 7 Habits have become a common language,” “Hallway displays are inspiring,” “School administrators model the 7 Habits,” “A strong team is in place to lead The Leader in Me efforts,” and “a leadership theme is visible in school-wide activities” within their school since implementing The Leader in Me (p. 3). Teachers also reported the greatest benefits for students have been goal setting, increased self-confidence, ownership for learning, and taking responsibility. Finally, teachers reported the greatest benefits for staff and school have been, “increased self-efficacy, “common goals,” “putting students first,” “teachers are less overwhelmed,” “less gossip,” “decreased discipline referrals,” “improved morale,” as well as a “better culture.”

Schools experiencing success from implementing the Seven Habits report a 68% reduction in discipline referrals, increased academic performance on state testing, 68% of teachers said the quality of education increased, and 97% of parents said they wanted the Seven Habits to continue (FranklinCovey, 2010). Collinwood (2009) conducted a preliminary report on schools’ implementation of the Seven Habits. The data he discovered implied greater student performance in both reading and math, a lower number of discipline referrals, an increased level of participation in decision making by teachers and an improved climate for students when a school “fully” implemented the Seven Habits, compared with schools that were “moderate implementers.”

Another example of success on the *Leader in Me* website is a study conducted by Baile and summarized by Collinwood (2008). In this study of six schools, 1,376

pages of transcriptions were analyzed and coded for six impact categories. The participants reported only positive comments in regards to how Seven Habits impacted their organization. Their beliefs of improvement related to: (a) their workplace satisfaction and depended greatly on interpersonal relations, (b) more open communication and trust between employees, (c) a greater sense of interdependence, (d) a greater focus on common goals, (e) increased signs of effective collaborative behavior, (6) strengthened focus and sense of control in their school. In this study “there is a strong perception by the participants that the 7 Habits, when taken by large numbers of employees and supported by administration, has the power to improve organizational culture” (Collinwood, 2008, p. 9).

When the data from those studies are compared to the data collected in this ethnographic case study, one can see some of these same themes. For example, when looking at the workplace satisfaction being largely dependent on interpersonal relations, this is consistent with data from Sage indicating that teachers who indicated a more positive school culture and felt more supported by school leadership were more positive about the leadership reform efforts occurring. The comments and responses from the participants also indicated a greater feeling of trust and communication between staff members. The analysis above suggests that the culture at Sage has not changed as positively as in the above examples from other schools implementing the Seven Habits. Ross and Laurenzano (2012) reported participants believed the greatest impact from implementing the Seven Habits was the improvement to their school culture. While the data collected from

Sage indicated a sense of improved school culture by some participants, several of the teachers also commented that this improvement could be related to the transfer of some staff members to other schools at the time the reform was initiated.

Kaniuka (2012) made an important point: “School reform is not performed in isolation; rather the context in which it occurs must be considered as to how it influences the implementation and ultimate success of the reform,” (p. 327). The context of Sage and the many different factors occurring alongside the reform should also be considered. Three themes were suggested by the data collected in this study. These themes are related to common language, time, and support. I will now discuss each of these further, relative to building a school’s capacity for change.

When teachers were responding to questions about what was working in terms of the reform, they frequently stated the “common language.” Since beginning the reform initiative, new language has been introduced at Sage. This common language includes the Seven Habits, the CARES procedural expectations, and Data Passports. The teachers believed that the common language enabled them to communicate leadership habits to the students, and thought the students were able to use the common language in their interactions with each other. Teachers felt it also gave them a way to tie things together in different curriculum areas and help students to see connections in reading to real life.

This common language was observed on 23 occasions in my more than 35 hours of classroom observations. During these observation hours, there were many instances in which it seemed to be a natural place to insert the common language, but the teacher did not. When I followed up with teachers regarding the

inconsistency between what was said and what I observed, the teachers had various explanations. These explanations included, “people don’t care,” “we are programmed to say we use it and nobody uses it,” “it isn’t consistent,” “I don’t think everyone is fully on board anymore,” “I think there are other teachers who don’t talk about it at all,” “maybe the common language is just understood, not spoken,” and “people are too overwhelmed.” Two teachers indicated that the teachers and students all had the same definitions and understandings of the common language, but when it came down to using it "old habits" were hard to break. In other words, when teachers are in the middle of a lesson or a situation, without even intending to, they may revert to their comfortable ways of teaching and go back to what they know and have always done.

Teachers consistently made statements related to the lack of time, which made implementing the reform more difficult. The lack of time related to teacher efficacy and their belief that they are able to implement something effectively. Teachers all stated that they did not have enough time, and that their time was not used as effectively as it could be. While most teachers liked Data Passports, they also noted that this part of the reform initiative took a lot of time to keep up with, because it involved setting goals, tracking them, graphing them, and reflecting on them. Teachers stated that the many other new aspects they have had to implement in the past few years (extended core teaching blocks, new Common Core Standards, a new evaluation system, and professional learning communities (PLCs) have taken more time as well. With many of the other new teaching components related to



what students are expected to know, there is less time to spend on something that is not on state-required tests or mandated.

Throughout the interviews and field notes, the data suggested that teachers needed more support both personally and professionally. This need for support came in many different forms. Teachers needed to feel valued and appreciated for what they do on an everyday, real level. They wanted administrative support in “putting less on our plate at one time” and indicated that the flurry of activity and increased demands on their time was causing “burn-out.” Teachers expressed the need for support in the form of help with instruction—both ideas and resources. They expressed the need for administrative help when it is requested, for follow through, and for honoring agreed-upon schedules. Teachers also expressed a desire to be treated with respect and not micromanaged. Overall, the data in this study clearly demonstrate the teachers' desire for greater support in multiple ways.

### **Recommendations**

In trying to answer to this study's original research questions, the data suggest that Sage School is still very much in the process of grappling with the changes that accompany a major reform effort, and that at present, the reform efforts do not run as deeply as originally hoped. Formal communication, documents, and walls paint the picture of a school that has leadership as its foundation. This image is supported by media attention and the recently achieved Lighthouse recognition. However, I have posited in this study that reform should be viewed as a process of cultural change. As a situated human process, there are bound to be ambiguities, challenges, and enormous complexity. This is reflected in differing

levels of teacher implementation and comfort with the Seven Habits reform. Some teachers had leadership as the foundation of their classroom; others were less comfortable with the leadership model and are low implementers; many teachers fell somewhere in between: they held positive views about the Seven Habits and leadership, but felt that the process had been rushed and that there had been inadequate time and support to fully implement the reform.

This leads to a greater set of questions: Can any school reform of the magnitude undertaken at Sage be authentic and enact significant, positive, and lasting changes? Is there always a certain degree of "painting the picture," as suggested by Ravitch (2010)? While the initial reform began with interest at the teacher level, how can a school import an exogenous corporate reform like the Seven Habits and still make it its own? How can the three elements research shows to be essential to successful reform (leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture) be supported and maintained?

With my obvious vested interest in the success of the Seven Habits and leadership reform efforts, I have several recommendations to make. These recommendations are for Sage and the school district they are a part of, but I also hope they will be of use to other school districts, and that the lessons from this case study might inform education practice more generally. The recommendations provide a path upon which Sage and schools embarking on similar reforms may travel in order to strengthen the leadership culture they are trying to foster.

Teachers overwhelmingly stated they needed more time for planning lessons that integrated leadership and they were in need of more ideas on how to do this. In

my many years of teaching, lack of time has often been a theme. However, there are instances in which time could be allocated differently. Instead of reading a book about PLCs and writing notes about what teachers learned, for example, the scheduled PLC time could be utilized for delving further into leadership and encompass lesson planning and data analysis about it. Another way to give teachers more time is to have teachers attend only trainings of which they actually need. Much the way teachers differentiate learning for their students, the school leadership and district should differentiate learning for their teachers.

Each year, teachers completed a Professional Growth Plan that stated what their learning goals were for the year and how they were going to accomplish the goals. This is an ideal venue for differentiating training; teachers should attend trainings that help them accomplish their personal learning goals. Additionally, staff development can be planned to offer a menu to teachers so they are able to choose something during the required staff development time that meets their needs and optimizes their time. Increasing teachers' skills in targeted areas will also increase their efficacy and their belief that they can use the skills learned to enact change.

Recommendations for reestablishing trust and a supportive environment would be multifaceted. A more open and transparent line of communication would need to be established at Sage. More resources and ideas would need to be brought in for teachers so they have a better idea of how to implement the leadership reform. The teachers would need time to revisit and refine their teaching in relation to leadership before moving on to another "big rock" or goal. No new implementation should take place until faculty members solidify the reforms they

are currently implementing. The personal connection would need to be infused back into the environment at Sage. Genuine, personal relationships would need to be reestablished so that all staff felt that they were appreciated and valuable members of the team. Team teaching lessons would be an invaluable way to provide support to teachers and to offer concrete examples of what teachers are expected to do while letting them know that it is a collaborative process.

Similar recommendations for the district include rolling out fewer programs at the same time and providing more support and resources for teachers in regards to those programs. Teachers often feel that they are asked to do new things without adequate resources to help them accomplish it. The district should also be at the forefront modeling differentiated learning for its teachers through differentiated staff development. As discussed previously, a menu of options or individual learning options to meet personal learning goals set each year would help teachers grow professionally while honoring their time.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Returning to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 (see Figure 1), this study reaffirms the importance of effective school leadership, teachers' sense of efficacy, and a positive school culture as the crucial ingredients in successful school reform. The unique setting and reform experience at Sage, however, means that there are limitations to any broad generalizations that might be made. This study would be difficult to replicate because of its nature; the participants involved are unique as is my relationship with them and the school. It would be challenging for an outsider to elicit the kind of candid and detailed

interview responses that emerged from this study. On the other hand, it would add insightful data to engage in a case study of schools that either attempted to implement the Seven Habits reform and were unsuccessful or that sought Lighthouse status and failed. The dynamics of the reform process and participants' beliefs about that process would provide greater insight into what transpired at Sage.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the ongoing reform efforts of a local school as it sought to improve the school culture through the use of Stephen Covey's (2008) Seven Habits and a school-wide leadership focus. The primary source of data came from two-part interviews with 10 teachers at the school. Additionally, teachers were observed teaching, artifacts were collected, and field notes were recorded. Teachers willingly gave up their lunch or prep times to meet with me. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and analyzed. The analysis of the data took many hours to determine recurring themes and to interpret those themes relative to the original research questions.

In the first chapter, I provided an introduction to the study. Background information was given about Sage, which laid the foundation for the necessity of the reform the school was implementing. The second chapter provided a review of the literature and the theoretical framework for this study. Combining the elements of school culture, teacher efficacy, and school leadership, this framework guided my research. The third chapter detailed the research methods utilized in this study as

well as the rationale for these choices. This qualitative research was an ethnographic case study. Additionally, the processes for analyzing the collected data were defined.

After the data were analyzed, Chapter 4 provided an introduction to the teacher participants, and emerging themes were identified through interview, observation, and artifact data. Next, teacher observations were analyzed and presented. Finally, artifacts and field notes were inserted. Chapter 5 included an evaluation of the study's findings vis-à-vis the original research questions. This evaluation was then compared to the data revealed in the literature review. Recommendations and implications followed. I conclude this dissertation with some personal reflections on the research process and what was learned through that process.

## **Epilogue**

As teachers discussed the possibility of not achieving Lighthouse status because we did not have measureable goals, such as decreased discipline or increased test scores, one teacher said, "But we didn't do this for that reason, we did it to change the yucky feeling at our school." When I reflect back on that initial reason and those initial months of hopes and dreams for the school, I feel a sense of nostalgia, like one would have when remembering a happy time—happiness for what was there, but sadness because it is over.

This reform effort began as a grassroots, bottom-up initiative. What this study and my own experience show is the difficulty in sustaining that organic, bottom-up quality, especially when the reform itself is based on a top-down

corporate model. The staff had tried to create the reform in a way that was tailored to Sage Elementary instead of merely replicating what others had done. But as the school progressed on its reform journey, it was guided by what and how other schools had implemented the Seven Habits and leadership principles, as well as by the Lighthouse School criteria. The focus seemed to turn more to things such as increasing student enrollment, achieving Lighthouse status, implementing PLCs, and applying for A+ schools recognition. With these shifts, the original desire to create an improved school culture seems to have subsided. As evidenced by their responses, teachers' energy for implementing the reform, along with their morale, have decreased.

At the same time, the authenticity of the reform among students attending Sage was readily observed. As a teacher, I have had students bring up the Seven Habits within my classroom on their own accord as we are reading stories, and there are more formal ways for students to exhibit leadership skills such as at assemblies and Leadership Days, which are both new events to Sage. For the Fall Leadership Day in 2012, there were over 150 students who were active participants during the day in the form of giving speeches, guiding tours, sitting on a panel, and greeting attendees. Another almost 100 students were involved in creating centerpieces and decorations for the room as well as helping to set up the room for Leadership Day. Nearly one-half of the students at Sage were actively involved in that single event.

The evolution of a school culture is not as simple as I once believed it to be. Has the school achieved its goal if it has badges that say it has? Has the school

achieved its goal if the students are engaged in the reform? Has the school achieved its goal if the teachers are at different levels of implementation? These are questions for further contemplation at Sage and beyond.

When I first began this journey, I anticipated telling a story of great things occurring because of a teacher-initiated reform effort. While the data revealed a much more complicated process than I originally envisioned—a process full of challenges and unexpected turns of events—I nevertheless believe that the data are insightful, precisely because of the complexity they reveal. It is my hope that everyone at Sage can learn and grow from the lessons contained herein, and that the Sage case will provide other schools with valuable points to consider when embarking on school-wide reform.



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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

## RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Teresa McCarty in the Department of Social Transformation, Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to examine school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture in relation to a bottom-up educational reform effort.

I am recruiting individuals to be interviewed and observed which will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours for the audio-tapped interview and 5 to 10 hours of observation. The audio-tapes will be transcribed and erased upon the completion of the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me, Michelle Lamp, at (480) 694-4230.

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM

## CONSENT FORM I

### **AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL'S ENGAGEMENT IN A REFORM INITIATIVE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

Teresa L. McCarty, a professor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University, along with Michelle Lamp, a graduate student under Dr. McCarty's supervision, has invited your participation in a research study.

#### **STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to investigate and document the efforts of a local bottom-up educational reform effort involving the implementation of Stephen Covey's Seven Habits and leadership model at an elementary school.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of a bottom-up educational reform initiative. The project involves two interviews with eight to ten teachers and one to two school administrators. It also involves eight to ten hours of observations in four of the interviewed teacher's classrooms. Participants will be selected based upon their involvement level in the local reform initiative. Participants are able to skip questions during the interview and also have a say in when and where they are observed.

If you say YES, then your participation will last for 11 – 15 hours in your classroom. You will be asked to answer questions and approximately 8 - 12 subjects will be participating in this local study.

#### **RISKS**

There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

#### **BENEFITS**

The possible/main benefits of your participation in the research include a contribution to the research on educational reform.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Due to the nature of the study, the research team cannot guarantee complete confidentiality of your data. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Teresa L. McCarty and Michelle Lamp will code audio-tapes and observations with a number and no master list will be kept linking the participant and the number. Any identifying information will be replaced with a

pseudonym.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is ok for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw, your audiotape will be erased.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers want your decision about participating in the study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet they recognize that your participation may pose some inconvenience due to the time involved. In order to show our gratitude for your time, you may receive a small token of our appreciation in the form of a \$50 gift card.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by Teresa L. McCarty, Arizona State University, Center for Indian Education, Farmer Building 146, P.O. Box 874902, Tempe, AZ 85287-4902 (480-965-6292); Teresa.McCarty@asu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk; you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at 480-965 6788.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Subject's Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Legal Authorized Representative (if applicable)	Printed Name	Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature. These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by Arizona State University to the Office for Human Research Protections to protect the rights of human subjects. I have provided (offered) the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document."

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
CONSENT FORM II

**CONSENT FORM**  
**(RE-) AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A SCHOOL'S TRANSFORMATION**  
**THROUGH A BOTTOM-UP REFORM INITIATIVE**

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Teresa McCarty in the Applied Linguistics Program, English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to examine school leadership, teacher efficacy, and school culture in relation to a bottom-up educational reform effort.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve two interviews regarding your professional educational experience, your opinions of the Seven Habits/Leadership reform initiative, and your opinion about the school and its culture. Your time commitment for each interview will approximately be 1 to 2 hours. I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

Your participation may also involve 5-10 hours of classroom observations. These observations are intended to supplement your interview and provide additional data regarding the Leadership reform initiative. You have the right to decide *when, which occasion, and where* the researcher can observe you. You also have the right to choose not to be observed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and it will not affect you in any way. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is information that could be helpful to others in the educational setting who are wishing to engage in a local reform movement. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

In order to ensure your confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym (a number) if and when you agree to participate in the study. This pseudonym will be used throughout the data collection. In brief, your responses will be confidential. The interviews will be audio-recorded, but any proper nouns shared in the interviews will be changed to a pseudonym or generic description during the transcription; and any identifiable information will not be transcribed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known.

All project documents, records, and tapes will be maintained in a secure location in the PI's office (Farmer 144E, 146), and in a separate and secure password-protected computer database to which only the project PI and co-PIs will have access. The PI and co-PI will remain the primary individuals responsible for



ensuring the security of all project data and records. After the project ends, the data will be archived in PI's office (Farmer 144E, 146) and will be destroyed three years after the project ends.

If you have any questions concerning the study or your participation in the study, before or after consent, you can contact me at 480-694-4230 or [mmeist@kyrene.org](mailto:mmeist@kyrene.org). In the event that you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Teresa McCarty by phone at 480-965-7483 or by email at [Teresa.Mccarty@asu.edu](mailto:Teresa.Mccarty@asu.edu).

Sincerely,

Michelle Lamp

By signing below, I agree to be audio-tapped.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, at (480) 965- 4796.

*"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature. These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by Arizona State University to the Office for Human Research Protections to protect the rights of human subjects. I have provide (offered) the participant a copy of this signed consent document."*

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

### Sage Elementary Teacher & Staff Demographics

- What is your primary position this year?
- How many years have you been an educator?
- How many years have you been an educator at Sage Elementary?
- What is the highest degree you hold?
- Are you National Board Certified?
- What is your race?
- What is your age?

### Interview I Questions

1. How did you come to be at Sage Elementary?
2. I define culture as: the unwritten rules, traditions, norms, and expectations held by a group of people that shape beliefs and behavior over time. How would you describe the culture at Sage Elementary?
3. How has it changed over the years you've been here?
4. How is the school trying to reinvent itself? Describe the school's unique features and the specific things that are occurring/different.
5. Typical day at Sage? Pre vs post 7 Habits?
6. How have students changed at Sage since the implementation of the Seven Habits?
7. What kinds of teaching strategies and materials do you use? How do you see these strategies and materials being related to the 7 Habits and the school's emphasis on leadership development?
8. What is working/not working for you? What factors have been the most important in the Leadership focus success? What have been the greatest challenges or barriers?
9. Aspirations for Sage students?
10. What keeps you at this school?

### Interview II Questions

11. Which of the Seven Habits do you find the easiest to implement? The most challenging?
12. Are the Seven Habits widely used throughout the school? What incidents do you see

- that demonstrate this?
13. How do you spend time collaborating with colleagues/regarding what/how much time?
  14. Do you think the Seven Habits have had an impact on staff interactions? If so, how?
  15. What are the behaviors/activities/shared rituals at this school?
  16. What do people say (and think) when asked what the school stands for?
  17. Your perception of the focus on if or how leadership is working school wide?
  18. How do you see the role of school leadership?
  19. Do you feel supported by the school leaders? What specifically leads you to believe this? (examples of support or non-support)
  20. What would you like to see from school leadership?
  21. How do you view your role as a teacher in a school that is trying to reinvent (and improve) itself.
  22. What is your perception of school leaders' implementation of the 7 Habits?

#### Follow-up Questions

23. Do you believe that you have everything you need (skills, knowledge, ideas, materials, time, support, etc.) to implement the leadership model?
24. Is there anything that has occurred since beginning the leadership model that has made it more difficult to implement it?
25. In all my conversations with people and throughout the Lighthouse process people talked about a common language and how having this common language has been one of the things that is working well in the leadership model. During my observations and field notes though I didn't encounter a lot of common language. What do you think about this? Do you have any ideas of why this might be?

APPENDIX E  
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

An Ethnographic Study of a School's Transformation Through a  
Bottom-up Reform Initiative  
Classroom/School Observation Protocol

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contextual Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Visual Map:



Running Record

<u>Time</u>	<u>Observation</u>	<u>7 Habit / Evidence</u>	<u>Observer Comments</u>
<p>BP= Be Proactive    BEM=Begin with End in Mind    FTF=Put First Things First WW= Think Win-Win    SFU= Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood</p>			