EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL:
HOW TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES SUPPORT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

JUDITH A. LANGER

CELA RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER 12002
EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL:
HOW TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES SUPPORT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

JUDITH A. LANGER

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I would also like to thank Steven Athanases, Miles Meyers, Joellen Killion, and Pam Grossman whose comments on earlier drafts of this report helped strengthen it.

J. A. L.

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The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

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JUDITH A. LANGER

Abstract

This study examined the characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompany student achievement in writing, reading, and English. It was situated in the classrooms of 44 middle and high school teachers in four states, in 25 schools and districts that were attempting to improve students' literacy abilities. The sample includes a high representation of schools and districts serving poor and traditionally low performing students and diverse student bodies. Fourteen of the schools were places where students were "beating the odds," performing better than other students in demographically similar areas. The other 11 schools were places where administrators and teachers wanted their students to do better, but the school scores were more typical of other schools with similar demographics. A five year study of both the professional and classroom communities sought to identify characteristics in teachers' professional lives that accompanied higher student achievement. Analyses of patterns across cases indicated six features that permeated the "beating the odds" schools, yet were not present in the more "typical" schools. The more effective schools and districts nurtured a climate that 1) orchestrated coordinated efforts to improve student achievement, 2) fostered teacher participation in a variety of professional communities, 3) created structured improvement activities in ways that offered teachers a strong sense of agency, 4) valued commitment to the profession of teaching, 5) engendered a caring attitude to colleagues and students, and 6) fostered a deep respect for lifelong learning. These characteristics were pervasive across levels, in the ways central administrators as well as classroom teachers lived their professional lives as well as in the features they considered evidence of professional excellence.
INTRODUCTION

As part of the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement's (CELA) mission to learn more about students' achievement of higher literacy, I have been studying characteristics of successful English programs, programs where students are performing better than similar students in demographically comparable schools. This is a report of a five-year study focusing on characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompany student achievement in English classes and the educational practices that support such learning. English classrooms have long been considered places where literacy – the writing, reading and language skills and knowledge that are the marks of an educated person at school, on the job, and in personal life – is taught and learned. But what kinds of professional and classroom environments as well as practices lead to the development of such literacy? In this paper I address the issues of the professional environment in which teachers find themselves. The issue is an important one, particularly at a time such as this when widespread calls for change in literacy education require sound conditions for decision-making as well as enacting change. Although little addressed in the field of English there has been a growing focus on professional community within the research on policy (e.g., Fullan, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996) and also some work suggesting that the conditions that affect teachers' professional lives will in turn affect student performance (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Louis & Miles, 1990; Louis & Smith, 1992; Talbert & Perry, 1994). This study recognizes the deeply contextualized nature of both teaching and learning (Dyson, 1993; Myers, 1996; Turner, 1993), and therefore examines the contexts that shape teachers' professional lives.

The work is anchored in a sociocognitive view of learning (Langer, 1987; 1995) heavily influenced by Bakhtin (1981) and Vygotsky (1987) that contends that learning is influenced by the values, experiences, and actions of others within the larger environment, and that the ways of thinking as well as the knowledge learned are necessarily affected. Teachers as well as students are part of a larger-than-classroom context, and just as students' heteroglossic and multiple voices carry the echoes of the secondary as well as primary groups to which they belong and affect what they bring to and take from the learning experience, so too do teachers belong to a larger context. Classrooms and the teachers who shape them are part of professional and social communities that
are themselves multivocal and thus affect teachers' professional knowledge and actions. It is largely within these professional contexts that teachers' notions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and effective communication gain their meanings. It is also in these larger professional contexts that professional concerns and educational reforms are encountered, new approaches discussed, and pedagogical routines adapted. The importance of teachers' professional lives becomes particularly acute at times when schools are called upon to reform their programs, since effective reform requires a vision of the kinds of learnings that are sought and the kinds of approaches most likely to achieve them.

A number of policy studies have focused on educational reform networks (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). They indicate that although professional networks differ, by and large they can provide purpose, collaboration, commitment, and community. They also provide participants with a language to talk about their work, a group of colleagues with whom tacit knowledge can become overt, new modes of professionally shared inquiry, and a renewed sense of purpose and efficacy. However, Little (1990) reminds us that there is a persistence of privacy and non-interference within the teaching profession. Cohen (1995) charges that coherence in policy is not the same as coherence in practice, that systemic reform is not well matched with the nature of instruction, and cites the need for studies on how instructional practice is constituted or how it might be changed. Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) examine school characteristics that support the development of professional community, identify contexts in which it more readily emerges, and connect it to the responsibility teachers take for student learning. Little (1993) describes professional development in a climate of educational reform and Grossman (1990), Grossman and Stodolsky (1994), and the articles in Siskin and Little (1995) focus on subject affiliation in the reform of high schools. Combined with Little and McLaughlin's (1991) study of teacher collaboratives outside the school of employment, we see a growing body of literature identifying particular contextual features that can support professional communities and their effects on teachers.

Previous studies in English have usually focused on one or another layer of the system that affects what gets taught and learned: on the details of the classroom interaction (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979), on the contexts that shape departmental policies (Siskin, 1994; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995), or on the networks that connect teachers to the ideas in their field (Lieberman
& Grodnick, 1996). But few have focused on the aspects of the English language arts context that involve the networks within teachers' professional lives and how they affect students' opportunities to learn. The series of studies I have undertaken in my work for the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) not only describe the nature of the various communities that are implicated in the daily life of the effective English classroom, but also focus on instruction, what gets taught and how. In this paper, I will focus on professional lives. The sociocognitive framework on which the work is based (Langer, 1987; 1995; Vygotsky, 1962; 1978) implies that if students are to gain high literacy, it will be because such literacy is an integral part of the cultural ways of knowing and doing that underlie how their classrooms operate and work gets done. How this is affected by the professional lives of teachers is the focus of this paper.

THE STUDY

The study examines professional contexts in order to understand how they relate to what happens in the classroom. Of particular interest is how various images of English as a subject and of student proficiency in English are constructed within these contexts, and how these are reconciled by the teacher. The professional contexts include the work-related environments of which teachers are a part both locally and at greater distance, the institutional frame of professional opportunities and support provided by their districts, and the inter- and intra-department interactions that sustain their efforts on a daily basis. This paper will discuss features of the professional contexts that permeate the effective and more typical sites we have been studying; in addition, a series of site-specific case studies are being developed to provide in-depth views of particular teachers' professional experiences and how these in turn are related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their classrooms.
**Project sites**

We limited this study to four states, Florida, New York, California, and Texas, that include great diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. Our sample includes a high representation of schools and districts serving poorer and low performing students. To identify the sites we would eventually study, we solicited recommendations from university and school communities for schools where "special" things were happening in English teaching and learning in an attempt to increase student performance and test scores. Based on these nominations, we checked test data reported on each state's web site to identify those schools that were scoring higher than schools with similar demographics and those that were scoring more typically. We did not want to study the lone, heroic teacher, but rather sites where there had been more widespread efforts to improve learning and achievement in English. We visited all programs in these categories, and made the final selection based on the teachers' and administrators' willingness to work with us over a two year period as well as each school's ability to contribute to the overall diversity of student populations, programs, and locations in our sample.

Over time, we studied 25 programs, 44 teachers, and 88 classes in Florida, New York, California, and Texas (Table 1). Fourteen participating schools were places where students were "beating the odds." Statewide standardized test results indicated that the students were performing better than other students in demographically similar schools. The other 11 were more typical, with scores similar to other demographically comparable schools.

As can be seen in Table 1, schools with poor and diverse student populations predominate in the study. In terms of representation, the schools range from a 92% African American student body and no White students in one school, 87% Hispanic and 5% White students in another, to 97% White students in another, with the other schools populated by students of greater ethnic and racial diversity. The schools also differ in amount of student poverty, with school records indicating from 86% of the student body to 5% of the student body eligible for free or reduced lunch.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Student membership</th>
<th>% free or reduced lunch</th>
<th>Selected features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+Reuben Dario M.S.*</td>
<td>83% Hispanic, 12% African, 4% White</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>team &amp; decision making councils; reading and language arts across areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Highland Oaks M.S.*</td>
<td>47% White, 23% African, 27% Hispanic</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams; academic wheels; collaborative partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm M.S.</td>
<td>60% African, 39% Hispanic, 1% White</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>Arts Magnet; tracking; Interdisciplinary teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendricks H.S.</td>
<td>56% Hispanic, 43% African</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>International Business and Finance Magnet; Jr. ROTC; Pivot Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Edison H.S.*</td>
<td>92% African, 8% Hispanic</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>new academies; teams; writing and English in subject areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Wm. H. Turner Tech.*</td>
<td>63% African, 33% Hispanic, 4% White</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>dual academic &amp; work related academies; workplace experience; Coalition of Essential Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Hudson M.S.</td>
<td>92% White, 4% African</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams; active departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockton M.S.</td>
<td>62% White, 23% African, 14% Hispanic, 1% Asian</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams; departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+King M.S.</td>
<td>33% Hispanic, 21% African, 43% White</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams; active departments; dual language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crestwood M.S.</td>
<td>66% White, 25% African, 5% Asian, 4% Hispanic</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>interdisciplinary teams; departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+International H.S.*</td>
<td>48 countries, 37 languages</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>academic teams; internships; portfolios; exhibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Westford H.S.</td>
<td>68% White, 22% African, 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Departments; grade level teams; arts focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawasentha H.S.</td>
<td>97% White</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>curriculum teams; facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Dove M.S.</td>
<td>58% Hispanic 72% African Amer. Literacy coaching; LEARN; Health/Science Career Magnet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Charles Drew M.S.</td>
<td>55% Hispanic 57% White Literacy Coaching; Strategic Reading Program; LEARN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James A. Foshay Learning Center</td>
<td>69% Hispanic 86% Asian USC pre-college program; LEARN; New American School; Urban Learning Center; academies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Foshay Middle School</td>
<td>31% African Amer. Humanities program; teams; Math/Science Magnet; service learning; LEARN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Foshay High School</td>
<td>86% Hispanic 74% Asian Foreign Language/International Studies Magnet; UCLA; LEARN; Collaborative; Career Ed Component; Bilingual Business/Finance Academy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutherford Hayes H.S.</td>
<td>83% African Amer. 67% English Dept.; reading &amp; language arts (double dose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Springfield H.S.</td>
<td>63% Hispanic 26% White Foreign Language/International Studies Magnet; UCLA; LEARN; Collaborative; Career Ed Component; Bilingual Business/Finance Academy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Parklane M.S.</td>
<td>47% Hispanic 46% Active English Dept.; reading &amp; language arts (double dose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby M.S.</td>
<td>83% African Amer. 67% English Dept.; reading &amp; language arts (double dose); Language arts Consortium with Lincoln H.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+John H. Kirby M.S.</td>
<td>42% White 32% Annenberg Beacon Charter School; Vanguard Magnet; Pre-Int'l Baccalaureate pgm.; school-based ctr. for teacher development; special pgm. for low-motivated students; reading &amp; language arts (double dose) for 6th grade; interdisciplinary teams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Lincoln High School</td>
<td>78% African Amer. 41% Active English department; Aviation Sciences Magnet; Navy ROTC; language arts consortium with Ruby M.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Lyndon B. Johnson H.S.</td>
<td>53% Hispanic 37% Research &amp; Technology Magnet; Inf'l Baccalaureate pgm.; ROTC; departments; grade level teams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Rayburn H.S.</td>
<td>87% Hispanic 58% Computer Technology Magnet; Extensive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% African Amer. 5% White 1% Asian voc. ed. pgm.; ROTC; double English in Grades 9 &amp; 10; departments; Annenberg Challenge Reform Initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Denotes schools whose scores on state assessments were above those of demographically comparable schools.

* Denotes participants’ preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.
Participants

In each of the schools, we worked collaboratively with two teachers, their students, and their various teaching and administrative colleagues. The teachers with whom we worked were recommended by district administrators as particularly successful and also willing to collaborate with us. Due to the nature of the research, we also interacted with the other professionals with whom these teachers co-planned, co-taught, or otherwise interacted professionally, both in school and out. We also selected six student volunteers in each classroom, collecting their work and discussing their classroom activities, engagement, and learning. The students were chosen to represent the range of performance within the class as perceived by the teacher.

The study design allowed us to examine the teachers within the context of their teams, department, and district. Across time we became aware that these teachers fell into three distinct groups: 1) exemplary teachers whose work was sustained by a supportive district or school context; 2) exemplary teachers in more typical schools who achieved their success in spite of inconsistent support at either the school or district level; and 3) teachers who were more typical, who were dedicated to their students but working within a system that did not lift them beyond the accomplishments of other comparable schools. The first category of teachers, beating the odds teachers within beating the odds schools, were not unusual in their work settings; that is, their school and/or district (often both) encouraged all teachers to become involved as professionals and our observations of meetings and working groups suggested that the teachers and administrators worked collegially toward professional growth and improved practice. The second category of teachers, beating the odds in more typical schools, were atypical in their schools. Thus, while their students may have scored higher than those in other classes, there was no consistent support to sustain student achievement beyond their individual classrooms. Like the excellent teachers in the typical schools the third category of teachers, typical teachers in typical schools, worked in departments and schools that lacked collegial interaction about professional issues. Unlike the excellent teachers in the typical schools, these teachers engaged in few out-of-school experiences to stimulate professional growth. Table 2 provides a quick summary of the schools and teachers in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben Dario Middle School*</td>
<td>Karis MacDonnell</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gail Slatko</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Oaks Middle School*</td>
<td>Rita Gold</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susan Gropper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Middle School</td>
<td>Nessa Jones</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendricks High School</td>
<td>Elba Rosales</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carol McGuiness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Edison High School*</td>
<td>Shawn DeNight</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kathy Humphrey</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School*</td>
<td>Chris Kirchner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Janas Masztal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry O. Hudson Middle School</td>
<td>Cathy Starr</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gloria Rosso</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockton Middle School</td>
<td>Helen Ross</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham S. King Middle School</td>
<td>Pedro Mendez</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donald Silvers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crestwood Middle School</td>
<td>Monica Matthews</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International High School*</td>
<td>Marsha Slater</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aaron Listhaus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Westford High School</td>
<td>Elaine Dinardi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack Foley</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawasentha High School</td>
<td>Margaret Weiss</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicole Scott</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Dove Middle School</td>
<td>Jonathan Luther</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evangeline Turner</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Drew Middle School</td>
<td>Alicia Alliston</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tawanda Richardson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James A. Foshay Learning Center Middle School*</td>
<td>Kathryn McFadden-Midby</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James A. Foshay Learning Center High School*</td>
<td>Myra LeBendig</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutherford B. Hayes High School*</td>
<td>Ron Soja</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield High School</td>
<td>Celeste Rotondi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suzanna Matton</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Project Schools and Key Teachers (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parklane Middle School</td>
<td>Rachel Kahn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amy Julien</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby Middle School</td>
<td>Shaney Young</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erica Walker</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. Kirby Middle School</td>
<td>Cynthia Spencer-Bell</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matt Caldwell</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln High School</td>
<td>Viola Collins</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vanessa Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyndon B. Johnson High School</td>
<td>Thelma Moore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nora Shepherd</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Rayburn High School</td>
<td>Carol Lussier</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jo Beth Chapin</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Denotes beating the odds teacher in beating the odds school.
2 Denotes beating the odds teacher in typically performing school.
3 Denotes typical teacher in typically performing school.

* Denotes participants’ preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

** We studied both the middle and high school programs at Foshay Learning Center.

Design

A nested case design was used, with the professional community (the people with whom the teachers shared and gained professional ideas and knowledge, both within and apart from their workplace, both close to home and afar) as a case, the teachers as cases within a case, and the classes, including the student-informants, as cases embedded within. For analysis, this design permitted us to shift lenses among the three contexts as ideas for instructional and programmatic change were considered, discussed, and enacted. One field researcher worked with each program, following the key teachers' professional contacts and experiences as well as classroom activities and interactions. The field researchers, Paola Bonissone, Carla Confer, Gladys Cruz, Ester Helmar-Salasoo, Sally Kahr, Tanya Manning, Steven Ostrowski, and Eija Rougle (all trained English language arts teachers), each studied one or two programs for two years; hence we were able to follow the teachers' professional and classroom lives over time, with two sets of students.
The sample reported in this paper involved two years each with 44 teachers working in 25 schools, including approximately 2640 students and 528 student informants. The student informants discussed classroom activities and expectations from their perspectives and maintained portfolios of their work to discuss and share with us. One site researcher worked closely with central office staff to develop an understanding of their roles in the professional lives of the teachers, from the central office perspective.

**Procedures**

Our data-gathering occurred simultaneously in both the professional and school communities, permitting constant comparison among perceptions, plans, and actions from the participants' and observers' perspectives. We kept in touch with relevant district and school administrators, including principals and language arts coordinators, to learn about their goals, special emphases, and views of English language arts, as well as their concerns and plans related to national and state issues. We "shadowed" the teachers' professional interactions and experiences via telephone, e-mail or in person whenever possible, collected all relevant materials, and interacted with the teacher and relevant others about their perceptions of these experiences and their relevance to the teaching situation. We also tracked the various perceptions of and experiences with state and national reform efforts – where these experiences originated as well as their substance and nature, and the teachers' responses to them.

Each field researcher worked closely with each teacher, attempting to understand the kinds of professional communities in which the teacher interacts (print, non-print, in person) and gains ideas, and how these affect the teacher's and students' in-class experiences. Beginning with a lengthy interview/discussion about concerns, goals, and plans for change, we carried on a collaborative dialogue with each teacher to understand the relevant professional networks and how they influence the teacher's knowledge and decisions, and the ways in which these get translated into the teacher's plans, class activities, students' participation, and assessment of learning.
Each field researcher spent approximately five weeks on-site per year, including a week at the beginning of each semester to interview district personnel about their plans and reflections, interview the new student volunteers, gather information about the teacher's professional and classroom plans and goals, and to make plans for data gathering for the year. This was followed by two weeks a semester to observe classes and professional interactions (i.e., department and team meetings, professional conferences, book clubs). In addition, each site researcher was in weekly contact with their collaborating teachers for on-line reports of plans, activities, and discussions of professional experiences and reflections as well as of student work. Portfolios were maintained, and samples of student work from distant sites faxed to the site researcher for discussion during the research team's weekly discussions.

**Data**

Data consist of field notes, audiotapes, e-mail messages, and artifacts including portfolios and in-process journals kept by all participants, as well as in-process case reports. The team focused on the multi-vocal constituents of both the teachers' professional world and the students' class experiences, as these relate to instructional interactions and students' learning.

**Data Analysis**

The data were initially coded for focus on type of community: professional, classroom, and social as well as for a focus on instruction, curriculum, and assessment. This scheme served as an indexing system that allowed us to later retrieve and more carefully analyze data from one subsection of the data pool and compare it with another, and to generate data-driven sub-categories used for later study. One level of data analysis was ongoing, focusing primarily on professional networks and instructional approaches, the knowledge sources that inform these approaches, the activities and interactions in which they were carried out, and the learning to which they led. These analyses involved a continual cycle of testing, revising, and refining by returning to the data as well as to the teachers themselves for confirming or disconfirming
evidence. These ongoing analyses were augmented by other analyses at the end of each year to characterize the instructional activities and interactions that support the students' learning. The various data sets were keyed to each individual teacher and classroom, providing multiple views of each particular instructional context and permitting both in-depth case studies and cross-case principles to be developed. In each case, we have triangulated the data, drawing on various aspects of the professional and classroom communities for evidence.

**SELECTED CASE STUDIES**

Results will be illustrated with examples from 8 of the 25 sites, to give a sense of how the various features of successful programs relate to one another, while keeping this report to a manageable length. Six of the cases presented in detail were places where students were "beating the odds;" one was a more typically performing school in the midst of major reform, with a core of excellent teachers; and the eighth school was a more typical school that was just beginning to make substantial reforms.

**Florida**

Four of the schools that will be discussed in more detail in this report are in Miami-Dade County, the fourth largest school district in the country. It serves the highest proportion of minority and free lunch students in the state and faces the host of problems shared by most urban inner-city areas. Non-native English speakers represent a total of 116 languages, with speakers of Spanish and of Haitian Creole the largest groups. Nevertheless, the district expects high student achievement and grade-appropriate instruction in each classroom throughout the district. The county-wide English language arts and reading specialists are an unusually cohesive group who keep up with the latest research and reform efforts in their field, continually sharpen their own theoretical grounding, and always rely on teams of teachers in the district to explore, recommend,
and grow with them to enact change. Each year, despite hard-earned achievement gains, they set new goals, continually striving for even higher successes.

**Ruben Dario Middle School** is in an area reported to be one of the poorest in the city, and gang-related incidents appear to be on the rise. It was opened in 1989 and was chartered as a Title I school three years ago. The school serves a poor and linguistically diverse population of 2083 students of whom approximately 14.5% are categorized as Limited English Proficient. The school's poverty rate is 1 1/2 times greater than the statewide average, its minority rate is three times greater, and its percent of English Language Learners is 15 times greater. Its absentee rate is below the state average and it operates at approximately 119% capacity. It is known as a safe school, a haven. Ruben Dario has a diverse full time staff: 51% Hispanic, 23% Black non-Hispanic, and 21% White non-Hispanic. Students' scores on the annual Florida Writes! exam have steadily improved; in 1997, 86% of its students performed above the statewide standard. (Florida's standard for grade 8 requires at least 50% of students to score 3 or higher on a scale of 0 to 6.)

The school's mission is to join with parents and representatives of the community to generate excellent students in a productive learning environment. Students are extremely well-behaved and the school is well-equipped with books and technology. In addition to a range of after school extra-curricular programs, morning and afternoon tutorials are offered to students who wish to participate. Reading has become a focus not only in language arts, but across the curriculum. For example, once a week, there is a school-wide reading period during which everyone, teachers and students alike, stop what they are doing to read for 20 minutes. The reading/language arts teachers meet with other faculty to discuss and model new instructional approaches and materials. Teachers and administrators maintain good interaction with the families who are said to "respect teachers, want their children to behave well in school, and to learn."

The major organizational structure is interdisciplinary teams, small clusters of teachers (representing the major subject areas) and students. Team meetings focus on students' joint needs and problems. A department structure maintains disciplinary focus; the teachers meet weekly to exchange ideas and discuss issues in their fields. High student achievement and grade appropriate instruction are expected in each classroom, and achieving this goal is a responsibility shared by all. Teachers and department heads meet in either a Teacher Ambassador Council or a Curriculum
Ambassador Council. Here, new ideas are developed and decision-making is shared. Teachers' ongoing professional development is a priority and funds for conferences, professional trips, and in-service are readily available. Collaboration and professional commitment are high. There are some 30 extra-curricular clubs at Ruben Dario, each with a teacher sponsor. "Rules" of good behavior and fairness are important, and supported by all. Academic success is the central focus.

**Highland Oaks Middle School** is located in an area that is more middle class than those of the other schools we studied in Dade County. However, the area is undergoing rapid change, and the makeup of Highland Oaks' student body is shifting quickly. Of the full time staff, 28% are African American, and 13% Hispanic. With a 1732 student enrollment, Highland Oaks presently operates at 128% capacity. Teachers and administrators are working extremely hard to maintain student achievement, even as the student body changes. Their effort is paying off. The students have scored above the state standard on the Florida Writes! exam, with 86% as opposed to the 50% standard, scoring 3 or higher.

The school's mission is "to cultivate well-rounded citizens . . . for our multi-cultural and changing world." The school is divided into interdisciplinary teams as well as departments. The teams meet four days a week and focus on students' academic and social well being, school morale, and discipline. The departments meet every Friday to focus on curriculum and instruction within their disciplines. As students move through the grades, they have opportunities to specialize in areas of interest, such as a vocation or the arts.

Highland Oaks provides many opportunities for faculty decision-making and collaboration. For example, for the past several years, the faculty has been selecting and working toward actualizing the Coalition for Essential Schools principles (Sizer, 1992). Administrators and teachers work side by side as team partners to achieve their goal. Team discussions and professional workshops that focus on writing and reading ensure the sharing of ideas that are then worked through by teams or departments. Parent and community connections are also strong. The active PTA meets weekly, in the morning and also in the evening. Highland Oaks also has "public partners" and is part of the marketing council of local businesses. School-community cooperation is high.

**Miami Edison Senior High School** houses 2430 students (116% capacity) in a congested urban location, sided by a four-lane road with heavy traffic. It is known for its transient population; newcomers, primarily of Haitian or Jamaican origin, stay until they have enough money...
to move out. We were told that weapons are a greater problem than drugs in this school. Twenty five percent of the student body has been designated as Limited English Proficient. The school has a large, culturally diverse teaching staff. In recent years, it has made a sizable effort to improve student achievement, and during the time of our study was making plans to reorganize into an academy structure.

At the time of our study, Edison saw its general mission as providing students with alternatives for success; however, these efforts were fragmented, offering little coherence at the school level. Although the teachers with whom we worked had developed a number of collegial relationships and were generally supported in their projects by the administration, they remained exceptional within the school. They worked closely on a variety of projects with the district English language arts supervisors as well colleagues from the other schools and found this a profound source of professional nourishment. The English department offered a multi-tiered curriculum for students (including language, composition, and literature courses and a Pacesetter program). A semantics course that focused on language use, structure, and understanding was offered as an elective, and had generated sufficient interest from teachers in other disciplines that biweekly lunchtime seminars were offered to colleagues. A Saturday Lab School had also been instituted to help students hone English and study skills and prepare for exams. Of the exceptional teachers we studied, we were told, "they use strategies we know work and they keep students at the center of learning."

Edison offers after-school options, including a community adult and night school, a 500 Role Models Program, and such community events as Haitian Night and Back to School Parents' Night. Although Edison had been identified by the district as low-performing, there has been a large scale effort to change this.

**Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School** is a specialized/alternative school of choice with a student population of approximately 2119. Approximately 6% of the students have been designated as English Language Learners. The school offers a combined academic and vocational program, with both high caliber academic education and hands on technical training and apprenticeships. The school is divided into seven academies, among which all teachers and students are divided: Agri-science, Applied Business Technology, Finance, Health, Industrial Technology, Public Service/Television Production, and Residential Construction. Students select a
career academy upon entering the school. Each academy accepts the range of students who further develop their skills and abilities while preparing themselves for college and/or the job market. Within each academy, teachers work in cross-disciplinary teams to develop integrated thematic units that apply "core learning competencies in their respective academic disciplines within the context of the students' selected career major." The teams meet several times a semester for 2-3 hours each, and department meetings are held three times a year to permit an opportunity for teachers to maintain connections within their disciplines. Nearly half the teachers also meet in critical friends groups to share plans and to discuss ways to improve student work fundamental to their pioneering efforts. Students can gain certification in one or more state-approved technical skill or vocation within or across academies. In addition, all Turner Tech students participate in hands on experiences both in the workplace and at school. The school has developed many rich partnerships with local businesses, who have come to play active roles in students' education. In their junior and senior years, students can participate in on-the-job internships.

In 1997, 90% of the students scored 3 or higher on the Florida Writes! exam, with an average score of 3.6. Not only do more of Turner Tech's students continue to surpass state standards, but they are closing the gap with the more middle class schools in the state. In 1997, for example, 78% of the graduating class went on to some form of higher education.

New York

The other four programs that will be discussed in more detail in the present report are drawn partly from New York City and partly from other parts of the state, to illustrate a range of successful programs both within and outside of densely populated major metropolitan regions.

Henry O. Hudson Middle School is in the middle class suburban area of Schoonhavn. It serves approximately 1250 students. Students consistently score above the state's norm, although the district's per pupil expenditure is below the state norm. On the state test of English reading effectiveness, 97% of the students scored above the state minimum standard, in comparison to 82% statewide. Among the school's goals are the development of academic growth, personal growth, and social skills, with a strong emphasis on issues of diversity. Because school faculty are
involved at all levels of planning, decision-making, and change within the district, the teachers are sought out for collaborations and special initiatives by the state education department and by state and national professional associations.

The school is divided into three houses, both physically and organizationally. Each house is divided into interdisciplinary grade-level teams who share expertise; however, instruction itself is most often subject-specific, with team teaching occurring only in specially planned instances. Team meetings are held on a daily basis and focus more on student support than on curriculum. Disciplinary planning, sharing of ideas, and coordination is frequent. In addition to interdisciplinary teams and departments, teachers meet weekly in grade level clusters. Collegial sharing both in and out of school is constant.

Community involvement is an integral part of the district's policy: Hudson has a Strive for Success evening tutorial program where parents and children work together, and parent volunteers are encouraged to participate during the school day. Students are given opportunities to volunteer in the community, including helping in nursing homes and the community center, assisting with reading programs at the library, and working in the town's parks and recreational programs. Parents are involved in many curricular as well as extra-curricular committees. For example, a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators revised the "Language Arts Expectations" document which discusses and specifies a framework for performance.

Abraham S. King Middle School is located on the outskirts of New York City. The multi-cultural neighborhood is quiet and relatively secure. The school defines its mission as providing "education of excellence" to all students and was recently named a Blue Ribbon School because of its collaborative initiative in helping students reach high standards. Despite high levels of poverty and student diversity, 89% of the middle grade students scored above the state reference point in English language arts/reading in comparison to 82% statewide.

The district has earned a reputation for grant-getting innovations and instructional efforts that support students' academic performance. English as a second language classes and other programs for adults are offered after school hours, and all programs include parent components. The school recently received a special grant from the state to plan, and then implement, a voluntary two-way bilingual program in which monolingual English speaking students learn and receive increasingly more course work in Spanish, and Spanish speaking students learn and have increasingly more
course work in English. The teachers in this program meet often, not only to coordinate curriculum efforts, but to translate all course material into both languages when such two-way translations are not available. Because the content in both languages is the same, the students also have opportunities to work with each other as classmates and collaborators. At King, we studied this two-way bilingual program.

Throughout the school, the teachers and students are divided into interdisciplinary clusters; those in the two-way bilingual program are further grouped as English or Spanish dominant students. The usual school curriculum is followed, and exposure to the new language develops from 10% exposure for 6th graders, at the beginning of the program, to a target of 50% by grade eight. At King, all teachers are required to teach reading. Teachers within each cluster have daily opportunity to interact with one another to discuss and plan curriculum, assessment, and instruction. There are monthly department meetings as well. Professional development is valued, and a variety of support incentives are offered for teachers to participate both within and outside the district.

**International High School** is a highly innovative, studied (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Flak, 1995) and reported (e.g., *New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Annenberg Challenge Journal*, National Public Radio, NBC News) high school designed to turn recent teenage newcomers to the United States into academically successful graduates. A small, alternative school (approximately 450 students) within the New York City school system, it uses some rooms in the basement of LaGuardia Community College.

The school's mission is to enable its students to "develop the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural skills necessary for success in high school, college, and beyond." To enroll, students must have been in the country less than four years and have scored below the 21st percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. It is open to students from across New York City. It is truly an international school, with 48 countries and 37 languages represented. The school is known for its remarkable achievement record; throughout its history more than 90% of its students have gone on to college. The school is linked to many educational projects with high aspirations for students.

International offers a restructured program for the students and a highly collegial environment for its teachers. Its statement of educational philosophy includes the beliefs that: limited English proficient students require the ability to understand, speak, and write English with near-native
fluency to realize their full potential in an English-speaking society; that fluency in a language other than English must be viewed as a resource for the student, school, and the society, and that language skills are most effectively learned in context and when embedded within a content area.

Students receive a complete high school curriculum that is taught using a content-based English as a second language approach. In addition to their course work, students are required to complete two career education internships in the workplace. They also have an opportunity to attend classes at the community college, and between 200 and 300 students a year take at least one college class. The school is divided into six interdisciplinary clusters of five teachers and approximately 72 students. These teachers collaboratively develop integrated curriculum related to large and unifying themes that cut across curriculum areas, such as "Motion." Faculty teams develop curriculum, projects for assessment, and student schedules; faculty collaboration is at the heart of the program. The teams have two scheduled meetings weekly, one for one hour, the second for 22 hours. Faculty also serve on a coordinating council and steering committee. Conferences between students and teachers are frequent. Parents and students are also active in the day to day working of the school, both as translators and aides.

**Tawasentha High School** is on the outskirts of a small, poor city that lost business, industry, and jobs throughout the latter part of this century. The district had been quite traditional, with few organizational or pedagogical changes until recent years, when a new superintendent of schools was hired who charged herself with enacting widespread systemic change. From the beginning, she encouraged professional development efforts and has empowered teachers to explore and develop new approaches, such as student centered and activity based learning and standards-based instruction.

With an initial focus on elementary grade achievement, the new superintendent formed liaisons with university-based faculty and projects, invited "facilitators" into the district, and encouraged teachers to participate in the range of activities available in their professional communities. She also increased parent involvement. These efforts paid off, with consistent and steady growth in reading and writing scores in all standardized tests at the elementary levels. But substantive change had not yet taken place at the high school level.

Tawasentha was built in the 1960s and houses approximately 900 students. Two recent school bonds enabled updating of facilities and technology. To help raise the community's involvement in
its schools, and to foster higher aspirations for its youngsters, a number of projects were instituted to foster school-community ties and engage parents as partners in educational improvement.

English department meetings, which had taken place infrequently, began to be held monthly when a local university colleague started to meet with the teachers for professional discussions. District workshops were organized, with particular emphasis on raising expectations and increasing student performance, focus on cooperative learning and standards-based instruction. The teaching staff is highly experienced, and had developed set patterns of interacting with their colleagues and teaching their students that we saw beginning to change over the two-year period. Student attendance and post high school goals began to change as well.

Features of Excellence

Although some of the effective schools had joined partnerships advocating whole-school change while others focused more on changes in English and literacy in the disciplines or on literacy as interdisciplinary practice, patterns in the teachers' professional lives were similar to each other and distinctly different from those of most of their counterparts in the more typical schools. Analyzing these patterns across cases, six features emerged in the professional lives of the teachers in the effective schools we studied that contribute to students' success. The schools and districts nurtured a climate that: 1) orchestrated coordinated efforts to improve student achievement, 2) fostered teacher participation in a variety of professional communities, 3) created structured improvement activities in ways that offered teachers a strong sense of agency, 4) valued commitment to the profession of teaching, 5) engendered a caring attitude that extended to colleagues and students, and 6) fostered a deep respect for life long learning. In the excellent programs, these characteristics were pervasive across levels, in the ways central administrators as well as classroom teachers live their lives and in the features they consider evidence of professional excellence. Essential characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompanied student learning and achievement in English will be discussed in the sections that follow. Langer (1999) reports on features of excellent practice in these teachers' classrooms.
1. Coordinating Efforts to Improve Achievement. Each of the English programs where students were beating the odds was marked by a highly organized, connected, and overt effort to increase student performance. Although the organizational hierarchies differed from locality to locality, there was always a coordinated effort by teachers and administrators to identify needs, investigate and then develop strategies for improvement, and set into motion a variety of ways to help teachers gain the knowledge to effectively incorporate the new practices into their daily routines.

Resources for professional development were made available to teachers in a number of ways, including the hiring of consultants and speakers to discuss and interact about the specific issues of concern, sharing pertinent professional material, and encouraging teachers to attend professional events and identify ideas that seemed promising for the district's or school's concerns. The ideas were shared and debated, leading to a targeted local plan for instruction that would be orchestrated across grades and over time. Thus, during our two years of observation, it was quite clear that the teachers in Miami-Dade County were working on particular targeted reading and writing competencies, and that these foci reverberated across classrooms and grades. Their consistent focus was on student achievement. Their coordinated efforts ensured the coherence between policy and instruction that Cohen (1995) calls for. For example, in the classes we visited, the first five to ten minutes of each class day was devoted to activities that focused on key areas of concern including the structure and uses of English (e.g., grammar, metaphor, affixes). Writing activities, for a wide range of purposes, were interwoven into the ongoing activities of every classroom, and reciprocal teaching as well as critical thinking activities were common. Each of the skills and strategies being taught and practiced had been carefully developed by the teachers and English language arts central office staff. This occurred in response to statewide achievement test results. Whenever test results arrive both teachers and central staff review the results and use these to reflect on their own practices. As will be discussed in a later section, they also stay abreast of issues and ideas in the field, and are aware of the latest as well as tried and true teaching approaches that are highly regarded for getting particular results. When deciding upon new instructional foci, they seek out the experts to learn from so that they can start shaping change in ways they believe will be most appropriate for the Dade County students. Each year they expect to make some changes – sometimes adjustments, sometimes more major shifts in curricular goals and instructional approaches.
Even as performance increases, they set higher goals. The Dade County Comprehensive Reading Plan is a good example. After a multi-year focus on writing with an aim of improving performance on the Florida Writes! exam (including a plethora of workshops, discussion groups, and the development of model "practice books" for teachers full of test goals and sample items, teaching models and ideas as well as frameworks and hints), and concomitant rise in scores on that exam, the district began to see the need for a comparable re-focusing on reading. Hence a professional effort was undertaken to learn about recent ideas for improving achievement in reading, followed by careful development of the curriculum by a partnership of teachers and supervisors, and the eventual hiring of 18 reading specialists (key teachers from district schools) to help implement the new plan. An effort was made to augment and improve the English curriculum while maintaining consistency with its constructivist and literature-rich orientations. As Norma Bossard, the district’s Director of English Language Arts, said, "A good teacher knows that all the teaching you do has to be wrapped up in a whole cloth, so that it is a whole child, the whole day." Among the newer teaching components was a focus on reciprocal teaching, CRISS (Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies), and the America Reads tutorial program. After their own training period, when they were immersed in the plan and its new instructional components, state and district standards, benchmarks, and assessment tools, the reading specialists began to support teachers in incorporating these foci into their classrooms through workshops, model teaching, and other face-to-face interactions.

Focal skills, knowledge, and activities reverberated within and across classrooms, desired outcomes were made overt, and teachers as well as students received the support they needed to succeed. The comprehensive plan includes some specifically planned opportunities to learn. Here are some that Norma Bossard, the Director of English Language arts, described in an address at a Miami Literary Celebration:

What's in it for the students for whom this plan was designed? . . . In the days of your parents and my parents, when one dropped out of school for whatever reason, it was an economy that could absorb them. They could earn a living by the sweat of their brow, with their hands, and with the strength of their backs. Now the muscle one must use is located between the two ears. So we must educate children from the neck up. . . . And so we have written a plan we hope will take into account all of the opportunities to learn to read that our students deserve. . . . The opportunity to have the time it takes to learn to read well . . .
Included in her description of opportunities afforded by the plan are: 2 hours of reading instruction daily, 30 minutes of free reading at school and another 30 minutes recommended at home; opportunity across subjects, including a content area focus (and training) on reading, an opportunity for feedback, through benchmarks and assessment; and, among other components, an opportunity for knowledgeable teachers through extended staff development.

The plan is inclusive, reaching into the community. One section of the Comprehensive Reading Plan Document is titled "Roles and Responsibilities." Here, the roles and responsibilities of parents/guardians, technical and administrative staff (including the 18 newly created Language Arts/Reading Specialist positions) are described. Also included are collaborative efforts with "universities and community agencies, including tutoring programs to train parents in the use of reading strategies with their children and tutoring services in before- and after-school care programs offered in the schools or by various organizations" (1998, p. 73). The effort is coordinated, consistent, and connected across the living day.

We found that the successful programs in Hudson and King Middle Schools and International High School followed similarly well-coordinated efforts. At Hudson, for instance, Hope Anderson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum said, "We have worked very hard to develop a set of goals. . . . It's not my goals so much as what we can develop and agree to as a team. That doesn't mean I don't have any. What it means is that my ideas become stronger as I hear others think. So we really begin to say what we mean as we question one another. . . ."

In the more typical schools in our sample, however, this was not the case. In the typical schools, individual teachers and/or groups made isolated decisions based on a range of factors at their disposal. Mechanisms that encourage coordination across classes and grades lack support or were absent. During our first year at Tawasentha, for example, we found that individual teachers might be instituting changes on their own, as Margaret Weiss did when incorporating rich writing and thinking activities into her classroom that she had learned from the summer workshops she had taken. However, these changes, although extremely well intended and executed, were not in response to a larger program-wide perceived need, and so stopped at her classroom door. The instructional foci and the skills and knowledge the students were expected to learn differed dramatically in the two English classes we studied at Tawasentha, where no coordinated effort to
plan, develop, or review curriculum or instruction was in place at either the district or school level. Nor, during the first year of our study, did the English teachers at Tawasentha collaborate or coordinate their instructional efforts or interact about the improvement of instruction or achievement.

2. **Fostering Teacher Participation in Professional Communities.** Another important characteristic of the successful English programs was the extent to which participants were members of a number of communities that sustained them in their efforts. Louis, Marks, and Kruse's (1996) study of within-school communities and Little and McLaughlin's (1991) study of math collaboratives emphasize the importance of professional community not only on the personal and intellectual lives of teachers but also on students. Our study, focusing on the range of professional communities teachers experience, permitted us to follow the variety of professional communities that nourished teachers across our study. We saw administrative and teaching colleagues invite each other into a range of communities at the school, district, and state levels, and participating in them is part of the social milieu.

All the teachers we studied in the successful programs are members of several ongoing professional communities (e.g., teams and support groups, curriculum development groups, local reading groups, English and reading association affiliates, university-school collaborations) that give them ideas and nourish them in their daily efforts as well as in their grand plans. They also have personal networks that feed into their professional knowledge and interests, and provide feedback from a range of perspectives. These networks exist in many different arenas, including national, professional, state, university, local, district, and school (departments and/or teams), and are collegial as well as social. Individual teachers participated in different communities, but whichever they chose, these communities gave them people with whom they could plan and work through problems. The teachers in the excellent programs do not feel they are alone; there is always someone nearby to dream with and commiserate with, and they pass on this sense of community to their students.

Community is the common thread, but what those communities are and how the teachers interact within them differs. There is no one predominant set of networks that seem to pervade these excellent situations; rather it is the teachers' opportunity to select among a variety of
networks to find the ones that work best for them that seems to make the difference. For example, in some cases cross disciplinary teams have taken the lead as the major on-site collegial networks, but where they have, disciplinary networks are almost always also sought out to offer grounding in curriculum and achievement.

At Hudson Middle School, for example, cross disciplinary teams meet daily. They focus in depth on students' well-being and academic progress and also sometimes develop collaborative efforts across subject areas. In addition, all language arts teachers at each grade level meet on a scheduled weekly basis. However, the English teachers sometimes also meet before school, "to plan and to connect." "It's a gift," says Cathy Starr. It is obvious that team planning time was built into Hudson's school schedule, as it was in all the more successful schools. However, the frequency of these scheduled times differed from school to school from once a week to daily.

The exemplary teachers we studied at Edison made similar connections. After seeing a particularly interesting lesson in a colleague's class and asking her about the idea, Kathy Humphrey explained, "I combined what I learned in a pilot program with what a colleague taught me about reading strategies. I've had a positive experience with my colleagues. And I get lots of support from [administration]. I need a group of English teachers to work with."

At International, the faculty work in "big idea" interdisciplinary teams that create curriculum, arrange schedules for students and teachers, and determine procedures for assessing student performance. Thus the teachers interact on a daily basis, with many opportunities to reflect on their own practice, students' progress, and new ideas. Aaron Listhaus says that the many student teachers and interns who work with them are one of the important ways in which new ideas become points of conversation for the entire team. Overall, the "incredible amount of professional community . . . is . . . built into the school-wide system." When Marsha Slater became concerned that the team needed to focus more heavily on the students' literacy development, she brought it to the group. Although it took many months of discussion, a plan was worked out. In addition to their self-selected teaching teams, all the teachers at International belong to peer evaluation teams where, periodically in their careers, they review and are reviewed by each other. The teachers themselves maintain portfolios with self- and peer-evaluations, reflections, goals, and progress.

The teachers in the effective programs we studied also belong to professional organizations and read professional journals. Each is active in one or more of the organizations to which they
belong, attending conferences, and also presenting. They usually go to the conferences with colleagues they know, and they meet others there. An integral part of their conference life involves discussing concerns facing the field, new ideas, and approaches in curriculum, instruction or assessment in which they are interested. For instance, Gloria Rosso and Cathy Starr attended a recent conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, as did their department chair and the just-retired high school department chair. They not only met with us about the project, but also attended many sessions, some alone and some together. Both at the conference and after they returned home, they discussed the ideas they found interesting and relevant to their own situation. Each of these people is also active at the state and local levels, where once again they not only organize and present, but use the time to gather ideas to carry back for professional exchange within their districts and schools.

In addition to these more formal networks, there are also a variety of informal ones. Every one of the teachers in the effective programs has at least one colleague at school, or someone who taught elsewhere, or an interested significant other with whom to share joys, agonies, and ideas that affect instructional plans, decisions, and actions. Each has contact with individuals who make a difference in the ways they think about their subject, their students, and themselves as professionals. Through these interactions they confront philosophical as well as more superficial differences, learn from and challenge each other, and develop their own voices. In contrast, Margaret Weiss at Tawasentha, who wanted to keep up with knowledge in the field and support her students writing and high literacy development, had spent some summers taking intensive workshops. She said she loved them, but complained that although she used many ideas in her own classes, she had no professional sustenance during the year; she shared her ideas with no one, within the school or elsewhere. She did not develop new friendships with her summer colleagues; she had no sense of community within or outside the school despite the fact that district and school money was available for professional visits and ventures, and the superintendent, Jane Hatfield, was supportive of change.

Teachers in the effective programs often are also nurtured through informal professional relationships. Rita Gold and Susan Gropper at Highland Oaks each says the other is her most important colleague. Not only are they members of the same faculty, but they hold theoretical views in common. Louis, Marks and Krause (1996) suggest that shared norms and values are
important elements of a school-wide professional community. Rita and Susan have grown together as professionals, with each other as well as along with the Dade County English language arts faculty. They collaborate on projects and plan and develop materials for lessons they teach separately. About their relationship, Rita Gold said,

I knew Susan [Gropper] before I transferred [to Highland Oaks]. . . . I think we're both on the same wave length. There's time for creativity, but the basics must be included. When we work on a unit together, like the literature circles, we bounce off one another. . . . We work better together than on our own. . . . When I moved to 9th grade, Susan shared everything she had with me. . . . We're friends outside of school and have been for many years. She's on my list of top ten teachers I'd love my nephews to have as a teacher. . . . I feel the same way about her as about the people uptown (county-wide English language arts staff).

Susan Gropper says, "[Rita's] creativity and outgoing personality are a perfect match to my more left-brained approach. Together we created units that still prompt a smile. . . . Just talking to each other always generates ideas or concerns that delight and surprise us." We saw no comparable professional relationships among the teachers we studied at Tawasentha; they planned and worked alone.

The administrators, too, feel the necessity for participating in communities and see their importance in ongoing professional growth. Marina Garcia was the principal of King Middle School during the first year and a half of our study, later promoted to district-wide Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. While at King, she had been a highly collaborative principal, having organized a variety of formal and informal teams, committees, and lunchtime working groups. She and Vera Coleman, the Superintendent of Schools, had co-written the proposal for state funds to create the two-way bilingual program, and brought groups of colleagues together to read, research, and conceptualize ways in which it could work most effectively. The program itself follows the team collaborative structure instituted in the school, and adds the additional programmatic community as well. From its inception, the program was to be not merely collaborative, but communal, with in-group goals, sharing, and articulation. After its inception, Marina Garcia remained a member of this community, along with her many others. Thus, when Marina Garcia arrived in her new office in the central administration building, she was dismayed to see that there was no room for people to meet. She said, "How can I get things going and make
change without at least a round table where people can discuss and work ideas, and become a community?" She then led us into a nearby room to show us where her new office, with ample "people space," was being installed.

Another example is the principal of Highland Oaks Middle School, who had been the Assistant Principal until our study began. His teachers had begun to organize into critical friends groups with their colleagues, with the support of the previous principal. He had supported their efforts because he felt it his job to do so, "but I was thinking, this isn't really going to do anything. But we're going to do it. The boss [the previous principal] wants to do it. . . . But I slowly felt changes." As his involvement increased, he voiced a growing appreciation for professional communities of his own,

I'm more of a nuts and bolts person . . . and I'm not much into the feelings of education experience. We went to a thing this summer for national school reform faculty, and we went to a week-long session. I learned what a critical friends group is all about. . . . My critical friends group is a high school principal in Seattle, a high school principal in California, a middle school principal in Texas, and she and I talk all the time (e-mail) – the guy in Seattle all the time too. . . . What we do as administrators, we bounce [ideas] off each other. . . . I came back really rejuvenated. . . . I had the best time . . . and just really learned a lot about protocols and being able to work through problems with colleagues, and understanding how to give hot and cold criticism and all that good stuff.

About his teachers' experiences with critical friends groups, he says, "Overall I think, what it's done for this faculty, is just given them more of a feeling of being on the cutting edge of a new reform that's going on nationwide. That they're a part of it. And now the critical friends group is an avenue for them to talk about it."

In turn, students in the effective schools become part of a community of learners, with people to turn to for knowledge and support. They have a sense of themselves as learners, responsible for their own choices and progress. Again the principal,

[They're] just opening their classrooms a lot more. Not just other teachers, but also letting the kids feel much more a part of classes, as opposed to the way I was going through this school: you're sitting there and hearing the teacher. Now it's group work, projects. You know . . . put it in the lap of the kids. (9/26, yr.1 p. 46)
Kathy Humphrey, an exemplary teacher in a typical school, spends a great deal of time at the beginning of each school year helping her high school students learn to listen to each other, work together, to appreciate the various perspectives and knowledge others bring, and to become a community of learners. Throughout the year, she reorganizes her room to permit the students to sit at group tables for the frequent small group work, and or to put their chairs into the horseshoe form so necessary for maximum interaction during her whole class discussion groups. This procedure is echoed in all of the classrooms of our most successful teachers, even when, as in Janas Masztal's class, space is in short supply.

When asked about why she thought there was such an unusual degree of agreement in theoretical views across the teachers with whom we are working in Miami-Dade County, Norma Bossard (the Director of English Language Arts) said, "Everyone within the [county supervisory] team works together. We create and brainstorm together. From the beginning, we relied on each other" And Sallie Snyder, the secondary school English language arts supervisor in Miami-Dade County, said, "It isn't one person's vision. We work together. We know what good teaching looks like. We've melded our philosophies into one workable paradigm [and grown together over time]. There is a high level of trust and respect; each person knows that someone else knows or can do something better than themselves, and considers crucial in reaching desired goals" Both administrators see themselves as part of a much larger community effort, one that started before them and will carry on after they leave. Layers of history past and present continue, as with family.

And it is too easy to assume that these communities once in place, simply sustain themselves. Here is an e-mail from Karis MacDonnell, in mid January of year 2, soon after her winter break.

I have been discontented with things in general lately and have been wondering why. I realized that I wasn't teaching [at the college] first semester and I wasn't doing as much reading or exchanging as many ideas with others as usual. I think I have neglected to reflect!

Over the holidays I had to plan and write a new (for me) course in curriculum for elementary teachers – that got my brain going! Then I had some conversations with my mentor. My course started, student teacher arrived full time, and Tanya [Manning, field researcher] arrived, and all of a sudden I'm having professional conversations with myself and others again.

I feel much better about myself and my teaching now! Isn't that weird? Just a couple of months of "isolation" and I could tell the difference. . . . But it also made me think about colleagues who NEVER do the things I neglected to do that got me
off track. They must feel terrible about themselves and their profession. But, they don't realize what they're missing. . . .

Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) describe professional communities in part as places where not only collaboration, but what they call "deprivatized practice" occurs. While the elements of deprivatized practice typify the more successful programs, there are vastly different teachers' experiences in the more typical schools. Findings from this study indicate that in the typical schools, professional communities are virtually absent. Resources to support teacher participation are often lacking. Even when school and district groups are formed, they lack essential elements to make them work. During the first year of our study at Tawasentha, for example, we learned that the teachers rarely interacted around professional issues. Lunch talk, even for those teachers who ate together, rarely focused on discussion of ideas or activities in the field. The newly instituted social studies and English cross-disciplinary efforts stimulated little collaborative planning and discourse, with parallel rather than coordinated curriculum and instruction (see Adler & Flihan, 1997) more the norm. Further, the English teachers rarely met as a department, and then twice a year "only for business that must get done." We saw no coordination or sharing of ideas. Margaret Weiss wanted to grow professionally and desired colleagues with whom to discuss ideas, but found no one to share with at Tawasentha. Nicole Scott, on the other hand, showed little interest in changing her preferred practices, and seemed unaware her old stand-bys were not working. She said she had attended conferences and workshops, some by choice and some mandated. "They sort of rejuvenate you and give you some new ideas . . . an opportunity to interact with colleagues. . . . I came away with a couple of good writing assignments [from Nancie Atwell] that I still use." However, for a planned observation, for instance, she had her students engage in a vocabulary lesson, listening to a commercially prepared reel-to-reel tape recording of words being read in succession both in and out of sentences. They were to mark the correct definition in their accompanying workbook. No discussions of the meanings nor of etymological clues to look for were offered. During this work time, Nicole helped students make selection decisions when they seemed to need help. She did not offer instruction into ways to understand what the words meant or how they could be used. After the lesson, she remarked that the vocabulary program has been one of her favorite activities for many years. She did not reflect on her students' compliant but lack of cognitive engagement with the task.
When asked about interaction with colleagues, she said, "There's not a lot of time in the school day for interaction. . . ."

All this began to shift during the second year, when a consultant was brought into the English department as a change agent, with the goal of raising expectations as well as achievement. She was a local university professor charged with stimulating the teachers to read, critique, and contemplate ways to improve students' performance. Department meetings were re-instituted for these purposes and after several months the quality of professional interaction rose substantially during these meetings. Professional ideas the teachers had read or heard about during the past ten years began to surface, and inquiry into effective practice was beginning. During the second year Nicole Scott began to change. We saw more writing process and interactive activities in her classroom. She said, "When I've tried collaborative writing, they seem more intent on revising the piece to meet the standards than when they're working on a piece by themselves."

3. Creating Activities that Provide Teachers with Agency. A third characteristic of the successful programs was that the participants have an ongoing sense of agency; they can effect change. The effective teachers all feel they can shape the kind of work they do – they develop curriculum, solve problems, make decisions and set directions in curriculum and instruction in their department, school, or district, help choose new colleagues, and pass this sense of purposeful action on to their students. Each of the 14 effective schools has adopted at least some components of school-based management and shared decision-making. In fact, Miami-Dade County was one of the first school systems in the nation to decentralize (Fiske, 1991). They decided the key to better schools was the professionalization of teachers, providing them with a sense of ownership and responsibility for what goes on in their schools. We saw the teachers in Dade County initiate their own proposals with administration support, and collaborate on those initiated by other teachers and administrators, with full confidence that if granted they would be enacted in ways that were compatible with the teachers' goals. Agency was given and accepted. For example, in October of our first year, Rita Gold wrote the following e-mail,

I just came from a DCCTE [Dade County Council of Teachers of English] meeting. Susan and I spent all day in the conference room writing for the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence application. We'll be out of class on Wednesday too. Since Friday is a teacher workday, that pretty much messes up the week.
Rita and Susan and their principal felt their contribution to the application was important and that their efforts could help the school earn an award they all considered important. That same October, Kathy Humphrey wrote,

I have something for you to look over. I wrote a proposal to support the testing results for both the Florida Writes! exam and HSCT [High School Competency Test]. The state, I guess, mandated that an allocation of $10 per student be given to the Education Excellence Committee to spend in support of the school improvement plan. That means a nice chink that could allow us to do something differently. So here we go! The following is my vision of what it could be. . . .

Similarly, International was founded on an ethic of professional cooperation. The entire staff shares major administrative responsibilities through a committee structure. The Staff Development Committee plans and oversees the in-service staff development program. The Faculty Planning Personnel Committee interviews and selects new staff members, and administers the peer evaluation program. The Curriculum Committee coordinates the ongoing curriculum development of the school.

The teachers in these schools are also involved in curriculum development. In many cases this is a continuing activity, involving selecting cross cutting themes and relevant instructional material and activities; this is especially true in schools with extensive cross disciplinary programs, such as in King Middle School, Turner Tech, and International High School. Whether they are involved in developing lessons for cross disciplinary efforts or planning ways to offer the high level instruction that is most appropriate for their students, the teachers' decisions shape important aspects of their curriculum and instructional offerings.

Not only were the teachers given agency, but they assumed it in response to their own desire to change. For example, Chris Kirchner co-wrote and received an Annenberg Foundation two-year grant to start critical friends groups at Turner Tech. The money was earmarked for paying substitutes so that the groups of teachers could meet no less than once a month. Chris was fully encouraged by her principal. The critical friends groups, once in place, were further contributors to the entire faculty's sense of agency. Beyond this, Chris wrote proposals and received a number of small grants to develop instructional approaches. These were well received by the district and Chris was invited to share her work at district workshops. She also, along with Rita Gold, Susan
Gropper, and Janas Masztal, was given a sense of agency by the district when she was invited to help write competencies for the newly developing competency-based curriculum. Their input had a real impact on not only what their own students studied, but what all the students in the district were exposed to. In fact, Chris said the competencies were written specifically enough yet broadly enough to provide a common set of instructional goals, without denying teachers agency or creativity to achieve the goals in ways that worked for themselves and their students.

This sense of agency extends to all levels within the school community. Norma Bossard, the English language arts leader in Miami-Dade County said, "When I began, Zelda [Glazer, the previous English language arts director, now retired, who they credit with creating an excellent department] said, 'You are the expert,' so I went out and talked to everyone and learned everything". It is this ethic, that one's effort will be useful, will lead to some end, that permeates the teachers' lives and gives them purpose. The sense of agency is transmitted to the students as well. At International they believe "Committee membership [of the faculty] is crucial to our teaching approach. It enables teachers to experience the collaborative process that they expect of their students. They can more readily serve as role models (PROPEL handbook, p. 3). Collaborative work and inquiry learning are at the center of classroom approaches. In literature, for example, the students in the effective classrooms are given ownership for developing, explaining, and defending their interpretations, while they are supported by needed instruction from the teacher. Karis MacDonnell, at Ruben Dario Middle School, gave the following assignment on *The Yearling* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings:

> Sometimes a particular person has a strong influence on other people. There are several such characters in *The Yearling*. Think about some of the characters you are meeting in *The Yearling*. Think about the ways one person affects others in the story. Choose one of the strong characters from this book and explain how that person's influence affects others in the story.

This sense of agency pervades Karis MacDonnell's middle school journalism class as well. Here, the students are the editors and assistant editors of the school newspaper. For example, one day when we entered, a student editor was using the overhead projector to make an outline of the deadlines that needed to be met. The information was being provided to her by the various editorial departments. They had a newspaper to get out and would make sure it was not merely on
time, but interesting and well-written as well. Karis MacDonnell's role was minimal at this time, although her efforts to help the students become good writers were both helpful and instructive. She feels their agency motivates and sharpens their learning. What is even more surprising about the students' agency is that the editor that year was from Nicaragua. It was her third year in the United States. The newspaper has won awards, and Ruben Dario has itself won many awards recognizing the school as a whole. When asked why Ruben Dario gets these awards against all odds, Karis said, "Because they can." It is this sense that permeates the atmosphere, and leverages achievement: the sense of giving and having agency because the participants are capable. They will do what they can and learn what they must.

Gail Slatko, also at Ruben Dario, begins most lessons by developing the knowledge, skills, and understandings the students will need to carry out the new activity. Because the activity always involves problem solving and learning, she says she then becomes "an orchestrator. I let the kids take over and work on their own." To encourage the students to take ownership for their learning, the effective teachers we studied use aspects of personal reflection as well as peer response. They have the students react to, check, and make suggestions in response to their classmates' writing, both in terms of content and organization and in terms of surface features such as spelling and grammar.

At Turner Tech, students in the Academy of Finance are developing their own stock portfolios which they track over time. They write their reasons for each purchase as well as chronicle what they are learning. They write predictions about how their stocks will do, and how things develop. One day local stock brokers came to meet with Chris Kirchner's class, but beforehand the students, in small groups, had planned for the event by preparing questions, predicting what they might learn, and deciding how best to use the brokers' time to their advantage. The sense of agency developed in the effective schools helps students take responsibility for their own learning, motivating them as they learn how to analyze situations and then organize, plan, and take action in appropriate ways.

Circumstances in the more typical schools were very different. In the typical schools, teachers have little sense of agency. Even when they work toward change, their recommendations are rarely acknowledged or supported. Professional development programs deliver services rather than having teachers determine their own needs. At Tawasentha, despite Superintendent Jane Hatfield's
support for teachers' involvement and ownership for change, a sense of agency has not permeated the professional environment. Nor, from the teachers' point of view, does the district administration do all it can to support it. For example, when discussing support for instructional change, Margaret Weiss spoke of the social studies and English team teaching effort that had been instituted the prior year. She had participated:

Last year, my social studies teacher and I were able to block, and we blocked four days a week, and on Fridays we did normal time, and the administration supported us, and it was wonderful. And we decided to move up as tenth grade teachers to pilot the tenth grade team to see if students would do better on the Global Studies Regents [test] having the same teacher. Because I worked with Laura I moved up with her. And what was very disappointing is we get the mouth talk that, yes, we support you and we support blocking, but the way they scheduled us, we can't block this year. And that's a disappointment to us and to the students, and its really easy to lose heart when something is said like, 'We value this.'

Although the outside consultant working with the teachers had been hired by Superintendent Hatfield without their involvement in setting professional needs and goals, her approach was to engage the teachers in dialogue about research in the profession and ways in which the ideas might be of use to the teachers and students. This experience differed from the previous school-sponsored lecture-oriented workshops the teachers had attended.

4. Valuing Commitment to Professionalism. The fourth characteristic of successful programs is the pervading sense of professional identity each participant displays. In the effective programs, the teachers we studied are proud to be educators; they think of themselves as professionals and carry their professional selves with them wherever they go. They are in touch with the larger world and the concerns of others with regard to education. They consider themselves spokespersons for the profession. Norma Bossard, English language arts director in Miami-Dade County, said,

A characteristic of us [the language arts department] is that any of us would go back to the classroom tomorrow morning and do a good job and be happy there. We're not out because we don't want to be teachers. One of the things I really attribute to Zelda . . . is defining the role of the department that way. I always thought they picked us because they knew we could do good staff development and remain teachers. They knew we could go back to the classroom.
It is this sense of being a teacher as well as speaking for teachers that identifies the professionals we studied. In an interview, Zelda Glazer recalled,

When I first got the job as supervisor, the whole set-up downtown [in the central office] was different. One of the people I worked with was very smart, very knowledgeable, very current in her information. There was nothing ossified about her. But at the time everyone accepted the bureaucratic paradigm which was you didn't go into a school unless you were invited. . . . They don't want you. . . . So downtown, they were not connected to the body of the patient. And so it was a big jump when we decided that was no way to function. But getting into classrooms, being close to teachers was my ideal. . . . The other thing that helped was the Bay Area Writing Project, the National Writing Project [which was used as a model for their Writing Institute, now renamed the Zelda Glazer Writing Institute]. In our view it has become a learning, not just writing, institute, for everyone.

Similarly, the teachers maintain a professional stance, keep up with their fields, and continually hone their own skills. Norma Bossard and all of the English language arts supervisors subscribe to a number of journals and magazines. They also expect the teachers to do the same. "We make it real important to them to join one of the organizations. . . . We let them know that's the standard -- to be part of the group we've got, that you're a professional and a professional joins the professional organizations and reads the literature." They also share their knowledge with each other. For example, Susan Gropper at Highland Oaks had adapted reciprocal teaching strategies (initially introduced into the ongoing professional discussion within the English language arts program) to improve her students' reading comprehension before they were incorporated into the new Comprehensive Reading Plan, but she also shared this expertise with other teachers in the district via workshops.

The teachers also mentor pre-service teachers and new teachers. Take Cathy Starr and Gloria Rosso at Hudson Middle School as an example. Although both are excellent and experienced teachers, Cathy Starr has been teaching at this school for 26 years while Gloria Rosso has been there for 6 years, after having taught in New York City for 17 years. From the moment Gloria Rosso arrived, Cathy Starr assumed a professional responsibility to help her make a comfortable transition. She invited Gloria Rosso into her classroom and to presentations and workshops she was giving, both at school and at local, state, and national conferences. Gloria Rosso, on the other hand, has student teachers in her classroom and with care and guidance, she helps them gain a
sense not only of the curriculum, classroom organization, and instructional approaches and interactions, but also of the many complex roles an English teacher plays. Gloria Rosso serves as a role model not only for her students but also for the many student-teachers she cares for and helps grow as professionals.

The teachers feel that they are experts in their profession and take pleasure in sharing what they know with others. Most of the teachers with whom we are working are involved in some aspect of professional development. Some teach at local colleges (Karis MacDonnell, Marsha Slater, Pedro Mendez, Margaret Weiss). Others are frequent speakers at conferences and workshops (Gail Slatko, Karis MacDonnell, Chris Kirchner, Cathy Starr, Marsha Slater, Susan Gropper, Rita Gold, Shawn DeNight, Gloria Rosso, Margaret Weiss, Kathy Humphrey). Some have won teacher of the year and other excellence awards (Marsha Slater, Cathy Starr, Shawn DeNight, Gail Slatko, Chris Kirchner, Janas Masztal, Karis McDonnell, Rita Gold). And others are or have been officers of professional organizations (Cathy Starr, Gail Slatko, Karis McDonnell, Rita Gold, Susan Gropper), or have published in professional journals (Cathy Starr, Gloria Rosso, Kathy Humphrey, Gail Slatko, Chris Kirchner, Marsha Slater, Rita Gold). They think of education as a worthy and important profession and place their professional obligations extremely high on their list of priorities. For example, Cathy Starr had accepted an invitation and long been listed as a speaker at a Teacher Center conference. By chance, this turned out to be the long-awaited day her daughter-in-law gave birth to the first child of her only son. Cathy Starr, without hesitation, arrived at the conference, gave an excellent talk, and only then rushed to the hospital to see her first grandchild. When asked about it later, she said simply that she felt it was her professional obligation to keep her commitment.

The school administrators also treat their teachers as professionals, not only providing time for team and planning meetings, but also released time with pay for professional meetings, conferences, and other professional invitations their teachers may receive, such as working on state standards or test development committees. They do this because they know that by treating their teachers as professionals, the district will ultimately benefit. As Eija Rougle suggests, "teachers put some ideas [from these meetings and conferences] in their minds as a seed bed for possible future use," or as Rita Gold put it, they are "interested in reviewing ideas, and learning
about how the field is going." They use their experiences to create and recreate a professional knowledge base, and they use this to help them enact what they believe their students need.

As Shawn DeNight, an exemplary teacher in a typical school, said,

Many times in teaching we have disruptions in our long range instructional plans [field trips, testing, pep rallies, etc.]. If it is possible to bend the disruption so it fits in some way with my instructional plans, then I feel I have triumphed. I have wanted to teach my kids how to write a character analysis based on something we read in class. The theme of our field trip [Inter-generational Issues Forum: Senior Citizens and Teens Discuss What it Means to be a Liberal or Conservative] lent itself to interviewing. This would force my students to interact with seniors. But what to do with the interviews? How about a character sketch? The writing follows a similar format to the persuasive essay, something my kids worked on a couple of months ago. It will also be a nice segue into the character analysis in the sense that both types of writing establish a thesis that a person has a certain character trait, and then goes on to provide support for the thesis. For the character sketch, the evidence – that a person was liberal, conservative, or moderate – came from the interviews the students conducted. With the character analysis, which we will begin in a couple of weeks when we finish Romeo and Juliet, the evidence comes from the things the character has said or done in the play. (e-mail to T. Manning 4/27, yr.1)

While Shawn is clearly inventive, the kind of inventiveness he exhibits is shaped by his overall professionalism, his belief that education can and should work despite asides and intrusions. He considers it his role to make sure it does so. There is a pride in being teachers that is exuded in the successful programs, and among the exemplary teachers in the typically performing schools.

In general, the teachers in the more typical schools were less likely to be deeply involved in their profession. Findings indicate that the typical schools and districts do not have expectations regarding teachers' commitment to their profession, aside from their classroom duties. At Tawasentha, the teachers we studied were certainly less activist in participating in broader changes within their department and school than were teachers in the higher-achieving schools. Nor did we see invitations or encouragement for them to become more involved. During the first year of our study, Nicole Scott demonstrated almost no awareness of the changes in English education that had taken place over the previous twenty years, and seemed unaware of the current tensions. While Margaret Weiss tried to keep up with the concerns in the field, she perceived
herself as alone, never fully speaking up or taking a strong role of professional leadership. Jane Hatfield, the superintendent, felt that professionalization of the teachers was a critical part of her educational reform goals. For example, she told us that when she began her job, she began a process that engaged multiple constituencies in identifying their goals for Tawasentha.

With Goals 2000, I was able to design a focus for the district . . . a systemic reform effort that was going to make them think and talk about the students, first of all a student focus, looking at the fact that the students go through a system, and that the system has to be one that provides some continuity, consistency, and a focus for what you want the students to be able to do and understand when they graduate. So given these broad based committees aligning their thinking, we were able to then set up building planning teams, shared decision-making teams, and when we designed the blueprint for how they would operate, the focus would be on student results. . . . And the goal of those committees were to improve students results by looking at data that existed, and beginning to suggest ways to improve them. And they could decide anything they wanted that related to that, as long as they had gotten the data and information to make the decisions. To support the buildings I also felt we needed three support teams: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. So we began with curriculum committees. And we started mostly at the elementary level because it appeared that I was going to have to be more persuasive in terms of a new vision at the secondary level. . . . Every year I sit down with the principals to see if there’s evidence the project leaders truly change theory to practice . . . There has to be demonstration of change in the classroom. . . . Because it seemed that at the high school our own could not make the change, I’ve begun to bring in outside consultants.

Margaret Weiss, who had been a member of some of these change-agent committees, including a summer committee to develop integrated social studies and English curriculum, had also invited some writing process specialists to meet with the teachers in her school. She described the superintendent as "a visionary, leader" who is "aiming towards more collaborative teaching and more discovery and collaborative learning for the students." While the superintendent was creating opportunities for professional discourse, the consultant who met with the English teachers, provided them with opportunities to read, discuss, and develop opinions about issues and approaches. However, even in the second year we did not see the teachers interact with each other or their fellow teachers apart from the arranged meetings.
5. Engendering Caring Attitudes. The fifth cross cutting characteristic of the exemplary programs is that they share an ethos of caring (Noddings, 1984). The teachers we studied care about their students, and about the people with whom they work. In some schools, they hug each other a lot, in others they show affection with each other more subtly. They ask each other how things are going and go beyond small talk at the coffee machine. Sallie Snyder's welcome back to school letter in Dade County at the end of the summer began like this,

Dear Exalted Ones,

The warmest and most sincere welcome to all of you as the 1997-1998 school year begins. I need not tell you that we are also beginning year two of the "Langer Project" and with it the joys and stresses I know that brings.

It ends with

My best regards and greatest admiration to all.

Despite her jocular language, the teachers know Sallie Snyder cares about them, appreciates them, and knows that they are involved in a professional commitment that costs them – in time and comfort. The letter is one small act of caring among countless others in these schools.

The teachers appreciate expressions of caring and extend this ethos to their interactions with students. For example, Pedro Mendez, from King Middle School, said about his Spanish proficient students in the two-way bilingual program,

Kids need to be comfortable. They need to see me as a resource and I hope that's what's happening. Not only that they see me as an authoritative figure, that they see me as a mentor, as a role model. When I walk out in the hall they can say, 'Well, that's Mr. Mendez. He's my teacher. He's what I would like to be when I grow up.'

When he teaches, Pedro Mendez maintains a very caring attitude towards his students, the way he looks at them, tries to draw them out, and guide them to engage with the topics being taught. Once, at the end of the day, he found that something had been taken from his office. It was not needed, and he could easily have ignored the incident. Instead, he questioned others about who had been in his office, and when he thought he knew who the culprit was, he got into his car and drove to the main street, where he found the culprit. He drove him back to school, spoke with the student...
himself, and then moved on to the principal's office, explaining in a parental manner, "It isn't only important for what you did now, but you must never do something like this again."

The effective schools hold team meetings during which they discuss students who are absent, who may be in trouble academically, socially or in other ways, and they try to work out ways to help, before problems escalate. They bring students in, and families too; they go the extra mile to try to make things work, and students and parents know it. To create a "family" feel, most of the schools have photographs in entrance ways and hallways of past students, field trips, and family and community members engaged in projects. Parents are encouraged to visit classrooms to become familiar with the programs and to volunteer to help. And all have a range of community, parent, and teacher committees, advisory groups and common welfare and social interest groups that create a sense of belonging.

The teachers we studied in these schools care about the curriculum as well as their students' learning, constantly monitor their students' grades, and are responsive to signals from their students that changes in instructional approaches or activities are needed. One of Turner Tech's standards is to help their students develop more relationships with adults, especially those in business and industry. We observed one meeting when 11 industry guests (financial planners and brokers) spent a morning with the students in the Academy of Finance. The agreement was that they would return, soon. The guests felt valued, not overwhelmed, and so did the students. Many of the brokers invited interested students to contact them if they could be of help. As part of the process, the students used reflection sheets to evaluate the visitors' helpfulness to them personally.

In contrast, findings indicate that in the more typical schools, while human interaction was respectful, among and between both teachers and students, the schools lacked a deeply caring atmosphere and unified sense of community. Upon entering Tawasentha, the walls were bare and the hallways empty and quiet. The friendly interactions, evidence of class projects and activities, and a sense of the school's inhabitants were absent. This was not the case in Margaret Weiss' classroom, where questions about how students were feeling, and warm interactions were the norm. Nicole Scott, however, remained the more distant teacher, holding herself more apart. The constant student-case discussions and team efforts that prevailed at the other schools also seemed absent, although problems seemed to be dealt with in other ways. During the second year, Nicole told us about the faculty room, "we decided to personalize it, and we all brought in artificial
flowers just to make it look less sterile. . . . and at the end of the year we do a camping day, just the female members. And we do sometimes talk about work, but we just have a good time too. And over winter break there's a group going to the culinary institute in my car for the day."

6. Fostering Respect for Learning. Lastly, the teachers we studied in the successful schools are learners themselves, in their personal as well as professional lives. They are truly the lifelong learners they want their students to become. For instance, Donald Silvers, a teacher in King's two-way bilingual program, says "Well, growing up, some of my family members were teachers. I've always respected teaching as a profession. I always liked school. I had a positive, very positive school career. I love going to classes. I love learning."

The teachers in the effective programs are exposed to a plethora of opportunities to keep in touch with the latest thinking in their field. However, it seems more the range of opportunities and the manner in which teachers are invited to intellectually engage with and respond to the ideas more than any one kind of learning activity that typifies this feature for excellence. Their districts invite guest speakers and consultants to interact with the teachers. Someone – be it a curriculum supervisor, department chair, principal, or fellow teacher – duplicates and shares pertinent journal articles. In class, talk about learning pervades their days. Their students join in the conversation, talk about their own learning, share it with each other; they consider themselves learners too.

The exemplary teachers have learned to be computer literate, and almost all have computers in their classrooms or in a media center. The least computer-rich schools are presently increasing their capacity. While the teachers know about a range of ways to use the internet as a resource, they make use of it in their classes only after they have had time to see its use as an enhancement to their students' learning. Gloria Rosso, for instance, was teaching a research unit on names. The students were learning to use a variety of materials to search the history of their first and last names. In addition to the many books on surnames and first names she had brought into her classroom, she also taught her students how to use the web for genealogies. The students developed their own genealogies, but shared knowledge about how to get the information, use the technology, and gain research skills. In another instance, Shawn DeNight was selected as one of a few teachers in the United States to visit the Ukraine as part of an educators team. He brought letters from his students to the students he would meet and planned to encourage a letter exchange
across the countries. As excellent teachers, they understand that technology is important for students to learn to use, both as a developing skill and also for its plethora of offerings. A group of Miami-Dade County teachers participated in a district sponsored hands-on workshop on using the World Wide Web. The teachers were: "enthusiastically cautious about the possibilities for internet applications in their classrooms, concerned about how they will teach their students to discriminate among the sources available to them, how the students will learn to extract and categorize the available information, how they will learn to weave their information into a coherent whole, how to teach proper citations from electronic databases, and the need for appropriate higher literacy skills." Even as they air their concerns and hold its use on the back burner, they are constructive.

Beyond in-service and other professional development offered to them, they go to conferences and meetings, take courses, and belong to groups. The topics not only deal with education, but a range of issues and ideas that help them grow as individuals. In Miami-Dade County, for example, teachers are given in-service credit for participating in adult readers' groups. Here, they meet in people's homes on a rotating basis and talk about books that have been selected by the participants. Norma Bossard, the county director of English and language arts, believes that love of reading is infectious, and that "some of it will rub off on the children." Describing one such group, Susan Gropper said,

_Last Friday our reading group met to discuss The Color of Water. What fun it was to share our interpretations, complaints, praise, and personal experiences. I enjoyed telling my students about it in the hope that they might be inspired to discover the pleasure of reading and sharing themselves._

_Not only does this activity offer an opportunity for teachers across the disciplines to get to know each other, it sometimes also engages them in discussing content and strategies they might share with their students. Using this model, Rita Gold has developed a very popular and well-attended Borders Book Club for Highland Oaks middle grade students._

_In their professional learning, the teachers place themselves in the stream of new knowledge in their field, and weigh and rework ideas in ways that make sense for their students. Shawn DeNight, an exemplary teacher in a typical school, for example, attended the summer Writing Institute, an intensive and highly empowering two week informal mixture of speakers, workshops, and sharing._
"The Writing Institute, for me, is like a banquet where I just feast . . . You always hear new people, and it's just time to sit and reflect, and talk about the way you teach. I mean, I remember just two years ago, we thought about creating our own little mini writing institute here at Edison for teachers in other departments. We called it the Edison Model Institute, and we had some of the various presenters from the Writing Institute come, and then our teachers taught other teachers, just to promote reading and writing in the classroom. So I do think they have that influence. You know I've benefited from them." Shawn DeNight often uses models in his classroom. "What better way to make things concrete than to use models?" Thus, when he saw some poems used as models in a summer writing institute workshop, he knew they would work for his own class. Using some poems from the workshop, and additional ones of his selection, he developed a unit that introduced poems, their messages, and discussion of some literary elements such as imagery, simile, alliteration, personification that made them work. Using the poems they studied as models, the students wrote their own, and served as peer editors. After much feedback to several drafts, they proudly keyed their poetry into the computer and printed them out. As did the other teachers we studied, Shawn DeNight chose ideas he felt could help him reach his own goals for student achievement, that fit into his curriculum, and could be shaped to fit his teaching approach.

The teachers also make the students aware that they are making use of what they have learned. For example, Gail Slatko, as she begins a writing activity and is passing our cards to her students, comments. "You remember the writing course I told you about that I took this summer. This is something I learned."

In contrast, the typical schools we studied do not usually make teachers' learning overt nor provide students with opportunities to see adults enthusiastically involved as learners. During the first year at Tawasentha, we saw little evidence that teachers were engaged as learners, either in professional or personal endeavors. If they did engage in such activities, they did not share them with their students or colleagues. By the second year of its participation in the present study, Tawasentha had many parts in place, but was still far from the cohesive learning community Jane Hatfield wanted so much to achieve. But this too was beginning to change. When she began as superintendent, professional development had not been a focus at Tawasentha – neither professional days for conferences nor invited speakers. Occasionally articles were distributed. By the end of our two years, the teachers were reading a variety of books and articles and interacting
about the ideas. The consultant who was meeting with the teachers on a monthly basis, engaged them in book talks about professional books and articles and discussing instructional approaches and activities. The teachers were beginning to act as learners, to overtly seek professional knowledge and share their own ideas. And they were conversing with each other about what they were learning.

Overall, Jane Hatfield was doing a great deal to change the sociocognitive context of the school district, affecting ideas and images of change by developing overlapping communities of professionals and parents to look beyond the usual – to read, research, discuss and also set new goals and processes. Her leadership encompassed the characteristics we have seen at work in the more successful schools. And by the end of our project, changes in goals as well as performance had begun. She assured us she plans to keep "plugging and pushing. . . . Matter of fact, in the next five years we'll see a tremendous change in the high school."
**DISCUSSION**

From our study, we have seen evidence that it is the six characteristics working in concert that seem to make the difference; every school we studied that was performing better than comparable ones exhibited all six characteristics: 1) coordinating efforts to improve achievement, 2) fostering teacher participation in professional communities, 3) creating activities that provide teachers with agency, 4) valuing commitment to professionalism, 5) engendering caring attitudes, and 6) fostering respect for learning.

Overall, the teachers we studied in schools that are beating the odds are in touch with their students, their profession, their colleagues, and society at large. And they use these differing contexts to gain knowledge and sensitivity to shape their curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts in disciplinary and societally responsive ways that work for their students. The knowledge and experiences gained in their wide professional arena affect the classroom context, their students' learning and achievement, in at least three ways:

a) **transported ideas**: Ideas and activities with which they come into contact "fit" what an individual teacher has already been doing or searching for and is available for use in a manner and classroom setting that is not too dissimilar from the teacher's own. Although the activity may change over time, the initial "match" permitted an easier try-on.

b) **seed-bedded ideas**: Ideas and activities interest teachers as potentially useful and are, as Cathy Starr says, "put on the back burner" to be useful in a variety of ways at some later time. These are rarely used as initially presented, but become part of an integrated teacher-constructed approach, theory, activity, or framework that becomes part of the teacher's knowledge or action repertoire over time.

c) **rejected**: Ideas and activities are rejected, as falling outside the theoretical and pedagogical realm of what the teacher thinks is either useful or appropriate.

In all three cases, the teachers never work in a vacuum, either in gaining the ideas, discussing them, gaining feedback in understanding or reconstruing them, or even in rejecting them. It is through constant exposure to and filtering through both the broad and distant as well as closer-to-home professional contexts that teachers maintain the professional knowledge, skill, and techniques they use to help their students learn and achieve in English. However, it is because they
constantly air their concerns and reactions to ideas in the professional arena in the ways described above that they are able to work through the centripetal tensions and maintain common vision.

Much call for educational reform has focused on changing the teacher, but this research suggests a need to change the setting, the activity setting Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) call it. This setting, from a sociocognitive perspective (Langer, 1987; 1995), includes the larger educational system within which decisions are made and goals are set that affect how teachers behave and grow as professionals, and thus create the educational cultures within which students learn. It was adherence to a sociocognitive framework throughout the study (questions, design, procedures, and analyses) that permitted us to demonstrate ways in which an understanding of teachers' professional environments can enhance our understanding of ways to improve student learning and achievement.

The findings from this study, identifying and describing characteristics of teachers' professional lives that seem to make a difference in student learning, provide models of implementation within the embedded contexts McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) consider as a strategic site for systemic reform, simultaneously addressing their three components: content, students, and teacher. The findings also provide further models of ways in which teachers can learn the new practices Peterson, McCarthy, and Elmore (1996) and Elmore, Peterson, and McCarthy (1996) say are critical in order for school restructuring to work. As they, and Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), conclude, redesign efforts need to be understood and embraced by teachers, and carried into the daily activities of the classroom through a conceptually integrated reculturing rather than superficial change actions (Cuban, 1984; Rosenholz, 1989), the "whole cloth" and "whole student" Norma Bossard speaks of. The characteristics described in our findings relate to the features Little and McLaughlin (1991) found in their study of math collaboratives, and explain the social contexts within which teachers can successfully feed their professional identities, ideas, and commitments, and also develop and continue to build upon effective strategies for improving student achievement. They also provide evidence of ways in which professional development can effectively replace more restricted notions of in-service (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979; Hall & Loucks, 1979) toward what Lieberman and Miller (1990) call a culture of support for teacher inquiry. In fact, we have seen that in broad-based networks, administrators and teachers become colleagues who examine, inquire, learn and share.
They develop the collegiality and experimentation that Little (1986) indicates is responsible for successful implementation of new programs.

For policy implications that may be derived from this study, it is important to remember that the schools, teachers, and students were quite different; no "cookie-cutter" set of enterprises can be mandated. In these places there was certainly not a mandate to attend professional meetings, no pronouncements regarding curriculum change or shared decision-making. These elements were all present, but grew from contexts that invited such behaviors. What they did have that can be emulated, was a culture that values these features of the educational workplace; it was shared by administrators, teachers, and students, and lived by actions rather than pronouncements.

This culture was manifested in a number of ways: 1) A past history of cumulative reform efforts that built upon others in the field and created a school and district history of positive change (e.g., the Zelda Glazer Writing Project that built upon the Bay Area and National Writing Project; International H.S. and Turner Tech that built upon the Coalition for Essential Schools as well as other reform movements; and the two-way bilingual program at King Middle School that build upon dual language education efforts); 2) A thorough and long lived process of reculturing (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) that defined the interpersonal and professional environments of all the schools, including Tawasentha in its nascent stages toward changing the context; 3) Resources for professional change and development that were understood to require a reallocation of both monetary and time resources, although both were at times gained through external funding; and 4) Resources for a professional community that were understood to involve collegiality, common goals, and joint activity that created a synergy to make a difference. These occurred within open rather than closed communities, open to new ideas from many places, and open to examination and discussion.

These features were not easy to come by and enact; they resulted from the hard and ongoing work of dedicated professionals – who permitted themselves to be both dreamers and doers. Neither is such a culture quick to come by. Instead, it is built up over time, sustained by the willingness to persevere. It comes from an unremitting belief in public education, a belief that all students can learn, can have successful futures, and that it is in the power of the school to make it happen.
Are these things characteristic of all teachers in the departments in each of these schools, or only of special 'lead teachers' chosen for us to study? The schools I have described "feel" good, from the moment you enter the doors. They are human places – places of learning, and also places of safety. They are exceptional educational environments because the overlapping features of the contexts invite them to be so. We cannot necessarily assume that any one of the teachers in this study would have been wonderful (or at least as wonderful as presently) anywhere. Instead, it is the array of contextual features in the many contexts of their work lives that supports and feeds their excellence, and helps them sustain it. But not every teacher finds himself or herself in contexts as exceptionally rich and plentiful as the ones in which the various teachers in this study were situated. Nor does a rich context assure excellence. We all know there are teachers who burn out, who have other priorities, who resist participating in such rich contexts. But the mixture of characteristics within the kinds of educational features I have described – coordinating efforts to improve achievement, fostering teacher participation in professional communities, creating activities that provide teachers with agency, valuing commitment to professionalism, engendering caring attitudes, and fostering respect for learning – seems to support more potentially exceptional teachers than usual, teachers who believe it is within their power to make a difference in their students' lives, and who thrive on making this a reality.
REFERENCES


RELATED MATERIALS FROM THE EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH RESEARCH PROJECT

Research Reports
12002  Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers’ Professional Lives Support Student Achievement. Judith A. Langer.

12014  Beating the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well. Judith A. Langer.

Case Studies
The following site-specific case studies profile teachers, teams of teachers, and central office administrators. These and others will be available beginning in spring 1999.


12004  Beating the Odds Over Time: One District’s Perspective. Sallie Snyder.

12005  A Middle School Teacher Never Stops Learning: The Case of Cathy Starr. Eija Rougle.

12006  Vocational School Teacher Engages Students in High Level Reading and Writing: The Case of Janas Masztal. Steven Ostrowski.

12008  Collegial Support and Networks Invigorate Teaching: The Case of Marsha S. Slater. Ester Helmar-Salasoo with Sally Kahr.

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13005  Teaming to Teach English to International High School Students: A Case Study. Paola Bonissone.

13008  Collegial Networks: A Team of Sixth-Grade Teachers in a Two-Way Bilingual Program. Gladys I. Cruz.

In addition, CELA has published a booklet, Guidelines for Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well. For current availability and an up-to-date list of reports, visit the CELA website: http://cela.albany.edu or call 518-442-5026.