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The school experience from the students' perspective: A comparative case study analysis

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

by

John Goldhardt

Bachelor of Science
Southern Utah University
1989

Master of Public Administration
University of Utah
1995

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education**

**Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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The Dissertation prepared by

John T. Goldhardt

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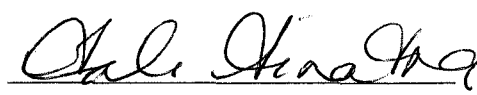
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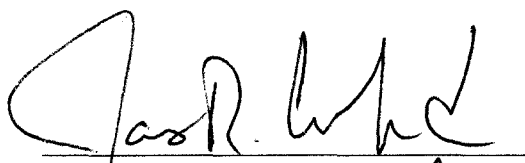
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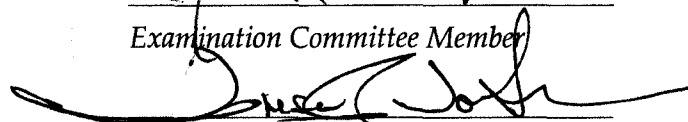
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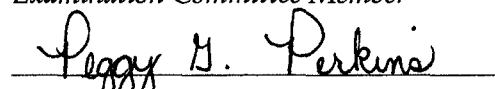

Examination Committee Chair


Examination Committee Chair


Dean of the Graduate College


Examination Committee Member


Examination Committee Member


Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

The School Experience from the Students' Perspective: A Comparative Case Study Analysis

by

John Goldhardt

Dr. Robert S. McCord, Examination Committee Co-Chair
Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Dr. LeAnn G. Putney, Examination Committee Co-Chair
Associate Professor of Educational Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Since the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (also known as No Child Left Behind), public schools are required to be more accountable in relationship to student achievement. With the current attention on accountability that is based mostly upon standardized tests, it becomes compelling to study the school experience from the students' perspective. The purpose of this study is not to analyze traditional data from students, but to instead, examine the perceptions of high school senior students based upon their schooling experience and its implications for school leaders.

Invitational education and critical theory provide a theoretical framework for this study. In addition, the review of literature provides a conceptual framework. The literature reveals that the quality of the instructional program, support for student

learning, positive school climate, and meaningful student activities contribute to student achievement and positive perceptions of school by students.

This study is a descriptive comparative case study, which follows the research designs of qualitative investigation. During the spring of 2003, juniors at two Utah high schools took the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) student opinion inventory. The data from the NSSE survey provided a basis by which to delineate questions for focus group interviews. In December 2003 and January 2004, interviews took place in focus groups that consisted of seniors at each high school.

Results of this study formed several themes. Results revealed that students want rigor, but they also want caring and supportive teachers, meaningful work, and an opportunity to apply the knowledge they learn. Students want to be trusted and want their voices heard when decisions are made that affect them. In addition, they want to interact with school administrators and guidance counselors.

There were several issues identified for further research including replicating the study in five years with the same students and conducting the study with three schools (large, medium sized, and small) to ascertain the impact of school size from the student perspective. There are also implications for school leaders. The student voice can be a powerful force in school improvement and the leader's role as instructional leader.

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It was an honor for me to be a member of Cohort 1 of the executive leadership doctoral cohort. This program piqued my interest in educational leadership research and focused on what really matters in educational leadership: Student learning.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the three most important people in my life: my wife Roma and my sons Christian and McKay.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Elected officials, business leaders, parents, teachers, professors and consultants freely offer their advice and views on how to improve the educational experience for students and how to improve student achievement. Over the last two decades several reform movements have been spurred by reports or summits about education (A Nation At Risk, 1983; America 2000, 1990; Goals 2000, 1993; No Child Left Behind, 2001). Although the United States was the first nation to embrace the idea of free universal public education for all of its children, historically those children have been guaranteed only the right to *attend* school rather than the right to *learn* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, emphasis added). However, when it comes to school reform, do we ever ask the students? Although students are considered central to schooling, they are rarely consulted (Dyson, 1995). The current trend in education is to test students more often and to analyze student attendance, grades and discipline data. The only direct “voice” that students have in educational research are their grades and test scores. One student in the study described it this way:

The people in the legislature, all they want are tests, but how can you test music or being in sports? I mean, in choir, we learn how to blend not only with our voices but also with other people. How can you test that? I don't think these people (state legislature) understand how important this is to me and how it makes school better for me.

Yet, if we expect change to occur in our nation's schools, we must redefine the role of the students "to become active, not just passive, recipients of knowledge" (Bacon & Bloom, 2000, p. 38).

Barth (2001) asserted that our schools are replete with what he calls inert knowledge. Inert knowledge is acquired knowledge that does not go anywhere.

Despite the (now waning) educational rhetoric that boasts expressions like discovery, inner motivation, exploration, active involvement, and best interests of the child, school continues to be an adult-centered, not student-centered enterprise. And the greater the preoccupation with standardized tests, the more adult-centered it becomes. It is no surprise that many youngsters' natural excitement and curiosity about the world are more thwarted than nurtured by the school experience (Barth, 2001, p. 39). Schools that do not welcome students' dialogue, inquiries, and recommendations deprive young people of the opportunity to develop self-knowledge, integrity, good judgment, and the ability to deliberate soundly (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). However, there is a movement to utilize student voices to raise expectations and results in schools (Gehring, 2004).

A compelling argument in favor of seeking out and listening to the student voice is that it is a moral imperative. Sergiovanni (1992) says that "the heart of the school as a moral community is its covenant of shared values. This covenant provides a basis for determining its morality" (p. 108). Sergiovanni calls this moral community a virtuous school. One of the characteristics of the virtuous school is that it honors respect, including the respect of students. "The virtuous school respects students by giving them the same consideration given to teachers, parents, and other adults" (Sergionanni, 1992,

p. 112). In fact, Yatvin (1990) claims that the only way to improve American education is to let schools be self-renewing communities where *everyone* counts and *everyone* cares. DuFour, DuFour Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) ask, “will (educators) recognize that in a very real sense, lives are hanging in the balance” (p. 192)? They urge educators to pursue the moral imperative of helping students pursue their dreams and aspirations.

This study will examine the perceptions of students’ secondary school experience. In other words, what are the students telling us about their schooling experience and how can principals use this data to enhance leadership and school improvement?

Theoretical Framework

Lewin (1943) stated, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (p. 338), but added we have to be careful so that theory keeps its proper place in research as a servant and as a tool. It is the assumption of Polansky (1986) that the goal of research is to advance theory, and this is especially true of studies oriented toward practice. He added that there is a general mistrust of theory, but “actually, there are a number of important functions good theory can serve in applied fields” (p. 5). Given that the purpose of this study is to advance the voice of students as agents in the reform process, a suitable theoretical framework for this study will combine the tenets of invitational education with the perspective afforded from looking through a critical theory lens.

Invitational Education

The goal of invitational education is to create a total school environment that intentionally summons success for everyone associated with the school (Purkey & Strahan, 1995). Five basic premises undergird invitational education: (1) People are

able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly; (2) Schools should be cooperative and integrative; (3) Process is as important as product; (4) People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor; (5) Human potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 144). The basic contention of this theory is that people behave according to how they see themselves and the situations in which they are involved (Combs, Avilia & Purkey, 1978). Therefore, each individual behaves according to how the world appears at that instant.

Purkey and Strahan (2002) use a metaphor of blue cards and orange cards to provide a guide for the symbolic meaning that takes place in and around educational settings. The color is symbolic of files being sorted and filed in the brain. What is written on the card represents the content and the color of the card represents the context.

Blue cards. Blue cards carry a positive feeling that the person is able, valuable, and responsible. They encourage the individual to see the world as a good place to be, where there are many things to love that will love in return. Regardless of content, the context of each blue card encourages the best in self-esteem, excitement for living, and the finest qualities of trust, respect, and intentionality.

Orange cards. Orange cards project feelings that inform the individual that he or she is unable, worthless, and irresponsible. An orange card warns the person to be aware: beware of one's own feelings, of relationships, of life. Orange cards are so painful that individuals will do almost anything to escape the hurt (Purkey & Strahan, 2002, pp. 19-20).

Purkey utilizes studies in semantics (Bateson, 1987; Hayakawa, 1990), cognitive psychology (Beck, 1988; Meichenbaum, 1977), and counseling theory and practice (Gladding, 1992; Grinder & Bandler, 1981) to demonstrate the significance of metaphor in human experience and functioning. Purkey and Strahan estimate that each person needs at least 12 blue cards to make up for one orange. The researcher believes that the 12-1 ratio is based upon the use of perceptual tradition (Combs & Snygg, 1959; Combs, Richards & Richards, 1976) as a foundation for invitational education. "The basic contention of this theory (perceptual tradition) is that people behave according to how they see themselves and the situations in which they are involved" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 21). Specifically, teachers who treat their students as able and respond to them empathetically promote cognitive and emotional growth (Purkey & Aspy, 1988). This is demonstrated in the words of a student:

If we are not careful, these little voices we hear in our heads can be deadly. If we get too many orange cards, or too few blue, we begin to feel like we're useless failures. Then it's orange alert, eat dirt (Purkey, 2000, p. 87).

Finally, Purkey (2000) continues to emphasize that student self-talk is an essential element of invitational education and the perceptual tradition:

1. What significant people think about students and how they act toward students influences how students define themselves.
2. How students define themselves in their internal dialogue influences their academic success or failure.
3. Everything the school does and every way things are done influences what students say to themselves.

4. Altering how students define themselves involves altering the total school environment.
5. The task of the school is to structure experiences that reduce crippling self-talk while inviting students to define themselves in essentially positive and realistic ways (Purkey, 2000, p. 77).

After analyzing 200,000 hours of classroom instruction, Aspy and Roebuck (1977, 1985) concluded that classrooms that facilitated self-concept development also enhanced student achievement. Educational practices based on self-concept theory reflects optimism, respect, and trust. They are intentionally inviting (Purkey & Aspy, 1988).

Cook-Sather (2002) claims that the basic premise of educational policy and practice is trust. Yet, historical and current practices “reflect a basic lack of trust in students and have evolved to keep students under control and in their place as the largely passive recipients of what others determine is education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 4). Lecompte and Dworkin (1991) explain “central to the concept of alienation is a sense of a gap between expectations and experiences, or between potentials and objective realities for individuals and groups” (p.59). This gap often results in feelings of meaninglessness in students (Becker, 1967; Loken, 1973; Lecompte & Dworkin, 1991). The underlying tenets of invitational education most relevant to this study are that all voices in a school must count and that adult voices to students must convey trust, respect, and encouragement. The research perspective that will best serve to unfold these tenets is critical theory.

Critical Theory

Critical theory looks for equity and fairness and is grounded in the day-to-day lives of people, structures, and cultures (Brown, 2004). Students who differ from the mainstream intellectually, physically, culturally, and socially often find themselves at odds with the culture of schools because most schools have been designed to meet the needs of the so-called mainstream (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001). Along these lines, critical theorists have agreed that their research should “empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (McLaren, 1994, p. 168). Critical theory pays attention to the educational ideas, policies, and practices that serve the interests of the dominant class while simultaneously silencing and dehumanizing the less dominant classes (Brown, 2004).

It is precisely in understanding the normative dimensions of education and how they are intertwined with social, structural, and ideological processes and realities that critical theory plays a key role (Beyer, 2001, p. 154).

Thus, the critical theorist leader looks at the school from the perspective of *all* stakeholders.

The focus of critical theory is raising awareness of the cultural dynamics that operate to oppress social groups and taking informed action to counteract the various forms of oppression within society. Brown (2004) adds that critical social theory calls educators to activism. Freire (1970) highlighted ways in which education can either be oppressive or liberating. He brought attention to the ways in which traditional forms of education functioned to maintain an oppressive status quo. Using an approach that Freire calls “banking education,” many traditional educators see knowledge as an inert body of facts

that needs to be “deposited” into the student by the teacher, who possesses the important information. Such an approach only serves those in power, and has the potential to be harmful and alienating to non-dominant groups. Activist educators on the other hand stand between the constituent base and the power holders (Brown, 2004) and have an ability to organize “reflectively for action rather than for passivity” (Freire, 1985, p. 82)

McLaren (1998) says that the status quo oppresses certain social groups through “unintended outcomes of the schooling process” or the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is composed of messages conveyed or implied by the manner in which school activities are conducted or by the choices of what to teach and what not to teach. The lens of the hidden curriculum, a central concept in critical theory, allows one to see the difficulties that may arise from the “unintended outcomes of the schooling process”(p. 43).

Educators and researchers concerned with applying critical theory to these circumstances have expanded on the work of previous scholars (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1994, 1998) and have developed what has come to be known as critical pedagogy or equity pedagogy. The use of these approaches may hold considerable promise for changing the “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Wink (2000) offers this definition of critical pedagogy:

Critical pedagogy is a prism that reflects the complexities of the interactions between teaching and learning. It highlights some of the hidden subtleties that may have escaped our view previously. It enables us to see more widely and more deeply. This prism has a tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political, and even economic conditions, and it does all of this under the broad view of history. After

looking through the prism of critical pedagogy, it seems clear that the basics aren't as basic as they used to be, or at least not as basic as we used to think (Wink, 2000, p. 30).

In relationship to this study, critical theory will support the concept of providing "voice" for students in educational research and provide a lens for examining the processes involved in promoting those voices to be heard.

Critical Theory and the Millennial Generation

The current generation, also known as the millennial generation, consists of children born between 1982 – 2003. In a 1999 address before the World Future Society, William Strauss shared his opinion that millennials are regular kids with core values and zero tolerance for injustice. In fact, Marx (2000) asserted that this generation needs to have a voice. They will expect to be heard and have a voice in decisions that affect them and their futures. That means educators will need to listen keenly and get to know their students better. "Our view of kids needs to open up, become more inclusive, and be more concerned about the process of learning," submits Mary Beth Blegen, teacher in residence at the U.S. Department of Education (Marx, 2000, p. 40).

In addition, many students perceive that they are be treated with what the Mott Foundation (1988) termed adultism:

The disrespect by the adult world towards the intelligence, capabilities, judgment, emotional life, leadership, and physical being of young people. Young people are considered to be less important and in a sense inferior to adults. The adult world cannot seem to trust young people's ability to make intelligent decisions and develop creative solutions for the issues affecting their lives (p. 26).

Adulthood assumptions have encouraged schools to establish structures of authority and control, which reproduce systemic inequalities in the wider society and run counter to democratic pedagogy (Hepburn, 1983; Radz, 1983; Wallin, 2003). According to the Coalition for Essential Schools, “when students experience real practice in the democratic process, school becomes a political laboratory for democracy, not a benevolent dictatorship” (HORACE, 1994).

Church (2001) claims that youth are not stakeholders in meaningful decision-making, yet they have the most at stake. They are not nurtured as liquid assets but more often as liabilities. In order for youth to be legitimate stakeholders and to be viewed as assets, Church asserts that it will require the breakdown of what she calls the Adult Superiority Syndrome: (1) Imagining the capacities for vision, drive, passion, and social consciousness are directly proportional to candles on a birthday cake; (2) Supposing that kids have vicarious intellects dragged around on parents’ leashes waiting to be instructed; (3) Assuming that kids are simply students – empty vessels sitting with hands folded in a classroom waiting to be filled with teacher’s wisdom; (4) Forgetting that in a short time young people will be mature people acting on the skills and principles developed during the formative years; and (5) Not taking youth leadership seriously (Church, 2001, pp. 218-19).

When looking at schools through the lens of invitational education and the lens of critical theory, an inherent conflict with the status quo becomes visible. Policy makers and school leaders generally do not include the student voice in decision making. In addition, schools are considered to be a central tenet to maintaining the free enterprise

system and democracy, yet it appears that most schools are not designed as democratic institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Some observers have characterized present conditions in schools in discouraging terms. Brophy (1998) observed that among other things, compulsory attendance, lack of choice in curriculum, and concerns about evaluation contribute to a less than desirable climate from the student perspective:

It's hard to just enjoy an activity...when the activity is compulsory and your performance will be evaluated, especially if you fear that efforts will not be successful (Brophy, p. 12).

Goodlad (1994) has noted the isolation of principals and teachers and the need for people and resources to get closer to students. In fact, research shows that the perception of students concerning their school becomes the reality and that those perceptions constitute the climate of the school (Haplin & Croft, 1962; Howard, 1986; James & McIntyre, 1996; Dodd, 1995).

The students' perspective of their secondary school experience has implications for school leaders. Researchers suggest that strong instructional leadership is associated with school effectiveness (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Sergiovani, 1987; Smith & Andrews, 1989) and that principals' practices influence teachers (Gomez & Jamachain, 1989; Seay & Blasé, 1992; Spalding, 1994) and student achievement (Davidson, 1987; Heck, 1992; Heck & Marcoulis, 1993; Mendez-Morse, 1991). This study will examine students'

perceptions of the secondary school experience and its implications for the principal as instructional leader.

With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, also known as the “No Child Left Behind” Act, schools are mandated to assess students’ knowledge with standardized tests that measure their knowledge of established standards to meet adequate yearly progress mandates. This means that schools and students will be judged, to a great extent, according to student test scores. Test scores are the only “voice,” albeit an indirect voice, that students have in the educational system. The essential question for the school leader then becomes: How can the principal better utilize the actual experiences of students as data to improve his or her role as the instructional leader and to increase student achievement?

Purpose and Rationale

Purkey and Novak (1996) claimed that most schools are involved in some sort of school improvement process. Whether they call it restructuring or reforming, they are developing action plans to do better. Many of the schools are successful in this process while others tend to be more mechanical in nature. The state of Utah, like other states, has embraced the research literature that indicates the positive outcomes of school improvement plans (Fitzpatrick, 1998 & Bernhardt, 1999). In fact, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) has tied the accreditation of schools with a school profile (self-analysis) and a school improvement plan. Of course, the process of self-study is not new, but the goal of school self-evaluation is educational improvement (Pazaruski & Rasp, 1990). The process is supposed to involve the efforts of faculty, parent, and student

committees which, over the course of as much as two year's time, evaluate existing school programs and practices and develop plans for future action that are focused upon student achievement. Based upon the personal experience of the researcher as a state accreditation facilitator and visiting team chairman, most of the work is completed by teachers and administrators with some input from parents and very little or no input from students.

In addition to embracing the concept of school improvement plans that are part of the accreditation process, the USOE has adopted (by mandate from the Utah Legislature) the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS). U-PASS is a series of assessment systems that include criterion-referenced tests in language arts, mathematics and science, a direct writing assessment, a norm-referenced test (Stanford Achievement Test, 9th edition), the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (mastery is required for graduation), the Utah Alternate Assessment for students with severe learning disabilities, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

With the current attention on accountability that is based mostly upon standardized tests, it becomes compelling to study the school experience from the students' perspective. The purpose of this study is not to analyze traditional data from students, but to instead, examine the perceptions of secondary students based upon their schooling experience and its implications for school leaders.

Research Questions

This study will examine students' perceptions of their secondary school experience based upon their personal point-of-view. The following research questions will be used to

answer the problem statement of the study:

1. How do students perceive school climate in their school?
2. What factors in school climate do students consider valuable?
3. What changes in school climate need to occur to make the school experience more personally relevant?
4. What factors in school climate would contribute to increased student involvement?

Research Design and Method

A comparative case study will be the method of inquiry used in this study. According to Creswell (1994), in this design the researcher explores a “single entity or phenomenon bounded by time and activity and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (p. 12). Miles and Huberman (1994) define a case study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). Merriam (1988) defines a case study in terms of its end product: “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (p. 21). Merriam (1998) adds that she sees “the case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can ‘fence in’ what I am going to study” (p. 27). The case can be a person, a program, a group, a school, a community, or even a policy (Merriam, 1998).

A mixed design was chosen for this study to properly examine differing types of data collected from each school. Quantitative surveys will provide the breadth needed for student understanding and the qualitative focus group interview data will provide the

depth needed to understand the student perspective. The study will utilize a mixed-use design and will contain different types of data from two Utah high schools. Darlington and Scott (2002) claim that mixing methods has been the subject of considerable debate in the social sciences. Greene and Graham (1989) identify three positions: The purists, the pragmatists, and those taking the middle ground, situationalist approach. This research project will take the situationalist approach. The situationalists adhere to the notion of separate paradigms but value the increased understanding that can be obtained from examining aspects of social life from different perspectives (Filstead, 1979; Kidder & Fine, 1987; Oakley, 1999). Kidder and Fine (1987) say:

We share the call for 'synthesis', but at the same time, we want to preserve the significant differences between the two cultures. Instead of homogenizing research methods and cultures, we would like to see researchers become bicultural (p. 57).

In fact, the researcher chose a mixed design of both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data from focus groups to get the needed data to answer the research questions.

Each case will include descriptive statistical data from the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) student opinion inventory and qualitative focus group interview data from high school seniors. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) assert that group interviews are particularly useful when studying adolescents' perspectives on particular issues. They claimed that young people are stimulated to talk more expansively when others of their age join them. The purpose of the survey research will be to generalize from a sample so that inferences can be made about a particular population (Babbie, 1990). In this study, the survey data will be utilized to find out the students' perceptions of their school

experience. Focus group interview questions will be designed to answer why they have those perceptions, and how, through a critical theory lens, to work toward improving the school experience.

Data Needs

“A good respondent can express thoughts, feelings, opinions, and his or her perspective on the topic being studied” (Merriam, 1988, p. 76). Data for the comparative cases in this study will come from a sample of seniors from two Utah high schools. To protect the identity and confidentiality of the schools, fictitious names will be used. Color Country High School is located in Southwestern Utah. Central High School is located in the more populous Salt Lake County. The researcher will interview focus groups consisting of seniors at each high school.

Data Collection

The National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) Student Opinion Inventory was administered randomly to 400 juniors at Central High School and 155 juniors at Color Country High School in May, 2003. The NSSE survey is utilized by Utah schools to measure the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents as a part of the self-study for accreditation. The data generated from the surveys will be utilized to design interview questions for the focus group interviews at each school.

Unlike the instrument used in the NSSE, the researcher will function as the primary instrument in the collection of the focus group data. As is common in using qualitative methods, these data will be mediated through this human instrument, the researcher,

rather than through some inanimate instrument (Merriam, 1998). The use of multiple methods of collecting the data will ensure the triangulation of data sources and will secure the trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity (Borg & Gall, 1996). Jick (1979) adds that combining methods neutralizes bias. Bias is neutralized with the use of both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data. Another advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 1989). The multiple methods used in this study will include surveys, focus group interviews, and the theoretical framework of invitational theory and critical theory.

Definition of Terms

The following are operational definitions for this study:

Case Study: An intensive description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community (Smith, 1978; Merriam, 1998).

Critical Pedagogy: A prism that reflects the complexities of the interactions between teaching and learning. Its focus is to raise awareness of the cultural dynamics that operate to oppress social groups and taking informed action to counteract the various forms oppression within society (McLaren, 1998; Wink, 2000).

Focus Group: A group interview that is structured a particular way and that has specific and well-defined goals (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Leadership: "...The process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation" (Hersey & Blanchard,

(1977, p. 161).

Mixed-Methodology Design: The research mixes aspects of the qualitative and quantitative paradigm at all or many methodological steps in the research design (Creswell, 1994).

Qualitative Study: "...An inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based upon building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1-2).

School Climate: A general concept to describe the enduring quality of organizational life. It is defined by shared perceptions of behavior (Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Ashworth, 1995).

Student Voice: "...The concept of voice has several meanings, including the literal (representing speech and the perspectives of the speaker), metaphorical (the manner and qualities of the speaker's words), and political (a commitment to the right to speak and be represented)." (Britzman, 1989, p. 146)

Survey: A data collection process of asking questions of a sample of people (Fowler, 1988).

Delimitations

This study will limit itself to surveying 400 students at Central High School and 150 students at Color Country High School. Focus group interviews will be limited to 20 students at Central High School and 20 students at Color Country High School.

Limitations

The proposed sampling procedure and focus group interviewing procedure decreases the generalizability of the findings. This study may not be generalizable to all educational settings and may be subject to other interpretations. However, the researcher is not seeking generalizability, but instead is seeking a depth of understanding. This study is also limited in the scope of the school experience. This study will only address the quality of the instructional program, support for student learning, the school climate and environment, and student activities. In addition, the sample for this study is limited to two unique Utah high schools. Finally, the qualitative data were from focus groups interviewed with the researcher as reporter. The students were interviewed in their respective schools, but they were not observed in their natural classroom settings.

Significance of the Study

“The major reason for educational research is to develop a new knowledge about teaching, learning, and administration” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 4). This study will add to the educational knowledge base by giving “voice” to students in the realm of educational research. Following the critical theorist perspective, limited educational research actually looks at the school experience based upon the students’ own personal experience in the school system as a learner and participant. In addition, rarely is such data utilized to help the principal as instructional leader. “The work of authorizing student perspective is essential because of the various ways that it can improve current educational practice, re-inform existing conversations about educational reform, and point to the discussions and reform efforts yet to be undertaken” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). The significance of this study lies in the unfolding of a student perspective that will be used to inform and reform

school practice through the changes made by the instructional leader. This study may have the potential to serve as a model of school reform.

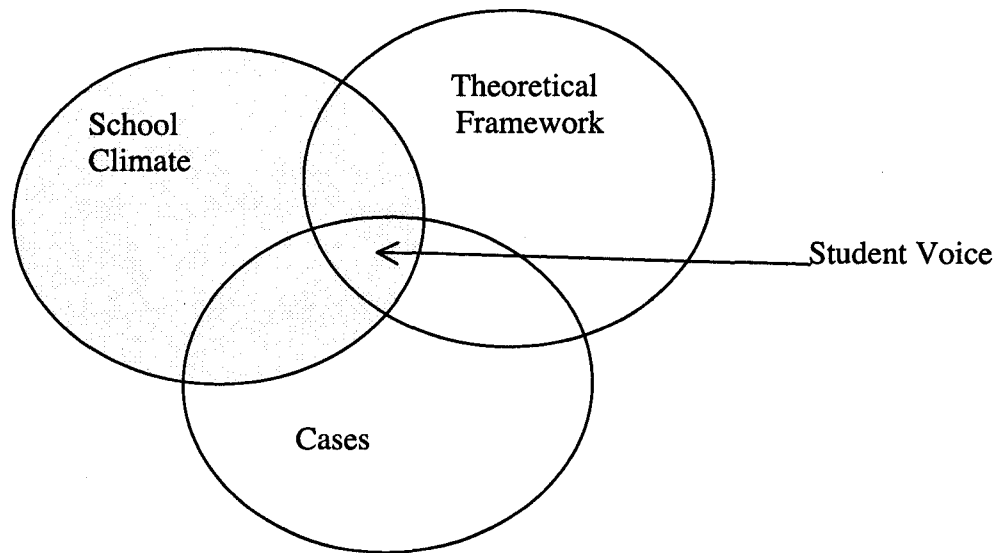
Summary

The research literature has indicated that the principal plays a vital role in school improvement (Barth, 1998). Without the vision, leadership, and abilities of the principal, effective and long term school improvement will not occur. Educational leaders may learn from “discoveries in biology, chemistry, and physics that challenge us to *reshape our fundamental world view*” (Wheatley, 1992, p. xi, emphasis added). Unfortunately, the principal seldom utilizes the student as a source of data to improve the school and improve leadership ability. Perhaps it is time for school leaders to “reshape our fundamental view of the world” and look to students to “enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 11) in schools. The study will look at the students’ perceptions of the school experience using critical theory and invitational education as the framework for this process.

The goal of invitational education is to create a total school environment that intentionally summons success for everyone associated with the school (Purkey & Strahan, 1995). However, it is imperative to use critical theory when analyzing the school experience from the students’ perspective. This study is not a study that is based upon traditional student measures such as criterion reference assessments and norm-referenced assessments. This study utilizes the student voice and provides voice for students in educational research. To achieve the goals of this study, it will be necessary to look at the interplay of the cases, school climate and the theoretical framework of invitational education and critical theory (see Figure 1). The highlighted area in figure 1

indicates the commonalities of the cases, school climate and critical theory and represents the student voice in this study.

Figure 1



The second chapter of this study presents a review of related literature as it aligns with the NSSE student opinion inventory. This will include instruction, support for student learning, school climate, and student activities. In addition, literature of student voice will be explored. It is important to note that literature reviewed will align with critical theory and invitational education so that a framework of democratic and constructivist schools can be presented.

The third chapter will explain the rationale for the method chosen; the researcher's potential for bias; selection of sites; selection of respondents; method of data collection; data analysis procedures; and the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study.

The fourth chapter will present the data gathered from the surveys and focus groups and the fifth chapter will include analysis and findings gathered from the data and will discuss conclusions, implications, and will present suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

To provide a framework for this study, the literature aligning with the categories of the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory will be explored. The NSSE survey is utilized in this study to measure student perceptions about the school experience as well as to help frame the questions for the focus group interviews. The major topics of the NSSE survey are quality of instruction, support for student learning, school climate factors, and student activities. In addition, student voice literature will be included. There is a plethora of literature as it relates to the topics outlined above and there are many avenues that could be utilized in this literature review. However, since this study is about the student voice and utilizes the theoretical framework of invitational education and critical theory, this review will focus upon literature that supports democratic, community and constructivist approaches to teaching, leading and learning. This review of literature will:

1. Analyze research concerning quality instruction as it relates to school improvement including keeping students on task, homework, and what students need to know, understand and be able to do in the 21st century.

2. Address the types of support for student learning including school guidance counselors, caring teachers, competent teachers, and home environment.
3. Review the literature and impact of school climate including perceptions and school climate, positive school climate, and physical setting and school climate.
4. Explore whether student activities enhance student achievement including sport involvement.
5. Review the literature about student voice.

Quality Instruction

Walberg (1984) found three major causal influences on student learning: aptitude, instruction, and environment. He concluded that the degree of student engagement and the overall quality of the instructional experiences were important influences on student academic achievement.

Wang, Walberg, and Haertel (1990) reported that program design variables, such as the quantity and quality of instruction, were directly linked to student academic achievement. They indicated that classroom instruction had nearly as much impact on student learning as student aptitude. Building on this work, Wang, Walberg, and Haertel (1993) confirmed that quality classroom instruction had a significant impact on student learning. They also suggested that the amount of instruction is an important variable reporting that “extensive research on quantity of instruction indicates that students need to be fully engaged in their academic pursuits and teachers need to make wise use of instructional time” (p. 76).

In an integrative review of seven areas of study, Ysseldyke, Christenson, and Thurlow (1987), investigated environmental and instructional factors related to student learning and subsequently presented ten empirically documented instructional strategies. While the implementation of these specific instructional factors may be complex, they found that student academic achievement increased when students were granted access to effective instructional strategies. Ogbu (1987) and Fordham (1988) argue that adolescents perform poorly and withdraw personal effort from academic learning when they perceive that school curriculum and systems do not reflect their own aspirations and culture or help them fulfill their own purposes. Successful high school programs for all students may depend on adapting curriculum and instruction to the unique interests and talents of each student (Clarke, 2000).

According to Gallimore and Tharp (1992), learning occurs best when (a) collaboration between students and teachers is accompanied by discussion; (b) instructional activities are meaningfully connected to students' prior experience and knowledge; and (c) instruction is dialectic and occurs within the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined by Vygotsky (1978) as "the difference between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Wink and Putney (2002) add:

Vygotsky theorized that, through dialogic and collaborative practices, learners personally reformulate a problem and then formulate a possible solution in their own words. What begins as a collective work is transformed as students take up, or

internalize, common language and knowledge of the collective to be used in their personal academic work (p. 102).

Teaching can also be viewed as a dialogic and dynamic process. The teacher can learn by observing what students “take up” and then using this information to design and redesign classroom activities (Wink & Putney, 2002). Finally, Vygotsky made clear that the ZPD’s practical significance was twofold: it is the only accurate measure of development and it is the crucial variable to take into account in creating pedagogy (Newman & Holzman, 1993).

An additional aspect of instructional quality is the degree to which the lesson makes sense to students (Slavin, 1995). Teachers must present information in an organized, orderly way (Kallison, 1986), note transitions to new topics (Smith & Cotton, 1980), use clear and simple language (Land, 1987), employ many vivid images and examples (Hiebert, Wearne & Taber, 1991; Mayer & Gallini, 1990), and frequently state and restate essential principles (Maddox & Hoole, 1975). In addition, lessons should be related to students’ background knowledge, using devices such as advance organizers (Pressley, Wood, Woloshyn, Martin, King, & Menke, 1992) and the teacher’s enthusiasm (Abrami, Leventhal, & Perry, 1982), and humor (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977) can also contribute to the quality of instruction.

In a recent comprehensive study of applying 35 years of research on instruction, Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identified instructional strategies that have the highest probability of enhancing achievement for all students in all subject areas at all grade levels. To prepare this study, researchers at Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a meta-analysis to analyze selected research studies on

instructional strategies that could be used by teachers in K-12 classrooms (Marzano, 1998). They identified nine research-based strategies that resulted in the higher levels of student academic achievement (see Table II)

Table I

Summary of Marzano's, Pickering's, and Pollock's Research on Instruction that Works

Instructional Strategy	Percentile Gain in Achievement
Identifying similarities and differences	45
Summarizing and note taking	34
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition	29
Homework and practice	28
Nonlinguistic representations	27
Cooperative learning	27
Setting objectives and providing feedback	23
Generating and testing hypotheses	23
Questions, cues, and advance organizers	22

Keeping Students on Task

After analyzing 64 research studies, Friedman and Fisher (1998) conclude quite conclusively that the more time students spend focused on the performance of assigned tasks that enable achievement of learning objectives without distractions, the more likely it is they will achieve the learning objectives. Although students' bodily presence may be

mandated and coerced, students control what they learn and will not continue to focus on the performance of assigned tasks if they do not want to (Friedman & Fisher, 1998).

Instructional planners and teachers must make every effort to ensure that students are ready to perform assigned tasks, that their interest in performing assigned tasks is stimulated, that the learning environment is conducive to performing assigned tasks, and that the students are given every opportunity to succeed in performing assigned tasks (Friedman & Fisher, 1998). Friedman and Fisher (1998) also indicated that when students spend more time on task, they show greater achievement levels in mathematics, reading, English, and biology.

Jones (2000) has observed what he calls “natural teachers” for 20 years. He found three characteristics in common: (1) They were not working hard at discipline management; (2) They were relaxed; and (3) They were emotionally warm.

At the very least, I learned that discipline management did not have to be humanless or stressful or time-consuming. You certainly do not have to wait until December to smile. Rather, these teachers had the simple luxury of enjoying the process of teaching. ... I learned something remarkable about natural teachers. They could not tell me what they were doing if their lives depended on it. They had no technology of management. They had *good instincts* (Jones, 2000, p. 5, emphasis in original).

Jones (2000) adds that the natural teachers make prevention center stage. Effective prevention includes mobility, proximity, “working the crowd,” excellence and accountability, rules and routines, meaning business, and say-see-do teaching (Tell the students what is expected. Show the students how to do what is expected. Have the students do what is expected).

One key factor associated with keeping students on task is classroom management. Marzano (2003) defines classroom management in four categories: (1) establishing and enforcing rules and procedures, (2) carrying out disciplinary actions, (3) maintaining effective teacher and student relationships, and (4) maintaining an appropriate mental set for management. Everston, Emmer, Clements, Sanford, and Worsham (1984) add the following concerning rules and procedures:

Rules and procedures vary in different classrooms, but we do not find effectively managed classrooms operating without them. It is simply not possible for a teacher to conduct instruction for children to work productively if they have no guidelines for how to behave, when to move about the room, and where to sit, or if they interrupt the teacher frequently and make whatever amount of noise that pleases them (p. 17).

One of the enduring tasks of teaching is the orchestration of classroom events so that they serve the curriculum goals of the teachers and the classroom. Everston (1987) found that teachers who were more effective (1) Planned before the year begins by being very aware of the physical space of the classroom and how to best use it; (2) Implement a planned management system that includes both the procedures and the course content; and (3) Maintaining the system throughout the year. These principles create classroom environments with better student engagement, less off task behavior, and less inappropriate and disruptive behavior (Everston, 1987).

According to the Effective Schools research (Pepperl & Lezotte, 1999), orderly does not have to mean rigid and oppressive. It is possible to have a climate that encourages students to enjoy school. One such way that effective classroom managers promote a positive climate is to give students many opportunities for cooperative group learning.

Cooperation requires a decision to cooperate on the part of the student. In order to learn cooperation, students must be taught cooperation (Jones, 2000). According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), there are five defining elements of cooperative learning: (1) Positive interdependence; (2) Face-to-face promotion interaction; (3) Individual and group accountability; (4) Interpersonal and small group skills; and (5) Group processing.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) found that the effective use of cooperative learning will increase student achievement by 27%. Kagan (1994) adds that the three most important outcomes of cooperative learning are academic gains, especially for minority and low achieving students, improved race relations, and improved social and affective development. In addition, the use of cooperative learning is effective in teaching character and caring (Kohn, 1991; Leming, 1993; Lickona, 1991, 1993; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). However, in order to get achievement results, cooperative learning groups based upon ability level should be done sparingly, they should be small in size, they should not be overused, and they require structure (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Kagan, 1994).

Homework

According to LaConte (1981), homework can be grouped into three categories: practice (reinforce newly acquired skills or knowledge), preparation (background information), and extension (student initiative and research). Homework can be defined as tasks assigned to students by teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours (Cooper, 2001). There is a general consensus in educational literature that homework does have a positive effect on learning through extending the time available for learning (Rutter, Mortimer, Ouston & Maughan, 1979; Knorr, 1981; Keith, 1982;

Cooper, 1989, 2001; Paulu, 1985). Research findings provide evidence that homework improves academic achievement for high school students if teachers plan it carefully and if the actual assignment has direct meaning to students (Cooper, 1989; Paulu, 1985). In addition, Cooper (2001) found that despite any negative aspects of homework, having so-called bad homework is still better than no homework at all.

Students know the difference between assignments that require and respect their individual perspectives and thought processes and those based on rote memorization and regurgitation (Glanville, 2002). North and Pillay (2002) add that homework that is not planned or designed correctly causes a loss of interest in academic material, physical and emotional fatigue, denial of access to leisure time and community activities, parental interference, cheating, and increased differences between high and low achievers. Parental involvement should be kept to a minimum, and practice assignments that focus on complex skills or processes should be utilized (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Cooper, 2001). Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) add that teachers need to clearly identify the purpose of the homework, and when homework is assigned, it should be commented on.

Cooper (2001) spent 15 years analyzing the literature concerning homework and conducting studies of his own. While he has found that there are some negative aspects of homework, having so-called bad homework is better than no homework at all. At the high school level, meaningful homework produces a gain of 24% in student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). However, when it comes to the student level, Cooper (2001) suggests that teachers should state clearly (1) How the assignment is related to the topic under study; (2) The purpose of the assignment; (3) How the

assignment might best be carried out; and (4) What the student needs to do to demonstrate the assignment has been completed. On the school level, leaders need to (1) Communicate the district and school homework policies to parents; (2) Monitor the implementation of the policy; and (3) Coordinate the schedule of homework among different subjects, if needed (Cooper, 2001).

Schools in the 21st Century

When analyzing the quality of instruction, it is compelling to look at the research literature as it relates to what students should know, understand and be able to do in the 21st century, and what schools of the 21st century should look like. Chaos theory (Wheatley, 1992) has interesting implications for the school of the future. The theory maintains that order can emerge out of chaos and that order is not imposed from without, but from within. Fixed and rigid systems for running organizations should be replaced by new models that provide flexibility and the capacity to change.

In 1996, the American Association for School Administrators (AASA) published their findings on what students of the 21st century needed to succeed (Uchida, Cetron, & McKenzie, 1996). A panel was chosen to participate in a modified Delphi study where participants were asked to repeatedly answer questions and comments in three rounds of surveys. The result was a report that made recommendations for academic content, essential skills, and behaviors. The common themes or directions for students of the 21st century included communication skills, respect, ethics, technology, clear standards, and social and cultural understanding.

A second report by the AASA was published in 1999 that focused on preparing schools and school systems for the 21st century (Withrow, Long, & Marx, 1999). Twenty

one leaders in business, government, and education identified 200 characteristics of schools and school systems that prepare students for the information age. Using a two-round quasi-Delphi process, the Council of 21 concluded with 16 characteristics of schools and school systems that prepare students for the information age. The authors noted, "In too many cases, education has focused on the needs of adults in the system rather than on the students" (Withrow, Long, & Marx, 1999, p. 7). The Council of 21 identified the following characteristics of student-centered schools and school systems for the 21st century:

1. All students are valued and provided the individual resources they need to succeed.
2. The primary focus of teaching and learning is the student.
3. Curriculum is flexible, student-focused, and purposely designed to help students achieve.
4. Students, teachers, parents, and other caregivers work together to address development of the whole child.
5. Low-income students have as many advantages in schools as wealthy students.
6. Every student is treated with respect.
7. High expectations exist for all students.
8. Learning experiences challenge students to grow and improve.
9. Each school focuses on the needs of its customers – children and parents, first and foremost – along with society at large.
10. All students have equal access to technology resources (Withrow, Long, & Marx, 1999).

Another noted document was released in 1996 that described a vision for school of the 21st century. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) along with the Carnegie Foundation published Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution. The report was a culmination of data from teachers, students and principals. Some of the recommendations in Breaking Ranks are that high school is a learning community, a transitional experience, and a place that teaches good citizenship. In addition, the report recommended that high school should provide a foundation of technology education, the importance of being interdependent with other nations, and that adults in high schools must be advocates for young people. In 2004, the NASSP released Breaking Ranks II. This updated report's core recommendations included collaborative leadership and professional learning communities, personalization and the school environment, and highly effective curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Murmane and Levy (1996) professed that the economy of the 21st century will change must faster than the rate schools have improved. They proposed that the school system should focus upon what they call the New Basic Skills. The New Basic Skills are the minimum skills people will need to get a middle class job. The New Basic Skills are (1) The ability to read at the ninth grade level or higher; (2) The ability to do math at the ninth grade level or higher; (3) The ability to solve semi structured problems where hypotheses must be formed and tested; (4) The ability to work with persons of various backgrounds; (5) The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing; and (6) The ability to use personal computers to carry out simple tasks like word processing. Unfortunately, Murmane and Levy claimed that nearly half of the nation's 17-year-olds leave high school without mastering the New Basic Skills.

Using web based resources, Thornburg, (2002) examined 500 job descriptions posted in the spring and summer of 2001 that mentioned specific skills. He then constructed a table of the six most wanted workforce skills that he calls the New Skills. Thornburg added, “there is no point in arguing whether they (the New Skills) are in fact required – they are” (p. 58). His conclusions include the following:

- Technological fluency – “Simply stated, technological fluency is the capacity to use computers and the Internet as naturally as you would books, pens, or paper.”
- Communication Skills – “You can have the best ideas in the world, but unless you can express them concisely and clearly they will never be implemented.”
- Teamwork – “...the lone wolf worker is an anomaly these days.”
- Collaboration and Leadership – “is required at virtually every level of a modern company.”
- Problem Solving and Creativity – “Numerous job descriptions described successful applicants as ones with high tolerance for ambiguity, who could solve problems, think ‘outside the box,’ demonstrate strong analytical skills, and learn new procedures, tools, and ideas quickly” (p. 58).

However, Thornburg claims that in order for the New Skills to be taught, learning must be contextual and school is a process and not a place. Thornburg concludes that we should question the validity of assumptions about education that have remained unchallenged.

Support for Student Learning

Eaker, DuFour and DuFour (2002) assert that educators should continually ask themselves these questions: “What do we expect students to learn? How will we know what students have learned? How will we respond to students who aren’t learning” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 12)? They conclude that schools must develop systemic procedures and interventions for students that are not learning. Students who encounter consistent failure and disapproval will move from negative self-talk (“I’m so stupid,”) to learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). Learned helplessness is the reaction to giving up. The student says to him or herself, “There’s nothing I can do to change anything.” Educators often mistake this lapse into total apathy as lack of motivation (Purkey, 2000). Purkey (2000) adds that educators should shift their energies away from a “doing to” process of trying to motivate students to a “doing with” process of encouraging students to choose beneficial directions for the basic drive toward fulfillment. Eaker, DuFour and DuFour (2002) calls this quest the “pyramid of interventions” so that students have a support system in place to help them succeed in school.

Hope has a human face. The most powerful fuel for sustaining the initiative to improve a school is not the desire to raise test scores but rather the moral imperative that comes with the desire to fulfill the hopes of those we serve and those with whom we work (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 11).

School Guidance Counselors

The counselor’s role in the school has been discussed widely in the literature, but there has been no agreement on appropriate functions (Keating, 1975). Role definition has

historically been a problem for the school counselor. Gysbers and Henderson (1994) stated that “because our programs have not been well defined, people have had unrealistic expectations about counselors and the services counselors can and should provide” (p. 245).

Hitchner and Tifft-Hitchner (1987) contend that counselors should be seeing and helping students. They stated, “Your essential role as a counselor is to communicate with your counselee so that they are able to develop a more suitable and realistic self-image, become better aware of education and career opportunities and then combine this understanding of self and opportunities to make informed decisions” (p. 42).

The comprehensive developmental approach is relatively new to guidance program conceptualization and delivery. Until recently, the content of guidance, including decision-making, problem solving, and communicating has received little emphasis and has been of secondary importance. Gysbers and Henderson (1994) cited the following concerning the role and function of the counselor:

Counselors are expected to teach the guidance curriculum; assist students to develop their individual plans; counsel, consult, and refer students and others in response to their specific problems and needs; cooperate with other school staff in needed support of their programs; pursue their own professional growth; and develop and implement and effective guidance program (p. 145).

While a counselor cannot provide all the assistance that both children and staff need, the counselor can be part of a learning community that helps the school achieve its major purpose, which is effective education for every child. As a member of the school staff, a colleague of teachers and administrators, the school counselor works with those

individuals on the major task of helping students gain optimum benefits from their educational experiences. The school counselor is an educator with special training and special interest in guidance and counseling. In Utah, the State Board of Education adopted the Gysbers model of counseling. Each secondary student in grades 7-12 should have a Student Educational Occupation Plan meeting each year with the counselor and the student's parents. The purpose of this conference is to help the student to make choices that affect his or her future, discuss career options, and provide support for student learning.

In relationship to support for student learning, Gysbers and Henderson (2001) summed it up this way:

Some of the dissatisfaction of youth with education stems from the feeling that what they are doing in school is not relevant to their lives. A comprehensive guidance program is needed to seek to create relevance in the schools and to show individuals how the knowledge, understandings, and skills they are obtaining and the courses they are taking will help them as they progress through their life careers (p. 60).

Counselors can also provide support for student learning through counselor watch (meeting with feeder school officials to identify needy students before high school begins), counselor check (meeting often with students who are failing classes), and keeping track of student achievement data (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Reeves, 2004).

Caring Teachers

Noddings (1984) has argued for a pedagogy of care that is centered on relationships between people and ideas under consideration in schools. She called for "taking relation

as ontologically basic” (Noddings, 1984, p. 4). Shields (2004) interpreted Noddings’ pedagogy of care to mean that relationships make up the basic fabric of human life and must not be pushed to the periphery of educational considerations. Noddings (1984) recommended that schools and teaching be redesigned so that caring has a chance to be initiated. Empathic education requires understanding caring as a value and a cognitive commitment, not just an emotion (Shields, 2004). Therefore, caring cannot and must not resemble pity. An empathic education is one firmly grounded on positive interpersonal and pedagogical relationships (Noddings, 1984). Grumet (1995) concluded that our “relationships to the world are rooted in our relationships to the people who care for us” (p. 19).

Through respect, courtesy, shared responsibility, and a sense of community, teachers convince students that they are working together and that everyone is wanted and needed in the classroom (Haberman, 1995). Experienced, highly committed, caring teachers effectively promote the academic success of all their students (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992). In a study involving 241 high school freshmen, Niebuhr and Niebuhr (1999) found a positive correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and academic achievement.

At least four actions are essential for a teacher to establish positive relationships with their students. First, a teacher must show students a high level of trust (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Second, a teacher must show students that they care about the students as individuals (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Third, a teacher must communicate to students that they are willing to help them learn by creating a learning environment where students are not afraid to take risks (Parsley & Cocoran, 2003).

Fourth, teachers must build a supportive classroom environment, including the use of positive reinforcement, where students feel like they belong (Morganett, 1991).

Haberman (1991) argues that too many teachers use power and control rather than democratic principles in managing the classroom. For example, some teachers require students to complete drill and practice activities without showing the students any connections between the assignment and the students' lives (Parish, Eubanks, Aquila, & Walker, 1989). On the other hand, master teachers make learning as real, relevant, and interesting as possible by utilizing techniques such as thematic instruction, discovery, and inquiry (Haberman, 1995). Parsley and Corocoran (2003) stated that "limited government funding is no excuse for school failure" (p. 86). Williams (2000) and Conrath (2001) added that teachers should not accept excuses for failure and they should require their students to be on task at all times.

As part of a comprehensive study of school reform, Peart and Campbell (1999) asked one student what she would change about her school experience so that she would have been more successful. She said, "Actually having teachers care. Some teachers did, but some teachers just didn't care" (Peart & Campbell, 1999, p. 272). Coppedge and Shreck (1988) found that what really mattered to students were the teachers' human qualities. McEwan (2002) adds that highly effective teachers recognize and manage the tension between caring and control. In fact, Aspy and Roebuck (1977) found that students in high-facilitative classrooms (high levels of teacher understanding, caring and genuineness) made greater gains in academics and had fewer disciplinary problems.

Competent Teachers

A large body of literature supports the relationship between teacher competency and student academic achievement. Research on effective teaching associates teacher competency (background in content and subject matter in which they are teaching) with student academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Holt-Reynolds, 1999; Wenglinsky, 2000). Darling-Hammond (2000) conducted a 50-state study of policies for teacher education, licensing, hiring, and professional development and her findings suggested a relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. More specifically, Darling-Hammond (1996 & 2000) believed that the strongest influence on how well students performed on national assessments was the competence of teachers (fully certified and/or licensed and had knowledge and skills in their content area).

Darling-Hammond (1996 & 2000) suggested that the most consistent factor associated with student academic achievement is closely tied to teachers that are fully licensed and certified. Goldhaber and Brewer (1999) also contended that students who are taught by certified teachers performed better than students taught by teachers with no certification. Stronge (2002) also concluded that well qualified, fully prepared teachers are more likely to recognize the individual needs of students and provide students with more effective opportunities to learn. In Texas, the literacy levels of teachers were more closely related with student performance than any other inputs (Ferguson, 1998) and in Alabama the ACT scores of future teachers were the best predictors of the gains their students would make (Ferguson & Ladd, 1996). In relationship to teachers certified by the National Board for Teaching and Standards and student achievement, Vandevoot, Amrein-Beardley, and Berliner (2004) concluded that gains made by students of Board certified

teachers were over one month greater than the gains made by the students of non-Board certified peer teachers.

Finally, McEwan (2002) analyzed qualitative and quantitative literature regarding the traits of effective teachers with focused attention on the relationship between what teachers do while they are teaching and how well they achieve. She then asked educators and students to rank the list and add comments. Ten traits emerged from this process that aligned in the categories of personal traits, teaching traits, and intellectual traits. The traits include mission-driven and passionate (Fried, 1995; Kohl, 1984), positive and real (Banner & Cannon, 1997; Kottler & Zehm, 2000), teachers as leaders (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Gardner, 1989; Meichenbaum & Beimiller, 1998; Pellicer & Anderson, 1995), with-it-ness (Saphier & Gower, 1997; Wong & Wong, 1998), style (Codell, 1999; Johnson, 1995; Mathews, 1988), motivational expertise (Kameenui & Darch, 1995; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Saphier & Gower, 1997), instructional effectiveness (Hunter, 1967, 1982; Joyce & Weil, 1996; Saphier & Gower, 1997), book learning (English, 1992; Palmer, 1998), street smarts (Delpit, 1995; Eckert, 1989; Finn, 1999; Freire, 1998; Heath, 1983; Kozol, 1991; Payne, 1998), and a mental life (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Palmer, 1998).

Home Environment

Ashton and Webb (1986) reported that, “positive relationships between the school and the home are important for student achievement” (p. 20). Further, they looked to a reanalysis of the Coleman Report (1966) conducted by Mayseke (1972) that contended that the home environment had an even stronger influence on student achievement than originally believed.

Walberg (1984) found parental support of school activities to be associated with student learning. Later, Wang, Walberg, and Haertel (1990 & 1993) indicated that the category “home environment” has been well documented as a strong influence on students’ academic achievement. One example of a positive home environment is parental facilitation in the completion of homework.

Foertsch (1992) studied background factors that are closely related to reading instruction and reading performance and found that students who reported home support for literacy had higher average reading achievement. Patrick (1993) said that a home environment that promotes reading, emphasizes and ensures completion of homework and limits television viewing may be an important influence on student academic achievement. Griffin (1996) concluded that schools with high levels of parental support and involvement enhance student academic achievement.

Parental involvement has been thought to have a strong influence on student academic achievement. Henderson and Berla (1994) suggested that the family makes tremendous contributions to student academic achievement. A home environment that supports student learning is more important than other student and family demographic variables such as family income or parental education levels.

School Climate

School learning climate was defined by Hoy and Miskel (1991) as a broad term that referred to students’ perceptions of the environment of the school, distinguished one school from another, and influenced the behavior of the students. Freiberg and Stein

(1999) added that school climate is about the quality of the school that helps each individual feel personal worth, dignity and importance. School climate is a relatively enduring quality of the entire school that is experienced by members, describes their collective perceptions of routine behavior, and affects their attitudes and behavior in the school (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Climate has also been referred to as the “personality” of the school (Haplin & Croft, 1963). Finally, Joyce and Slocum (1982) defined organizational climate as the shared perceptions of the acquired meaning and values evident in the workplace.

Perceptions and School Climate

It is widely accepted that the perceptions of individuals influence their behavior and their learning. According to Baller (1965), the essence of perception is:

the observation and identification of objects and happenings in one’s world and the attaching of significance to them. Perception is an amazingly complex process. There is much about its explanation that challenges the best efforts of researchers; there is much about it that deserves the most thoughtful consideration of teachers and others who would try to understand the way individuals view their world and themselves.

The way an individual’s world looks to him – how he perceives the objects events in it – furnishes much of the basis for his decisions and his actions (Baller, 1965. p. 194).

Dodd (1995) found through her years of teaching that “understanding students’ perspectives was the best way to foster engagement and learning” (p. 64). She noted that

What teachers need most to know about students is hidden; unless they develop a trusting relationship with their students, teachers will not have access to the

knowledge they need either to solve classroom problems or to motivate students (Dodd, 1995, p. 65).

The concept of climate has its roots in the field of industrial psychology and its focus on determining specific environmental influences, which increase motivation and produce behavior. James and McIntyre (1996) believed that the foundations of climate, unlike that of culture, lay in the individual's cognition and perception of the surrounding environment. Howard (1986) said that the essence of school climate is the patterns of shared perceptions about a school and its members (teachers, students, parents, and community members), which are relatively enduring over time. It is a psychological construct that people respond to their environment based upon their perceptions.

The perceptions of the members of an organization have been a critical ingredient of climate research and have provided basic evaluative data in schools since the mid-1960s (Haplin & Croft, 1962), and are an important component of this current research. The assumption that there is a direct connection between an individual's perception of the work setting, routines, and rewards and that individual's behavior has been preeminent (Howard, 1986) and that those perceptions constitute the climate of the organization. Purkey and Novak (1996) maintain that behavior is based on perceptions and that perceptions are learned, and perceptions can be reflected upon.

Of all the perceptions that people learn, none seem to affect one's search for personal significance and identity more than self-perception – a person's view of who one is and how one fits in the world (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 25).

Haplin and Croft (1962) found that the perceptions staff, students, parents and administrators held about a school learning environment were important because the

perceptions were, in fact, reality for most of those involved. Indeed, the perceptions and self-concepts of students are heavily influenced by those who treat them as able, valuable, and responsible, as well as by those who treat them as unable, worthless, and irresponsible (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Positive School Climate

Research literature has often cited a positive learning climate for students has a positive influence on academic performance. Haertel, Walberg, and Weinstein (1983) identified several theoretical constructs that were consistently represented as causal influences on academic achievement. They found that the psychological environment is a primary influence on student learning.

Welhage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) studied fourteen schools that were considered effective schools even though they consisted of populations of students that they regard as academically at-risk and identified school membership and sense of belonging as primary determinants of success. Essentially, this study indicated the importance of building a climate for sense of belonging. Within this context, Alderman (1999) asserted:

When students experience a sense of belonging in a school context, they are more likely to adopt goals valued by the school. In contrast, a context that does not allow for satisfaction ...student motivation will diminish and lead to alienation and poor performance (p. 172).

She also suggested that establishing a positive academic climate may help minimize the effects of other variables such as socioeconomic status and home environment.

According to Witcher (1993), characteristics of a positive school climate include: an emphasis on academics, an ambiance of caring, a motivating curriculum, professional collegiality, and a closeness to parents and community. Sweeney (1988) identified ten factors that schools with “winning” school climates have in common: supporting and stimulating environment, student-centered orientation, positive expectations, feedback, rewards, sense of family, closeness to parents and community, communication, achievement and trust. Newman and Wehlage (1995) assert:

If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff (p. 37).

Silberman (1970) noted that children are taught a host of lessons about values, ethics, morality, character, and conduct every day of the week, not as much by the content of the curriculum but rather by the way the schools are organized, the way teachers and parents behave, the way they talk to children and to each other, and the kinds of behavior they approve or reward or disapprove or punish. These lessons are far more powerful than the verbalizations that accompany them. As a result, these elements make a positive impact on school climate.

Duttweiler (1988), suggested that school learning climate was the major factor in the school’s success as a place for learning. The presence of a positive social climate in school, as reported by Sweeney (1992), fosters academic excellence among students and creates an achievement-oriented environment. Grummet (1989) also said that what takes place in the classroom is linked to what goes on in the corridors, lunchroom, principal’s office, teacher’s lounge and buses. However, a school that seeks improvement needs

more than just a warm, friendly place. School personnel should concern themselves with achievement by establishing high expectations, challenging students and teachers, assessing performance, and holding individuals accountable (DuFour & Eaker, 1992).

Effective schools researchers have also identified seven correlates that promote a positive learning climate and also emphasize the important role of the instructional leader: (a) collaborative problem solving and decision making between the administrator and teachers, (b) an instructional leader who models behavior that is congruent with the instructional goals of the school, (c) high expectations that students from all socio-economic levels will master the basic skills, (d) a safe and orderly environment, (e) curriculum that has continuity across grade levels and instructional delivery which maximizes learning time and promotes student success, (f) frequent monitoring of student progress using a variety of evaluation methods, and (g) involving parents and the community (Duttweiler, 1988).

In their school climate research, Johnson, Johnson, and Zimmerman (1996) showed that middle school and high school students perceived that the affective-experiential dimensions of respect, trust, morale, and caring were priorities versus the cognitive-managerial dimensions of academic and social growth, cohesiveness, school renewal and opportunity for input. Trust and morale were rated the highest. However, the difference in “What Should Be” and “What Is” in the opportunity for input was the most pronounced by students. The students perceived that they were not asked for input about school matters. These were important factors that must be considered when developing plans to improve the teaching and learning climate.

As students move from elementary grades through the middle grades and onto high school, students perceive school climate to be more negative, teacher support to be less and classroom environments to be less healthy (Freiberg and Stein, 1999). Improving school climate requires a consistent effort and reflection upon the issues that have led to current conditions. Freiberg and Stein (1999) suggest that the following questions should be addressed:

1. Start with your senses and ask yourself: How does the school look, feel, and yes, taste – would I eat in the student cafeteria?
2. What direct and indirect climate measures can be used to help document and create a baseline for change?
3. What initial climate changes can we make that would have the highest visibility and be accomplished in the shortest period of time?
4. What groups or individuals should be involved to encourage and create an environment for sustainable school climate improvements?
5. What long-term changes are needed to create a healthy environment for all members of the community (Freiberg & Stein, 1999, p. 25)?

Physical Setting and School Climate

Moos (1979) found that the physical setting could influence the social climate through student reactions to architecture, which promoted isolation or cohesion between students. Cohesive styles of building design would encourage social interaction, while the long corridors extended layouts, bolted rows of desks, and disjointed features associated with isolated designs would inhibit such behavior. Safe and well-maintained schools are

important influences on student attitudes and achievement. Purkey (2000) argues that “there is no excuse for self-imposed squalor in a school” (p. 81).

Berner’s (1993) research in the District of Columbia emphasized that the physical condition of the school does have an impact on student achievement and school climate. Pepperl and Lezotte (1999) maintain that a “poorly maintained school building gives a message to students that nobody cares about their school. If the adults don’t care, why should they” (p. 55)? Comer and Edmonds (1989) conclude:

It matters whether or not you repair a broken window. It has less to do with windows and more to do with the fact that if it stays broken, you’ll see it for a long time, and you’ll conclude that nobody cares about the school (p. 18).

School Activities and Student Achievement

Mayton (1990) reported a positive, significant relationship between Structured Extracurricular Activities (SEA) participation and life satisfaction in a sample of high school students. Moreover, school-aged students who report higher overall life satisfaction generally report less dissatisfaction with their school experiences (Gilman & Huebner, 2000), greater satisfaction with their family life (Dew & Hubner, 1994), and greater satisfaction with their friends (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001) than do adolescents who report lower overall satisfaction. Larson and Verma (1999) define structured extracurricular activities as discretionary activities that are physically or mentally stimulating to the individual and contain some structured parameters (i.e., school-sponsored events, peer tutoring, participation in athletics, volunteering for service)

as opposed to unstructured activities in which the individual assumes primarily a passive role (e.g., television viewing).

Research findings have yielded a number of positive benefits from participating in SEAs, especially as they pertain to academic outcomes (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Gerber, 1996; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marsh, 1992). Related research has noted that participation in activities for the mere benefit of social affiliation enhances an individual's sense of competence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Isaac, Sansone, & Smith, 1999) and facilitates positive changes in self-esteem (Larson & Verma, 1999; Marsh, 1992). Black (2002) added that schools that encourage students to participate in SEAs show significant declines in discipline problems and dropout rates.

Rombokas (1995) interviewed 292 college students and collected data on social and academic achievement. She found that those who participated in SEA's had higher intellectual and social development than those that did not participate in SEAs. Rombokas concluded that in many cases SEA's are the only component that causes some students to stay in school and attend school regularly. Holloway (1999) also found that SEAs provide all students, including those in remedial or advanced classes, with an "academic safety net" (p. 31). In a study of seven southeastern public schools, Mahoney (2001) followed 695 children to age 24 and determined that independent of risk variables such as living in poverty, boys and girls that participated in SEAs were less likely to drop out or be arrested.

Marsh (1992) reported that students participating in more extracurricular activities reported significantly higher academic self-concept, which also influenced other

educationally relevant outcomes such as grade point average, time spent on homework, and taking advanced classes. Marsh (1992) hypothesized that participation in such activities helps the student to identify with their school and school values, which facilitates academic growth.

In a recent study conducted by Gilman (2001), he found that adolescents that participated in greater numbers of SEAs reported significantly higher school satisfaction than adolescents with minimal or no participation in activities. Another finding was that greater participation in SEAs influences students' perceived quality of their school experiences. However, Gilman (2001) says that the most interesting finding in his study was that students who rated themselves high in prosocial disposition were not necessarily those that participated in higher numbers of SEAs. He suggested that one or two meaningful activities that promoted social connection were enough to enhance their school satisfaction.

Sport Involvement

Numerous researchers have identified physical activity as an important vehicle for enhancing the way people feel about themselves (Caruso & Gill, 1992; Fox & Corbin, 1989). Greene and Ignico (1995) examined the effects of a ten-week extracurricular activity program and observed that children involved in exercise reported significantly higher athletic competence and global self-esteem compared to the control group. In addition, Jaffee and Wu's (1996) findings indicated that girls that participate in after school physical activities felt more competent and tend to have higher body esteem compared to those involved in non-physical activities or those that do not participate in any school activities.

Task-oriented adolescents define success in terms of self-referenced criteria including task mastery, fulfillment of one's potential, and skill improvement (Ames & Archer, 1988; Nicholls, 1992). In contrast, ego-oriented adolescents develop success perceptions according to norm-referenced standards such as outperforming others and demonstrating superior ability with little effort (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987). The manner in which athletes perceive themselves within the academic realm is partly dependent on their identification with the athletic role (Ryska, 2003). Ryska's (2003) multivariate analysis reported that high school sport involvement reflecting a predominate ego participation is generally related to lower scholastic competence. Sport involvement characterized by task orientation and social identification with sport appears to be associated with greater scholastic competence.

Longitudinal studies on school sports have suggested that such participation raises students' grades and test scores (Fejgin, 1994; Hanson & Kraus, 1998, 1999). Hanson and Kraus (1998, 1999) found that participation in sports improves students' grades. Fejgin (1994) found that participation in sports in the 10th grade has a significant, positive effect on students' grades in the same year, controlling for performance in the 8th grade, and Hanson and Kraus (1999) found that for high school girls, participation in sports is related to higher achievement in science. Ryska (2003) added that when high school sport involvement is characterized by a task orientation, social identification with sport and relative autonomy it appears to be associated with greater scholastic competencies among both male and female student athletes. He also found that males reported greater academic and behavioral conduct competence and that females had higher levels of social acceptance and physical appearance competence.

Social capital is generally recognized as the ability to accrue benefits through membership in social networks (Portes, 1998). Coleman (1988) argued that the family is a primary site of social capital. Research has indicated that both human and social capital in the family play vital roles in a child's educational success (Coleman, 1990; Parcel & Dufur, 1998). Broh (2002) concluded that:

It is possible that school activities, especially sports, which offer increased opportunities for familial and extra familial social interaction, create and strengthen social ties among students, their parents, and their teachers. These relations act as a source of social control that encourages students to comply with school norms and expectations and, in turn, have a greater success in school (p. 73).

Participating in sports in the 10th and 12th grades significantly increases social ties between students and parents, students and the school, parents and the school, and parents and parents (Broh, 2002). In addition, playing sports significantly increases how often students' talk with their parents about school related issues and increases students' contact with teachers outside of class (Broh, 2002).

Student Voice

Student voice can offer insights towards students' perceptions of reality. "As recipients of schooling, students often perceive conditions in school differently than the adults that work there" (Noguera, 2001, p. 22). Several years ago, Sarason (1972) wrote that any effort to alter the structure of organization of schools that ignored the culture and climate of schools would be doomed to failure. Students have the most impact in terms of setting the climate of the school. They are also the greatest problem solving resource.

In many schools, there is a “code of silence which in effect cuts off faculty from essential information” (Ventura Unified School District, 1997, p. 1).

One aspect that can impact the school climate is alienation. Some students can feel alienated from the mainstream. Cote and Allahar (1994) state, “Alienation is the state of being in which one has withdrawn or been separated from an object or group, and it represents both isolation and loss of status for the alienated group. Your in-between childhood and adulthood, occupy an uneasy position in our culture” (p. xv). Realizing that some students and subgroups feel alienated from the school for a variety of reasons is crucial to understanding student perspectives. Working to include the potentially alienated students and subgroups will improve the dynamics and help foster learning communities among students and staff (Powderly, 2002).

Many students and their teachers have histories that have led them to presume that school knowledge is created by authorities who are remote from students’ personal lives, and who, unlike students, have access to truth (Johnston & Nicholls, 1995).

Students will resist any process that disempowers them Familiar school routines produce this alienation: teacher talk, passive instruction in pre-set materials ... mechanical drills ... the denial of subjects important to them, the exclusion of student co-participation in curriculum design and governance, and the outlawing of popular idioms in favor of correct usage (Schor, 1986, p. 183).

If school is to foster student voice, conditions for democratic talk must be established in the classroom. If we expect change to occur in the students’ customary actions in schools, we must redefine their role to become active, not just passive recipients of knowledge (Bacon & Bloom, 2000).

Doing something out of a sense of compulsion is not all the same as doing it because one knows and feels that it is right the thing to do. The ultimate reason to give students a say is that it can help them to make their own decisions, to grow into ethical and compassionate people – not because it will make them internalize what we want them to do. Our decision about *how* we involve them in making decisions should be guided by what helps that to happen (Kohn, 1996, p. 83, emphasis in original).

Dahl (1995) argued that if school is about what students value and care about, then we need to know who students really are. She suggests that we listen to them, pay attention to what they show us about themselves and their views, and we should build classrooms that support and teach in light of those insights. Students' voices help us to understand what students need and value as learners (Dahl, 1995). Briscoe and Owens (1990) added, "If we are to understand the workings of schools, we should look first at the lowliest points in the application of power – the students... we must listen to the students voice their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about school" (p. 42).

When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993) and motivated to participate constructively in their education (Colstant, 1995; Sanon, Baxter, Fortune, & Opatow, 2001; Shulz & Cook-Sather, 2001). Cook-Sather (2002) maintains that the student perspective is essential in improving educational practice and reform. Cassel (2003) makes a case that it is fitting and proper in a democracy that high school seniors provide the principal with an evaluation or rating of the program that they have been the recipients of. This evaluation should be from the perspective of the student. He also made the following claim:

If the high schools of our nation are to be made better, and the if the 'nation at risk' report is right, they need to be made better; then the students who have been the real recipients of the program need to tell in an honest manner the nature of where and how such changes should be made. Any principal/superintendent, worth (their) weight in salt, should welcome an honest evaluation of their program from honest students who have no axe to grind in the process.... In a democracy such evaluation represents good citizenship, and should be encouraged; since the principals and superintendent should have nothing to hide in the process (Cassel, 2003, p. 434).

In 1992, Poplin and Weeres spent 18 months interviewing what they described as "voices from inside" the schools. One of the primary purposes of their work was to design processes that use the voices of students and the school community to reshape individual schools. They said, "We knew we had to create strategies that allowed everyone at the school site to speak and insured that everyone be heard" (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p. 43). Using multiethnic student voices as a centerpiece, they identified seven major issues from inside the classroom.

1. Relationships. Most often mentioned were relationships between students and teachers. Where positive things about the schools are noted, they usually involve reports of individuals who care, listen, understand, respect others and are honest, open and sensitive.
2. Race, culture and class. Many students of color and some Euro-American students perceive schools to be racist and prejudiced, from the staff to the curriculum.

3. Values. Our data suggest that parents, teachers, students, staff and administration of all ethnicities and classes, value and desire education, honesty, integrity, beauty, care, justice, truth, courage and meaningful hard work.
4. Teaching and Learning. Students, especially those past fifth grade, frequently report they are bored in school and see little relevance what is taught in their lives and their futures.
5. Safety. Students feel physically safest inside classrooms and least safe in large gatherings between classes or traveling to or from school.
6. Physical Environment. Students want schools that reflect order; beauty, space and contain rich materials and media.
7. Despair, Hope and the Process of Change. Participants are anxious for change and willing to participate in change they perceive as relevant. (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, pp. 12-16).

Shultz and Cook-Sather (2001) say that it is just recently that educational researchers have encouraged students to speak and to write about their experiences in school. They asked students in several schools to write about their experiences so that the “student voice” could be utilized to improve schools. They essentially found that students want to be treated as unique individuals who are connected to other individuals. In other words, they want to be respected and supported as they pursue the kinds of education they know they need. One student author summed it up this way:

I would love for people to hear me, what I think as a student. I know that there are a lot of students and that we are not necessarily heard as much as adults are. And no offense, but I think that a lot of adults don't quite see what kids are going through.

Because they have been out so long. And they don't understand, don't know where we're coming from (Marzan, Peterson, Lewis, Christian, & Gold, 2001, p. 101).

Summary

The first part of the review of literature analyzed research concerning quality instruction. The data showed that student academic achievement increased when students were granted access to effective instructional strategies (Ysseldyke, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1987; Wang, Walberg, & Haertel, 1993; Gallimore & Tharpe, 1992; Slavin, 1995; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). In addition, homework has a positive impact upon learning by extending the time available for learning (Rutter, Mortimer, Ouston, & Maughan, 1979; Knorr, 1981; Keith, 1982; Cooper, 1989; Paulu, 1985), but homework must have a purpose (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Glanville, 2002; North & Pillay, 2002). Finally, schools of the 21st century were reviewed. Researchers described what the 21st century school should look like and the skills that students will need in the 21st century economy (Uchida, Cetron & McKenzie, 1996; NASSP, 1996; Murnane & Levy, 1996; Thornburg, 2002).

The second section addressed the types of support for student learning. The research shows that guidance counseling (Hitchner & Tiff-Hitchner, 1987; Gysbers & Henderson, 1994, 2001), highly committed, competent and caring teachers (Haberman, 1995; Neibuhr & Neibuhr, 1999; Parsley & Corcoran, 2003; Morganett, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Holt-Reynolds, 1999; Wenglinsky, 2000; Stronge, 2002), and home environment (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Walberg, 1984; Wang, Walberg, & Haertel, 1990, 1993; Foertsch, 1992; Patrick, 1993; Griffin, 1996; Henderson & Berla, 1994) are key factors of support for students.

A review of the literature concerning school climate was included in the third section. An essential element of school climate is the shared perceptions that students have about the school (Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Haplin & Croft, 1963; Baller, 1965; Dodd, 1995; James & McIntyre, 1996). Positive school climate for students has a positive influence on academic performance (Haertel, Walberg, & Weinstein, 1983; Welhage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989; Alderman, 1999; Witcher, 1993; Sweeney, 1988; DuFour & Eaker, 1992; Freiberg & Stein, 1999).

The fourth section reviewed research concerning student activities and their impact upon student achievement. The literature concluded that structured extracurricular activities and school-sponsored athletics do have positive benefits, especially in relation to academic outcomes (Gilman & Huebner, 2000; Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Gerber, 1996; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marsh, 1992; Gilman, 2001; Fejgin, 1994; Hanson & Kraus, 1998, 1999; Ryska, 2003; Broh, 2002).

Student voice was addressed in the next section. Students have the most impact in terms of setting the climate of the school and their views cannot be ignored (Noguera, 2001; Sarason, 1972; Cote & Allahar, 1994; Powderly, 2002). Students' voices help us to understand what students need and value as learners and should be taken seriously (Dahl, 1995; Briscoe & Owens, 1990; Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993; Baxter, Fortune, & Opatow, 2001; Shulz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Cassel, 2003; Poplin & Weeres, 1992).

Chapter 3 is an in-depth review of the methods used in this study. This chapter provides an explanation for the selection of this research method, and enumerates the research bias, techniques for data collection, data needs, data sources, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Chapter 1 described that the purpose of this study is not to analyze traditional data about students, but instead, to examine the perceptions of students based upon their schooling experience and its implications for school leaders. Chapter 2 served as a review of the literature concerning quality of instructional programs, support for student learning, school climate, student activities, and student voice. In this chapter the research methods that guided this study will be presented, a description of the participants, information about the instrument, and the methods of data collection and analysis. The reliability, validity, generalizability of this method will also be addressed.

Design

This is a comparative case study analysis that utilizes both naturalistic and positivist paradigms. Patton (1982) asserts that a lot of research practice is based on habit rather than on situational responsiveness. Patton (1982) adds:

In nothing is this truer than in making methods decisions. Routine heuristics and paradigmatic blinders constrain methodological flexibility and creativity by locking practitioners into unconscious patterns of perception and behavior that disguise the habitual nature of their methods 'decisions' (p. 186).

The researcher should be active-reactive-adaptive which means the researcher may need to use any and all research methods that includes any and all data that will help shed light on research questions (Patton, 1980). Patton (1980) asserts that the “debate and competition between paradigms is being replaced by a new paradigm: *A paradigm of choice*” (p. 200, emphasis in original). The methods in this case were based upon the concept of *paradigm of choice* in that the surveys (positivist paradigm) and focus group interviews (naturalistic paradigm) were utilized for the comparative case study analysis.

Data from the student opinion inventory survey alone cannot answer the research questions. However, the survey data will provide additional demographical and school perception data. Interview questions for the focus group interviews will be based upon the survey data. The focus group interviews will provide more in-depth student perception data. The design for this study used the following protocol:

1. The NSSE Student Opinion Inventory was administered to juniors at Central High School and Color Country High School in May 2003.
2. Students at Central High School and Color Country High School were asked to provide additional demographic data and answer an open-ended question.
3. Surveys were scored and data analyzed.
4. Focus group interview questions for each school were derived from the survey data.
5. A deliberate process was utilized to select a diverse group of students with diverse school experiences for the focus groups.
6. The researcher interviewed the focus groups from each school at the school site.
7. The focus group interviews were transcribed.

8. Focus group interview data were analyzed for common themes in answering the research questions.
9. Implications for school leaders will be reported.

Research Questions

Based upon the problem and questions that will be addressed in this study, a mixed-use design methodology will be used. The case study design will be “fenced in” with focus group interviews and the use of surveys. This study will focus on how the “voice” of students and their perceptions of the school experience may have implications for the principal as instructional leader. The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive school climate in their school?
2. What factors in school climate do students consider valuable?
3. What changes in school climate need to occur to make the school experience more personally relevant?
4. What factors in school climate would contribute to increased student involvement?

Table II will delineate the research questions with which data sources will answer each question.

Table II

Research Questions Data Sources

Research Question	Data Source	Time of Collection
1	NSSE Survey and Open-ended survey question	May, 2003
2	Focus Group Interviews	January, 2004
3	Focus Group Interviews	January, 2004
4	Focus Group Interviews	January, 2004

Rationale for the Method

Researchers frequently debate the relative merits of the two popular paradigms used in determining the nature of reality: positivism or scientific inquiry and naturalistic inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1988) argue that the positivist paradigm is appropriate in controlled experiments, such as the field of chemistry or physics. However, they contend that naturalistic inquiry also has a place in social and behavioral research. The choice of paradigm should be made on the basis of fit between the “assumptions and postures of a paradigm and the phenomenon being studied or evaluated” (p. 56). For many researchers in education and social sciences, scientific inquiry, however appropriate to the “hard” sciences, is not well suited in the study of human behavior. According to Guba and Lincoln (1988), the results of this kind of research often proves to be “inconclusive, difficult to aggregate, and impossible to relate to the happenings in the real world” (p. x).

The selection of a research strategy is a decision that is based upon the problem or research question being presented by the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (1995) and

Yin (1994) suggest that the researcher ask three questions: What is the form of research question (e.g., describe or demonstrate distribution of such phenomenon)? Does the research require control over behavior, or does it seek to describe naturally occurring events? Is the phenomenon under study contemporary or historical? The researcher will analyze statistical data and the study of a real-life educational phenomenon. In this study the researcher will investigate students' perceptions of the school experience and its implications for school leaders. Based upon the desire to use quantitative survey data and qualitative real-life educational data, a comparative case study with a mixed methods design methodology will be used.

Characteristics of Case Study Research

Yin (1994) emphasizes that “the essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case studies that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result” (p. 12). It then becomes apparent that case studies are usually implemented when the researcher is asking essential questions. Yin also says that case studies are the preferred strategy when “the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define case study as “an intensive or complete examination of a facet, an issue, or perhaps the events of a geographic setting over time...a case is a snapshot of reality, a slice of life, or an episode” (p. 214). They explain that a case study often reads like a novel for the same reasons that novels are novels. That is, novels are often written to describe the complexities of life and “the way these interact to form

whatever it is the case portrays” (p. 214). The value of a case report is that it is able to represent the multiple realities found in natural settings. A case study also shares numerous interactions and conversations between researchers and respondents that are difficult to communicate in traditional, scientific report form such as quantitative methods.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) add that a case study should be able to transport the readers to the actual setting where the action is taking place. In the best of cases, the readers’ knowledge is enhanced because the case study allows them to bring their own prior knowledge to bear on the new insights. However, the authors are remindful that this kind of *déjà vu* experience occurs only when the case provides sufficient description-thick description so “then reading it is very similar to being there...” (p. 214).

The comparative case study in this project is an intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) indicates that a case is intrinsic when “we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case” (p. 3). This indicates that the researcher not only wants to understand what happened and why, but also, would like to tell the story.

Understanding the case is critical to the researcher. According to Stake, that understanding is derived from the uniqueness or “particularization” of the case, not generalization. He says, “We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how different from others but what it is, what it does” (p. 8).

Interpretation is a key to understanding the case. Stake explains that the qualitative researcher must maintain vigorous interpretation during data collection in order to represent well the multiple realities or complexities of the case as well as the “different

and even contradictory views of what is happening” (p. 12). Understanding can develop from thick description of the what, where, how, when, and why of the case. Stake (1997) defines thick description as a description of the case that reveals the perceptions and values of the people who belong to the case. This kind of in-depth description is produced when the researcher communicates not only what is meaningful to him or her, but also how the people being studied see things.

The Survey Design

The survey design method of data collection will be used so that the researcher may generalize from a sample of students so that inferences can be made about the opinion and attitude of the selected population. These data will be used to generate interview questions for the focus groups. The survey for this design will be the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) Student Opinion Survey. The researcher chose the survey method due to several advantages including, but not limited to the economy of the design, the rapid turnaround in data collection, the ability to gather data from a smaller group of students, it is less intrusive upon the schools where the data collection will take place and it is the most common survey used by schools when developing their school profile for accreditation. The survey will be cross-sectional in that the data will be collected at one point in time.

The NSSE Student Opinion Survey contains four topics (subscales):

1. Quality of the Instructional Program (Section 1: Items 1 to 18);
2. Support for Student Learning (Section 2: Items 1 to 11);
3. School Climate/Environment for Learning (Section 3: Items 1 to 15);

4. Student Activities/Involvement in School (Section 4: Items 1 to 6).

The response categories for all four topics are:

5=SA (Strongly Agree)

4=A (Agree)

3=N (Neutral or Undecided)

2=D (Disagree)

1=SD (Strongly Disagree)

It must be noted that the “NA” response is included in the percent of respondents who selected each choice. However, the mean does not include responses to “NA”.

According to the NSSE Technical Manual (2003), the alpha reliability coefficients for the Student Opinion Survey were calculated based on a sample of 67,513 respondents. The alpha reliability for each topic and the composite are: Quality of the Instructional Program (18 items, $\alpha=.92$); Support for Student Learning (11 items, $\alpha=.89$); School Climate/Environment for Learning (15 items, $\alpha=.90$); Student Activities/Involvement in School (6 items, $\alpha=.86$); Composite (50 items, $\alpha=.96$).

In relation to the validity of the Student Opinion Survey, the NSSE Technical Manual states that the items were based upon a review of literature of high performing schools and were reviewed by focus groups that represented individuals from urban schools, suburban schools and rural schools. The items were then tested in New England, the mid-Atlantic region and the Southwest with no overall differences. Finally, focus groups representing school districts across the country as well as the regional accreditation agencies reviewed the items for their appropriateness.

Focus Group Interviewing

Fontana and Frey (1994) say that interviewing is one of the most often used and one of the most powerful tools that qualitative researchers use to gain understanding and new insights in to the life world. They explain that through interviewing, researchers can enter the world of the people they plan to study. The discourse from the interviews can dramatize moments in people's lives, producing richer and more meaningful data.

Mishler (1986) defines an interview as a "form of discourse which is shaped and organized by asking and answering questions" (p. vii). He explains that the interview and its resultant discourse are "jointly constructed by interviews and respondents" (p. ix). What this means is that an interview question can be thought of as part of a circular process whereby its meaning and that of its answers are created in the exchange between interviewer and respondent as they try to make sense of what they are saying to each other. Mishler says that responses "are not simply answers to questions but also a reflection of the interviewer's assessment of whether a respondent has said 'enough' for the purpose at hand" (p. 55).

Fontana and Frey (1994) define two types of interviews: (1) structured interviews and (2) unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are highly inflexible in that all respondents receive the same set of questions, which are asked in the same order or sequence by an interviewer who has been trained to follow the same interview procedure with all respondents. In contrast, unstructured interviews are characterized by open-ended questions used to understand the complex behaviors of members of groups or organizations in society. Open-ended questions place emphasis on minimizing the

interviewer's influence on both methods of data collection and the techniques of reporting findings.

Kvale (1996) notes that open or unstructured interviews allow people to tell stories about their lives or about past and present experiences. He describes this type of interview as literally an "inter view." It is "an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme" (p. 44). An interview is a conversation between individuals about a topic of mutual interest. Questioning and answering become ways of speaking that are grounded in and depend on shared knowledge and understanding.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) extend this idea of interview as conversation and explain what the researcher must do to encourage conversation and to produce "good interviews":

Good interviews are ones in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view. Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondent's perspectives. ...The interviewer probes the respondent to be specific asking for examples of points that are made. When asking respondents about the past, for example, the interviewer suggests that the subject think back to that time and try to relive it (p. 136).

There are other criteria developed by Kvale (1996) that will be utilized for this research project in the development of the interview questions as well as in the process of interviewing. They are: (1) The quality of the interview may be based on the extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the respondent; (2) The briefer the interview questions, the better and longer the subject's answers; (3) The interviewer needs to follow-up and clarify the meanings of relevant answers; (4) Many follow-up questions or prompts will be created on the spot as a result of the interviewer's

interpretation of the responses. That is, the questions can clarify responses and the interviewer can deepen the interpretation and the meaning of the exchange; (5) The interviewer can verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers by asking questions like, 'Is this what you mean?' in the course of the interview. In other words, the interviewer interprets the meaning of what the respondent describes and returns it with meaning. In this way, the interpretations are co-constructed by the interviewer and the respondent; and (6) Through this kind of co-constructed interviews, knowledge is conveyed and is open to further interpretation by the interviewer as well as the respondent.

Group interviews can be useful in bringing the researcher into the world of the subjects, so this method will be utilized for this study. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) asserted that group interviews are particularly useful when studying adolescents' perspectives on particular issues. They claimed that young people are stimulated to talk more expansively when others of their age join them. These interviews will allow the researcher to receive additional data and deeper perspectives from students that can't be measured in a one-on-one interview or on a survey. The researcher will need access so that in person interviews can be conducted with the groups. In this comparative case study about the school experience from the student perspective, unstructured and open-ended interview questions that will promote conversation will be used. The ultimate goal is to get descriptions from the respondents rather than to get their own more or less speculative explanations of why something took place.

Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981) offer a list of four major categories of questions: hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions.

Merriam (1998) advocates the four types of questions and provides an explanation of each:

1. Hypothetical Question: asks what the respondent might do or what it might be like in a particular situation; usually begins with 'What if' or "Suppose"
2. Devil's Advocate Question: challenges the respondent to consider a new opposing view
3. Ideal Position Question: asks the respondent to describe an ideal situation
4. Interpretive Question: advances tentative interpretation of what the respondent has been saying and asks for a reaction (Merriam, 1998, p. 77).

Questions to avoid are multiple questions (How do you feel about the instructors and the classes?), leading questions (What emotional problems have you had since losing your job?), and yes-or-no questions (Do you like the program?) (Merriam, 1998).

Population and Sample

The sample selected for this study will be high school seniors because they possess specialized information based upon their personal experiences throughout their K-12 experience. "A good respondent can express thoughts, feelings, opinions, and his or her perspective of the topic being studied" (Merriam, 1988, p. 76). Crabtree and Miller (1992) suggest that individuals should have been in the culture long enough to no longer think about the phenomenon. Twenty students from Central High School and 20 students from Color Country High School will be asked to volunteer as members of a focus group interview. Each focus group will consist of ten students. The researcher and a counselor from each school will select the sample. The criteria for the selection of

interview participants will be the following: (1) There will be an equal number of males and females interviewed; (2) The students will be in their senior year at Central High School or Color Country High School; (3) The students will represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of students. Student participants will include honor roll students, students with average grades, low achieving students, athletes, student leaders, students in various clubs such as drama, debate, music and foreign language, ELL students, Special Education students and students from the so-called "counter culture" such as "skaters" and "gothics"; and (4) Students that are under the age of 18 will sign a youth assent form and their parent will sign a consent form. Students that are 18 years old will sign a consent form. The NSSE Student Opinion Survey will be given randomly to juniors at each school in the spring of 2003. The focus group interviews will be conducted with seniors at the same schools in the fall of 2003.

Interview Process

For each focus group interview session, the researcher will briefly relate the purpose of the interview, the rights and protocol of human subjects for research, why a tape recorder will be used, and each participant's guarantee of privacy and anonymity. The participants will be asked if they have any questions of the researcher. During this time, it is the desire of the researcher to develop a relationship of trust with the group so that participants will feel free to share their ideas and feelings. At the conclusion of the interview the following question will be asked, "I have no further questions. Do you have anything more you want to say or ask about before we finish the interview? Each

participant will have the opportunity to bring up ideas or raise issues that he or she has been thinking about during the interview.

The interview questions are framed based upon the four categories (hypothetical question; devil's advocate question; ideal position question; interpretive question) developed by Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981). The questions were developed after analyzing the results of the NSSE survey and the open-ended questions with the survey. The questions were designed for clarification and expansion of student opinions and to answer the research questions. Each school population is unique and answered the NSSE questions and open-ended question differently, so the interview questions for each school are not exactly the same. For a complete list of the interview questions, see Appendix II.

The Selection of Sites

When selecting a school site, the recommendations of Marshall and Rossman (1989) will be considered. They recommend that (1) entry into these sites be possible; (2) each contain a high probability of a rich mix of the process, people, and programs being studied; and (3) that the researcher will be allowed to remain at each site as long as necessary.

The sites that will be used in this study will be two high schools in Utah that have populations that match the demographics of the state and who have completed or are in the process of the Utah Accreditation Process (based upon the school's community's work to develop a mission and vision for the school). The schools will include urban, suburban, and rural students.

Color Country High School

Color Country High School is located in southwestern Utah. The school is in a county school district and its boundaries include several towns and a city. Although it has maintained its “small town” feel, the community has expanded geographically (through annexations) and has a growth rate of approximately 5%. The boundary includes both suburban areas and rural areas. Two of the towns are very small communities with conservative political beliefs. For example, one town passed an ordinance banning the United Nations from the community and encouraging the United States to drop all association and membership with the UN. Another town passed an ordinance as a protest to gun control laws. The ordinance states that all citizens of the town are required to own a gun. Another community borders on the Arizona state line next to Colorado City, Arizona. The bordering communities are the home to Utah and Arizona’s largest polygamous groups. However, most polygamists do not attend school after the 8th grade.

The following are statistics reported on the 2003 Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) Secondary School Performance Report:

- Color Country High houses students in grades 9-12 with 1,120 students, 48 teachers, one principal, one assistant principal, and three counselors.
- 93% of the students are White.
- 4% of the students are Hispanic.
- 2% of the students are Native American.
- 1% of the students are other races or ethnicity.
- 34% of students receive free or reduced lunch.
- The average daily attendance of students is 94%.

- 434 students were absent from school 10 days or more.
- During the 2002-2003 school year, 49% of the students took the ACT exam with an average score of 21.

The researcher contacted a school counselor at Color Country High to work as the liaison for the project. In the spring of 2003, juniors took the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory during their history classes. The school was given 150 surveys and 95 were returned. Students took the survey voluntarily and anonymously. In addition to taking the NSSE survey, students were asked to provide demographical data, and to answer an open-ended question: What do wish was different about high school? See Appendix II for Table III, which is a summary of the NSSE survey, Table IV, which is a summary of the demographical data, and Table V, which is a summary of the open-ended question. The data gathered from the surveys was then used to develop the focus group interview questions for seniors in January 2004.

Focus Groups

Utilizing a counselor as a liaison, senior students were asked to participate in the focus group interviews. Using the criteria of purposeful representativeness (Merriam, 1998). the researcher asked for honors students, average students, students with disabilities, athletes, students involved in drama, debate, music and the arts, students representing ethnic minorities, and students from the “counter culture” such as skaters or gothics. Students were selected based upon the criteria and asked to sign an informed consent form if they were 18, or if they were 17 or younger, the student had to sign a youth assent form and their parent was to sign an informed consent form. Students were reminded that participation was voluntary.

The interviews were conducted at Color Country High School in the office conference room. The questions (see Appendix II) were delineated from the NSSE survey data. Twenty students agreed to participate and returned the necessary signed documents to participate. The focus group members were divided into two groups with ten in each group. Two students that agreed to participate were absent from school, so there were 18 total participants. Of the 18 students, the gender breakdown was ten males and eight females. The ethnic breakdown of the students included 15 Caucasian, one Hispanic/Latino, one Asian, and one Pacific Islander. In addition, students with above average grades, students with average grades, students with below average grades, athletes, debate team members, all socioeconomic levels, members of student government, a dance team member, a member of the Latter-day Saint Seminary Council, a former polygamist, and two self-described “punk-gothics” were represented. A brief description of each participant is listed below. In order to protect the identity of the students, they are identified as M (male) or F (female) and a number.

M1 considers himself to be a “damn smart student” and said that he was the token alternative kid in the group. He also described himself as a “punk-gothic.”

F1 is involved with FBLA. Her family lives in Hildale and are “reformed polygamists.”

F2 is involved in some clubs. Her favorite club is the Interact Club.

M2 says that he is an all right student and is not really involved with anything.

F3 is a good student and is a member of National Honor Society.

M3 is member of the golf team and is a member of student government.

F4 is a member of the yearbook staff and the Latter-day Saint Seminary Council.

M4 is involved with athletics (baseball and basketball).

F5 described herself as a really good student, but is not very involved with any school activities.

F6 is involved with athletics (softball), was a former cheerleader, and is currently serving as student body vice-president.

F7 is very involved with athletics and participates in volleyball, basketball, and track.

M5 is a member of the computer club.

M6 is a member of the basketball team and is a member of the Interact Club.

M7 loves all shop classes and has won several awards for his projects.

M8 is a member of the debate team and is a student web designer for the school web page. He refuses to get a driver's license to protest the pollution caused by cars and he describes himself as a modified "punk-gothic."

F8 considers herself to be an average student. She is very involved with dancing and is a member of the school ballroom dance team.

M9 said that he struggles in school, but he enjoys being involved with the VICA club.

M10 enjoys "hand on" classes and wants to be a diesel mechanic.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher went back to Color Country High School and asked the focus group members to complete a member check. Each student was asked to circle items that they strongly agreed with and to underline items that they strongly disagreed with. They were also invited to write any additional comments they desired. This data was then analyzed using the theory of invitational education and the topics outlined in the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory and the review of literature.

Central High School

Central High School is located in Salt Lake County, Utah. The school is in a one-city school district and its boundary is congruent with the city boundaries. The city is essentially landlocked and there are no large tracts of land left for residential development. The boundary includes both suburban and urban characteristics. The school has a modified block schedule with traditional seven period days three days a week and “block days” two days a week. Twenty-four credits are required for graduation. The following statistics are reported on the 2003 Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) Secondary School Performance Report:

- Central High houses students in grades 10-12 with 1,605 students, 68 teachers, one principal, two assistant principals, and four counselors.
- 85% of the students are White.
- 9% of the students are Hispanic.
- 3% of the students are Asian.
- 3% of the students are other races or ethnicity.
- 15% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.
- The average daily attendance of students is 97%.
- 156 students were absent from school 10 days or more.
- During the 2002-2003 school year, 71% of the students took the ACT exam with an average score of 22.

National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) Student Opinion Inventory

In the spring of 2003, the researcher contacted a counselor at Central High School. A protocol for administering the survey was established and agreed upon. Surveys were

administered to juniors in their U.S. History classes the last week of school. Four hundred surveys were provided and 320 were returned. All surveys were non-identifiable in that students did not put their names on them. In addition to the NSSE survey questions, the researcher asked students to respond to an open-ended question based upon Bernhardt (1999). The additional question was: What do you wish was different about high school? See Appendix II for Table VI, which is a summary of the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory, Table VII, which is a summary of demographical data, and Table VIII, which are the prominent themes of the open-ended question.

Focus Groups

The researcher worked with a Central High School counselor, to organize the focus groups. Using the criteria established by Merriam (1998), the researcher asked the counselor to find students that were representative of the school. Specifically, the researcher asked for honors students, students that struggle academically, students from various ethnic and socioeconomic groups, athletes, student officers, students that are not involved, students involved in the arts, and students from the counter culture (“skaters”, “gothics”, etc.). The counselor compiled a list and asked the selected students to sign an informed consent form if they were 18 or to sign a youth assent form and have a parent sign the informed consent form if they were under 18.

The objective was to have two focus groups with 10 students in each group. The first focus group consisted of 13 students (6 female and 7 male) and the second focus group consisted of 11 students (6 female and 5 male). The racial makeup of the group was: 16 Caucasian; 1 Hispanic/Latino; 1 Asian; 1 African American; and 1 other (Iranian decent). The group included students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, students with learning

disabilities, students with very good grades, students with average grades, students that struggle with grades, athletes, musicians, students that are not part of any school club or activity, a cheerleader, a member of the drill team, students preparing for their future careers and even a self-described “gothic.” A brief description of each student is listed below. In order to preserve the privacy of the students, a code is used for each student. The M represents a male and the F represents a female.

F1 considers herself to be an “okay” student, is a member of the soccer team, and is a varsity cheerleader.

F2 is very involved with track, is a member of the National Honor Society, and the Key club.

F3 enjoys school and is a member of FBLA, and the German Club.

M1 considers himself an all-around athlete, but says that schoolwork is not easy for him.

M2 is a member of the Concert Choir and has been in school plays and musicals. He is also a member of the bowling club

F4 describes herself as infamous, unique, anti-fashion, and opinionated. She is the editor of the literary magazine.

M3 is a member of the cross-country team and enjoys school.

M4 is a member of the Concert Choir. He says that he loves sports but that he is not good enough to be on any team.

F5 is a member of the tennis team, the school orchestra, and she is vice president of the senior class.

M5 is a member of the National Honor Society, and is a student board member for the PTA.

F6 says that she is an “okay” student and that she really doesn’t like school.

M6 considers himself pretty involved and is a member of the basketball team.

M7 is enrolled in AP classes, and is involved with the jazz band, concert band, and Key Club.

F7 says that she is really not involved with anything and is enrolled in several Special Education classes.

M8 is member of the bowling club and is member of the Spartan Cove crew (school restaurant).

M9 is a manager for basketball team.

F8 is a member of the yearbook staff.

F9 is a member of FBLA and Spartan Cove crew.

F10 is involved with an internship at the city Children’s Center.

F11 said that she tolerates school, but her priority is the drill team.

M10 enjoys school but prefers to keep to himself.

F12 is involved with VICA and is looking forward to graduation.

M11 works full time and fits school in with his schedule. He likes coming to school, but has difficulty with reading.

The researcher conducted the focus group interviews at Central High School and utilized established interview questions as a guide (see Appendix II). The interviews took place in the counseling conference room. The researcher recorded the process on an audiotape recorder and took notes on a laptop computer. After the interviews were

transcribed, the researcher went back to Central High School and asked the focus group members to complete a member check. Each student was asked to circle items that they strongly agreed with and to underline items that they strongly disagreed with. They were also invited to write any additional comments they desired. This data was then analyzed using the theory of invitational education and the topics outlined in the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory and the review of literature.

Content Analysis

In the last few years, postmodern educational researchers such as Barone and Eisner (1997), Carter (1993) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have been advocating the use of narrative as a way of shedding light on the work of educators. In fact, they encourage educational researchers to play a key role in educating the public at large as well as the educational community in particular by constructing narratives or stories about the world of school people and about the environments that students inhabit. A leading expert of narrative, Mitchell (1980) points out that the study of narrative is no longer limited to “literary specialists or folklorists... but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural sciences” (p. ix).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) make extensive use of teacher narratives to understand the experience of teachers as they plan curricula and engage in teaching. These narratives are qualitative materials that help us to understand the teachers’ experiences, which teachers tell through their own narratives. Connelly and Clandinin believe that these stories “lived and told educate the self and others including the young

and those such as researchers” (p. 415). The only difference in this study is that instead of teachers, students’ narratives will be utilized.

Barone and Eisner (1997) believe that narratives can be useful and important for improving education. They argue that the story format has the potential for promoting “epiphanic moments” in its readers. They explain that these can be thought of as “major transactional moments that disrupt the ordinary flow of life by questioning the usual definitions of important facets of one’s world” (p. 82). This is one of the reasons that the researcher chose to write this case study about the school experience from the student point-of-view. Perhaps educational leaders will utilize this data so that they will have many “epiphanic moments” in various school communities.

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), narratives possess certain distinctive characteristics. Typically, they relate “a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator [the respondent or social actor] and his or her audience [the researcher]” (p. 55). Most of the time, narratives relate events in a temporal causal sequence. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain that the story is a way for people to be able to retell key experiences and events. In education, some of the stories can be narratives of successful programs, or tales of key leaders and personalities that represent a kind of collective sense of culture of an institution.

Internal Validity

Merriam (1998) suggests that internal validity in qualitative research “deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative researchers utilize triangulation, peer examination, and

member checks as a means to enhance internal validity. The following methods were used in this study to enhance internal validity:

1. Triangulation: Multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm findings were accomplished by using the NSSE survey data and the focus group interviews. In addition, the researcher utilized the theoretical framework as well as the research questions to analyze the data.
2. Peer examination: The researcher asked the co-chairs of the dissertation examination committee to comment on findings as they emerged.
3. Member checks: After the researcher transcribed the focus group interviews at each site, the focus group members were asked to indicate which items they agreed with and which items they disagreed with. The focus group members were also asked to make any additional comments they had on the transcript.
4. Researcher bias: The researcher provided his theoretical orientation at the outset of the study.

Reliability

Educational researchers come from a variety of backgrounds and have divergent interests. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) said, "Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 36). However, reliability can be problematic in qualitative research because human behavior is never static and isolated (Merriam, 1998). Since the term reliability tends to be a misfit in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest

thinking about the “dependability” or “consistency” of the results obtained from the data.

“The question then is not whether findings will be found again but *whether the results are consistent with the data collected*” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206, emphasis in original).

Merriam (1998) suggests that the investigator’s position be explained, triangulation, and an audit trail be used to ensure that the results are dependable. The investigator adhered to Merriam’s techniques to increase reliability in the following manner:

1. The investigator’s position: The investigator has included the theory behind the study, the basis for selecting informants and a description of each informant in the focus groups.
2. Triangulation: Multiple methods of gathering and interpreting data were used through the NSSE survey and the focus group design.
3. Audit trail: The researcher has provided how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the study.

External Validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Creswell, 1994). “It is the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply” (Walker, 1980, p. 34)? However, the researcher needs to provide a detailed description of the study’s context so that readers can compare the “fit” with their own situations (Merriam, 1998). This can be accomplished with a rich, thick description and multi-site designs (Merriam, 1988). The researcher used these strategies in the following way to generalize the results of the study:

1. Rich, thick description: The researcher provided rich narratives of the focus group interviews with an emphasis on the actual thoughts and ideas of the students in the study. Readers can then determine how their personal situation matches that of the study.
2. Multi-site designs: Two cases were analyzed from two very different locations to maximize diversity and so that the results are applied to readers from a greater range of situations.

Researcher Bias

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) state that personal capabilities and professional experience should be taken into consideration when determining a research problem. Interest in this topic comes from being interested in the role of the principal as instructional leader and visionary leader. Interest in this topic also comes from a personal view that school improvement plans have very little input from the “customer” in education: the students. It must be noted that the researcher previously worked as an assistant principal at Central High School and there are professional and personal relationships with some staff at that school. However, all students that attended the school while the researcher was there have graduated and over 60% of the staff is no longer there.

Limitations

Although the study will utilize both positivist and naturalistic data sources from two schools that represent the student population in Utah, the results of the study may not be

generalizable to other settings and to all principals. However, the researcher is not seeking generalizability but instead for understanding. Students from urban, suburban and rural areas will participate in the study. Although these demographics may be applicable to other states and other regions, in many cases they will not be applicable.

Summary

This chapter explained the rationale for the qualitative methods chosen for the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Yin, 1994; Creswell, 1994). A comparative case study analysis will be used in this study (Yin, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Stake, 1995). The NSSE student opinion survey will be used to delineate questions for the focus group interviews. The selection of sites was based upon the recommendations of Marshall and Rossman (1989). Central High School and Color Country High School were selected as the sites for the study for their access they represent urban, suburban and rural characteristics, and the general population of students in the state of Utah. Focus group interviews are effective for data collection, especially with adolescents (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, 1998; Mishler, 1986; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Kvale, 1996). A description of the focus group participants was also provided.

Rich and thick description will be provided in the narrative analysis (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Mitchell, 1980; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Internal validity will be achieved through triangulation, peer examination, member checks, and researcher bias (Merriam, 1998). The investigator's position, triangulation, and an audit trail will be used to establish reliability (Merriam, 1998; Bogdan & Bilken, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). External validity will occur by having

a rich, thick description and multi-site designs (Creswell, 1994; Walker, 1980; Merriam, 1988). Finally, researcher bias and limitations were provided (Eralandson, Harris, & Allen, 1993).

Chapter 4 describes the cases, has a narrative of the focus group interviews, and answers the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASES

The previous chapters explained the purpose of this study, provided an in-depth review of the related literature, and presented the methodology that guided this study. This chapter will present the data gathered through fieldwork by the researcher and guided by the research questions:

1. How do students perceive school climate in their school?
2. What factors in school climate do students consider valuable?
3. What changes in school climate need to occur to make the school experience more personally relevant?
4. What factors in school climate would contribute to increased student involvement?

Two cases will be presented in this chapter. Each case analysis will include the following protocol: The fieldwork data will be presented as it aligns to the theoretical framework of invitational education and the themes of the NSSE survey and the literature review. More specifically: (1) Quality of the Instructional Program; (2) Support for Student Learning; (3) School Climate/Environment for Learning; and (4) Student Activities/Involvement. In addition, the final section of this chapter will provide a comparative case analysis based upon the research questions.

The results of this study reflect the data collection process, which occurred in a two-tiered process that involved a survey (NSSE Student Opinion Inventory) and focus group

interviews with students. Data collection of students' perceptions occurred over two phases at Central High School and Color Country High School. The first phase of official data collection was in May, 2003 when juniors (11th grade) took the NSSE Student Opinion Inventory. The second phase began in December, 2003 and January, 2004. Focus group interviews with seniors (12th grade) were completed at both schools. The data from the focus group interviews were transcribed and a member check was completed at each site.

Case studies allow us to experience situations and people that we would not normally have access to. "Case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 193). Merriam (1998) adds, "in order for the reader to vicariously experience a phenomenon, the writer must transport the reader to the setting. This is done through writing a vividly descriptive narrative..." (p. 238). Using the critical theory framework of providing "voice" for students in research, and in order to tell the story directly from the students' perspective, excerpts from the focus group interviews will be used extensively.

Central High School

The students were excited to take part in the focus groups. Students arrived 10-15 minutes early or both focus group sessions. Three students that had not been selected or had not completed the signed consent process asked if they could participate. Only the selected students that had the signed consent forms were allowed to participate. The counselor said that several more students had also approached her to participate.

Each focus group began with an explanation to the students of the purpose of the study, what a dissertation is, the purpose of consent and the process of ethical research, and the background of the researcher. The students in both groups asked several questions about the study and added that they were excited to take part in the study. They were asked why they were excited and they responded that they wanted to share their opinions and ideas about school. After the students were asked to introduce themselves and describe how they perceive themselves at Central High, the questions began and they spent most of the time telling their story.

Invitational Education

Using a metaphor from invitational education (Purkey and Strahn, 2002), students were asked to identify the blue cards and orange cards (see Chapter 1 for further explanation) at Central High School. While both groups of students spent more time describing the orange cards than the blue cards, the morning focus group spent significant more time talking about orange cards. The morning group also had more students with AP classes and extracurricular involvement.

The members of the focus groups took some time to answer this question. They were thoughtful and deliberate with their answers. Most members of the groups participated and added their own ideas and comments. They identified the brightest orange cards as uncaring teachers and not being trusted by adults. They used the attendance policy as part of their evidence for the lack of trust for students. The school requires that all students have appropriate academic and citizenship credits. Students can earn an “S” (satisfactory) or a “U” (unsatisfactory) in citizenship. A student with one “U” cannot

graduate from school. A “U” can be earned for tardies, absences and/or behavior. The only way to make-up a “U” is to complete 6 hours of school-approved service.

Table VIII

Orange and Blue Cards

Card	Description
Orange	<p>Teachers that don’t care or don’t keep up with the times</p> <p>Administration that doesn’t listen to student ideas</p> <p>The attendance policy</p> <p>Not being trusted</p> <p>Teachers and administrators that don’t know the students</p>
Blue	<p>Opportunities for activities and learning</p> <p>Concurrent enrollment and AP classes</p> <p>Caring counselors</p> <p>Modern technology labs</p> <p>New building</p>

During the discussion about teachers, the students described experiences they had in classes where they did not value the teacher. Most of the reasons stated included having no relationship with the teacher, having a teacher that shows favoritism, not understanding the content or what is expected, and having what they described as “busy work” assignments. In relationship to teachers, they said:

She (the teacher) singled me out of class. She said that middle easterners are all born to be violent. I am half Iranian and it really offended me. My family is kind. She doesn't know them. She also made comments about Armenians. She really said that all people from the middle east are violent and savages. My grandfather was a general for the Shaw and they were allies with the United States. That is why they are here now!

Other focus group members added:

You ask a question and they (the teacher) can't answer it, or they get mad. They don't have any motivation. Don't you think they should have an incentive to try harder? I've had teachers that don't care at all. How can they expect us to learn the same way? I can feel so intimidated and I am afraid to ask questions. How can someone that hates teenagers teach?

I think it is important for a teacher to know your name. It sounds really simple, but I have had teachers for a whole year and they would have to look at the seating chart to see what my name was. Was that how important I was to them? I was nothing more than a name on a piece of paper.

A member of student government described her frustration in her role as an elected student officer and her perception that she and her fellow officers are not trusted:

Some of the administration is not open to our ideas. We (members of student government) are told that we can do what we want to do; yet we can't do what we want. Why have student government when we have to be told what to do? Almost every idea we have is thrown out. Many times the assistant principal will come and

tell us what she thinks we should do for an important activity. We end up having no input and no say. We know we have to have approval and we know that we need their support, but they don't care and they treat us like we are non-existent.

They were also adamant about what they called the orange attendance policy. They agreed that there should be a policy in place and that students should get to class on time and attend school. Their problem with the policy is that a person can be late for the second time, be getting an A in the class and they will receive a "U". Students and parents are allowed to appeal their attendance and tardies one week before the end of the term. The students must provide specific reasons why their appeal should be granted. If the administration approves the appeal, the student does not get the "U". They added that the appeals process to prevent from getting a "U" promotes students to lie and make up stories.

Shouldn't we be judged on our performance and competence and not whether or not we walked in the door three seconds after the tardy bell? I know that most everyone in here has lied on an appeal form. It is demeaning and almost promotes us to lower our moral standards. The way it is set up, when I get my second tardy, I give up. Why bother? I will get a "U" anyway, so why not be late every day? I just wish that we could be treated more like adults. Everyone assumes that we are truants and delinquents. Give me a break!

I don't have a problem about being punished for sluffing, but I do have a problem if I am late to class two times and I get a 'U.' I also have a problem when my parents have excused me for legitimately being sick and it still puts me in jeopardy of getting a 'U,'

and then I have to fill out this appeal and hope that it is approved. My dad said that this is the system because the school thinks we are all liars.

It would be a lot better if the school got some students to help revise this thing (attendance policy). It affects us, but no one ever asks us about it. It could be set up like this meeting here (focus group). I think we (students) could come up with some great ideas that would be fair.

Finally, the students are interested in being known and being trusted. They want teachers and administrators to know their names and to show and exhibit care. One student provided this insight:

I am a senior in high school and I am 18 years old. They (teachers and administrators) think we that we are not capable of doing the right thing so they feel like they have to force us to be good, when I think that most of us can and will be good if we are given the chance. To me, the administration, they know the star athletes and the kids that are bad, but they don't know the rest of us. They don't even know who we are. We don't count unless we are in trouble.

The opposite of the orange card is the blue card and it promotes the best in human behavior and potential. The students described the very positive elements of their high school experience. The prominent themes in these conversations focused upon having opportunities to learn, to participate in school activities and to work with caring school counselors.

I feel like I have been given more opportunities for learning and opportunities to participate in activities than people in other schools. The community here really

supports the school and they want it to be great. In fact, I would say that this city is a blue card. I mean, look at the millions of dollars they spent to build this building. Our old building was terrible. The bathrooms smelled and water leaked in all of the classrooms throughout the winter and spring. Now we have the newest and nicest high school in the valley with wireless technology, air conditioning and heating that works, and room to move in the halls.

A student reminded the group that opportunities to participate in a lot of school activities is a blue card:

I mean, look at all of the clubs and things you can do here. There's sports, music, drama, dances and all sorts of clubs. We even have a bowling club. It has a lot of people in it too. You come to one of our games and they are packed with students dressed in crazy orange (school color) clothes and hats. This promotes school spirit. It makes us feel like we are part of something.

One of the honors students was quick to point out that concurrent enrollment and advanced placement classes are a blue card. Interestingly enough, others in the group that are not in high level classes agreed.

The AP classes and the concurrent enrollment classes provide us with a lot of options. I can walk out of here with quite a bit of college credit. The AP pass rate here is really high. My AP history class was the best class that I ever had. (The teacher) could really get on your nerves with all of the work, but it was good work and I did very well on the AP exam. I felt like this class really prepared me for college. This is what a blue card is to me: providing me with worthwhile classes that help me to expand and treat me in a more intellectual way.

A member of the group shared his struggles with learning and how hard it was to be a “slow learner.” He said the one thing that made the most positive difference for him in high school was his guidance counselor. Most of the other students added their support to his words:

I have struggled in school and I am not very smart, but the counselors here are great. They really care about you and they want you to graduate. They meet with you a lot and they help you to solve problems and get you motivated to do your work. Thanks to my counselor, I will have all of my credits to graduate this spring and I am planning on going to Salt Lake Community College next fall.

Quality of the Instructional Program

The students do not mind having class work and homework. For the most part they expect it. However, they do expect the work to be meaningful, challenging and to help them be prepared for life after high school. The most negative type of work they get is “busy work.” When asked what busy work is, they said that it is work that has no meaning and does not promote learning. They also said it is work that is designed simply to keep students busy so that they will not bother the teacher. Every single student in the focus group said that they had some type of busy work assignment during the previous week.

Table X

Quality of the Instructional Program

Prominent Topics	Description
Quality Student Work	Class work and homework that has meaning No "busy work"
Quality Instruction	"Hands on" activities Teacher checks for student understanding

According to the students:

You don't get anything out of copying definitions from the back of the book. What is the point?

Busy work is stuff that has no point to it. They (teachers) give you stuff just to keep you busy. To keep you out of their hair. It works like this: We do these meaningless assignments. The teacher doesn't walk around or check on you. They sit at their desk checking the busy work assignments from another class, reading the paper, or playing on the computer.

Worksheets, crossword puzzles and word searches are busy work. I mean we are in high school and they (teachers) think that we are going to learn from this. Can you

think of a college that wants word search skills? The teacher should just get up and say, 'I'm too lazy to teach so here is a crossword puzzle and a word search.'

I think some teachers are afraid that they don't have enough points for the quarter so they make up silly assignments for filler.

They described the type of work that is meaningful to them. They like assignments and class work where they know what is expected and work that has meaning or purpose. The types work that they consider meaningful are reviews, homework that gives them an opportunity to practice concepts, and teacher-generated assignments. The students added:

I really like reviews that go over what we have done. This helps me to remember important facts and to refresh my memory. I also like math problems that help me to practice the concepts. I had one teacher that would have you do all of the odd problems or all of the even problems and this didn't help me that much. We would get up to 50 problems a night. I just wanted to get it done. This year, my math teacher will give us a maximum of 15 problems a night. He told us that he wants us to really focus on each problem and to show our work. I really like this because I feel like I am really learning it.

My medical anatomy class was really hard, but the work in class and homework would help me to understand it better. I also liked how (the teacher) would go over the work and explain the things we didn't understand. He cared more about us understanding it, so he looked at homework as our practice and it was okay to make mistakes.

I wish that all of my classes were like my shop class. In shop, I can do something. Make something. I feel so out of place in academic classes because I can't relate to the work. I always do better in classes where the teacher has us do what we are learning and not just talk about it

Support for Student Learning

Caring teachers and counselors are important to these students. They want to feel valued and to know that there is an adult advocate for them in the school. All of the students described the traits of the teachers that they valued the most and they consistently had the same traits: They are caring, they take time to help students, and they have high expectations for the students. They want to have a relationship with the teacher and they want to learn the material.

Table XI

Support for Student Learning

Prominent Theme	Description
Teachers	Caring Takes time to help High expectations
Counselors	Student Education-Occupation Plan Help to solve problems

From the students' point-of-view:

There was no BS with this teacher. I had him in the 10th and 11th grades. We were required to read the textbook as our homework and class time was spent going over the concepts and bantering about the various topics we read about. He was really strict in class and so these discussions were never out of hand. If I ever had a question, he would have you come in and he we take as long as necessary to help you. He would always make sure that I understood before I left. If I didn't understand, he would make me stay until I did. I wish I had more teachers like that.

I remember when I was really sick and had to miss two weeks of school. He would send notes with the homebound teacher and would always inquire how I was doing and that he was looking forward to having me come back to class. When I came back, he didn't harass me about getting the work in. He was more concerned about me getting caught up and that I was feeling better.

She always asks how you are doing on a personal level. She cares about me as a person and as a student. I work really hard in her class and I am motivated to perform at my best. She is not easy either. We work right up to the bell and the work is challenging for me. Here I am in Special Education and I am passing this hard class.

In addition to the classroom teacher, there was agreement about having a counselor that looked out for you, helped to plan for classes each year, checked on credits, provided

options and planning for after high is over. One prominent topic was the Student Education-Occupation Plan (SEOP). The students said that these meetings with the student, the counselor and the parents were meaningful and helpful in planning for the future.

All of the counselors here are good. I was overwhelmed about making up some credit to graduate and my counselor helped me to work it out. I am all made up now and it is a relief.

They do these SEOP's here where my mom and me and the counselor have these meetings every year to go over my credits and to work on plans for the future. At first, I thought this was pretty lame, but it has helped me with making plans. I was confused about what credits I needed and they cleared it up for me. I didn't know about all of the options for college and the options for paying for it. I am putting together my applications and I am excited about what will happen.

School Climate/Environment for Learning

While both focus groups were keenly involved in the discussions that focused on school climate factors, one of the focus groups spent a lot more of its time discussing and bantering about school climate factors. They believe in rules and policies that establish a climate for learning, but they want those rules enforced and enforced consistently. Many of them are concerned about drugs and alcohol on campus and the prominent attitude by adults that it doesn't happen. They are proud of their new building and are glad to spend their senior year in it. During their sophomore and junior years the new building was under construction that reduced parking on campus and accessibility to parts of the old

building. Finally, they feel very comfortable associating with their school principal, but they want the entire administration to be accessible, to interact more with students, and to demonstrate care.

Table XII

School Climate Factors

Prominent Theme	Description
Rules	Not enforced or enforced inconsistently Campus security Drugs and alcohol
Physical Environment	New high school building
Administration	Interact with students Accessible and approachable Caring

The students asserted:

There are so many people here that dress gross. The rules say that you can't wear these outfits and yet they wear them and get away with it. It is offensive. I don't want to see another girl's thong hanging out or have half her breasts hanging out. I don't like looking at butt cracks either. If there is a rule, then they should enforce it.

I'm more offended about the PDA (public displays of affection) than anything. I have seen (the assistant principal) get on a kid for being tardy, but do nothing about a couple in plain view going way out in a make out. I also think that the campus security ladies are more concerned if you have a hat on than if you have just underwear on.

I'm more offended by vulgarity and make-out sessions in the halls than I am about hair. I just don't see how someone with pink hair is going to stop me from doing my homework.

I have seen kids in this school that are drunk or high, and it is pretty obvious. I have been to school dances when kids have come right in with really bad beer breath or who were high. How come we (students) notice this, but no one else does? Are people naive, or in denial?

If you park in the wrong place, these campus security people put these bright orange stickers right on your windshield. You can't even see out. If I haven't parked in the right place, then give me a ticket. I would rather pay a fine that have these huge stickers that never come off on my car.

I like the dress code, but it needs to be enforced. You should have been here at Halloween. Wow! Some people would have been better off if they had not worn any clothes at all.

I know that this building is still not completely done, but it is so awesome. We don't have leaking toilets and smells coming out of the drinking fountains anymore. I love the wide halls, the windows, and classrooms that are equipped with new technology. It has really boosted my morale. I'm proud to tell people where I go to school.

Many of us have been hanging out together since elementary school and we have known each other for years. It may appear that we are in cliques, but is because we have been friends for so long. There are some people that want to be in cliques, but some people will not accept them. Maybe we should take the initiative to invite others to hang out with us.

I would like to interact with the administration more. I would like to be able to talk to them about school issues like we are doing now (focus group). They need to let us know that they are available and that they care about us. They may want to interact with us, but the hatchet ladies (secretaries) in the office won't let them know.

Student Activities/Involvement in School

Even the students in the focus group that choose not to participate in school activities agreed that activities and involvement is important at school. For the most part, the students were satisfied with the student activities that are offered and they believe that there is enough variety to appeal to many people. They look at activities as an integral part of the school experience and believe that school is much more meaningful when you are involved. They believe that more students would be involved if there was more

emphasis placed on the importance of being involved, and if there was more variety in extracurricular or co-curricular activities.

Table XIII

Summary of Student Activity Factors

Prominent Theme	Description
Favorite Activities	Sporting events
	Dances
	Clubs
Impact of Participation on School Performance	Higher grades
	More discipline
	More organized
Involvement	More variety
	Emphasize involvement

The students said:

I really like attending the games and cheering and acting crazy. It is a lot of fun and I like to be with my friends and support the school. Everyone that goes know that there is someone there to hang out with.

I have learned a lot of discipline (participating in drill team). I am the busiest that I have ever been, but my grades are the highest they have ever been. I feel like I am prepared for life.

I don't participate in any school activities, but we should keep them. I see how the coaches work with the members of the teams. They are really on top of them and expect them to do well in school.

In orchestra I have to practice a lot. The more I practice, the more organized I become. The quarters that I am the most involved with my music are the quarters that I have the highest grades. It is nice to be involved with an activity that helps me to develop my musical talents.

The people in the legislature, all they want are tests, but how can you test music or being in sports? I mean, in choir, we learn how to blend not only with our voices but also with other people. How can you test that? I don't think these people (state legislature) understand how important this is to me and how it makes school better for me.

Participating in sports is definitely motivating. I know a lot of people that would have flunked out without sports. It is a motivation for grades. It also helps you relax a little bit. I know that in sports I have learned that you have to work with other people and that you can't just be a loner.

They are always looking for ways to save money, but getting rid of extracurricular activities and sports is not the right way to do it. Tell these people to come to school all day and not have anything to look forward to. They couldn't handle it. Keeping active is important to me.

I have never really been involved with anything until this year. One of the English teachers started a book club, so I decided to join in. Most of the people that go are kind of like me, you know, not all that involved or popular or anything. I really like it because I like to read and it is fun. We need more types of activities like this so that everyone can find a way to fit in.

Color Country High School

Both groups of students arrived on time and chose a place to sit. The morning group was very quiet and did not interact with one another before the interviews began. The afternoon group chatted and visited with one another freely before the process began. Both groups received an explanation and description from the researcher about the research project, the informed consent process, ethical research, and a review of the procedure for the interviews. The morning group did not have any questions and was ready to proceed. The afternoon group asked a few questions about why this school was chosen and wanted reassurance that their confidentiality would be maintained. Both groups of students shared their ideas and feelings openly. However, the morning group

provided shorter “to-the-point” answers while the afternoon group elaborated about topics more often.

Invitational Education Framework

Both groups of students enjoyed talking about this question. They understood the metaphor without any extra explanation and they all had several comments to share with the group. The students at this school focused more on the blue cards than on the orange cards. In fact, it seemed almost difficult for the students to think of some orange cards.

Table XIV

Orange and Blue Cards

Card	Description
Orange	Student body is too homogeneous
	Computer technology is poor
	Athletic program
	Busy work
Blue	Opportunities for more students to be involved
	Caring counselors
	Many excellent teachers
	Small school
	Students get along
	AP classes and concurrent enrollment

It appeared to be painful for the students to share orange cards about their school experience. Both groups had to think for few moments to decide what the orange cards are. Three prominent themes emerged during the discussions about orange cards. The students love their school, but say they may be too homogeneous. They also feel like they lack needed skills in computer technology and desire to learn more skills. Finally, there was a lot of discussion concerning their perception that the school does not have the same athletic program like other schools and that they deserve the same services that other district schools receive.

We are too homogeneous. While everyone is nice, many cannot stomach divergent ideas.

Some of us are very sheltered and have a hard time understanding people that are different than we are.

I'm from (polygamist community) and people always want to know why I go to school and why I don't wear long dresses and put my hair in braids. It was hard to be accepted because people didn't understand me or understand my circumstances.

Athletics are a big orange card. Look at our history and you will see that we are not that great. People here don't have a big opportunity to be trained. We don't even have an American Legion team or swimming. We don't have nice facilities like the other schools in the district either.

For the most part, we have some great teachers, but nothing is more orange than busy work. You know, those dumb assignments that they give you to keep you from talking or anything. Busy work doesn't help me learn anything. How excited can I get about a crossword puzzle or a worksheet? Maybe they think we will have busy work jobs where we can't think and they are preparing us for that.

The students spent more time discussing the blue cards at their school. They did not take any time to share their blue cards. The students just began to talk without any hesitation whatsoever. Every student in both groups had a blue card to share. The prominent themes were opportunities for involvement, caring counselors, excellent teachers, having a small school, and AP classes and concurrent enrollment.

Students here have many opportunities to be involved and most students take advantage of the opportunities. Just look at this group here. Many of us are involved with several activities. I think that this involvement makes us better prepared for life. I always hear that students here have more involvement than other schools, and I think it is true.

I think the fact that our school is small is a blue card. Because we are small, we can be more involved and we know each other. I attended a larger school during my sophomore year and I felt like no one knew who I was or cared if I came or not. Here, I am involved and feel like people know who I am. Anyone can be involved if they want to. You have to work for that involvement, but the chance is there to do it.

Although we don't have a lot of diversity here, we really do get along with everyone. As a whole, this student body is accepting of everyone and they get along pretty well. You could say we have a nice down home southern feel to our school.

Most of the teachers here really care about the students and they do a really good job. I think we have some of the very best teachers anywhere. I feel totally prepared for college.

Although we are a small school, we have the same AP classes and concurrent enrollment classes as big schools. I have taken several concurrent classes at the Dixie College center here and my AP classes are great. Our AP English pass rate is really high and the teacher is awesome.

The counselors here make sure that you are on line for graduation and they let you know about how to get into college and be prepared for careers. Everyone really respects them and they have a really good reputation. They helped me to find ways to get into college, because my family can't pay for it.

Quality of the Instructional Program

The students were able to identify the types of instruction that make a difference for their learning. Questions that aligned with instructional quality were answered with detail and feeling. They agreed on the types of instruction that matter to them, and the types of instruction that they dislike. They do not mind doing work. In fact, their biggest complaint was the classes where the teacher was too easy or was a pushover. Based upon

their schooling experience, they want meaningful work that will help them to learn, they want fair grading and quality instruction.

Table XV

Quality of the Instructional Program

Prominent Topics	Description
Quality Student Work	Class work and homework that has meaning Fair grading
Quality Instruction	Rigor Teacher checks for student understanding Use technology

The students concluded:

I don't like having a teacher that makes things too easy and too simplified. It is the type of class if you just show up and joke around, and if you get along, you will get a good grade. They allow people to teach like that is bad.

Some people in class could so easily persuade her not to do something. We would take a test and kids would ask questions and she would give the answers. This was way too easy and too lenient. I want more meaning and I am not afraid to work for my grade.

I need lots of feedback. If I am not doing so well, but I got a lot of feedback so that I knew what I needed to do, it would be beneficial. I can't stand being in a class where I'm just told what is wrong, but I don't know why it is wrong. Showing concern and providing feedback really helps.

I don't like being graded on a curve that is based on the highest score. It sets too much judging for students. I also don't like how most coaches grade you. They are more concerned about games and pay all their attention to their players. I prefer to have uniform grading by all teachers so that you know what it expected from you.

I like the types of work and homework where we can practice what we learned or we can finish what we started in class. Reviews are good too. Busy work like worksheets and word searches are a total waste of time and we don't learn from it.

I like classes where I am challenged like my English teacher that stresses the fundamentals of the English language. She has challenged me to learn more and look at new ideas. She let me know that the mind and intellect are important.

My four-year-old nephew could learn the same computer skills that we are learning. The future and our careers are based upon technology. We need to be prepared. There is a brand new computer lab in the science department and it is never used. We should use technology in all of our classes and the computer classes we have need to kick it up and teach us higher level skills and get away from Java Script.

Support for Student Learning

The students feel like they are more successful when they are with teachers that they perceive as caring, teachers that know the students by name and even know something about them, and teachers that are not judgmental. Several of the students described how they felt like a teacher did not like them because of an older sibling or because they were not popular or wore designer clothes. They also described teachers that are not judgmental and treat you in a respectful manner. They felt more successful with these teachers.

The school counselors are important to their success in school. The students like meeting with the counselors to plan for their future and to make sure they are on track for graduation. Both counselors are admired and respected by these students and they feel like the counselors make themselves accessible to the students and they believe that the counselors are genuinely interested in helping.

Another prominent theme generated by the students was the importance of feeling support from their principal. They like how he interacts with all types of students and his interest in what they do in class and out of class.

Table XVI

Support for Student Learning

Prominent Theme	Description
Teachers	<p>Caring</p> <p>Knows the students</p> <p>Doesn't judge students based on looks, family history, or popularity</p>
Counselors	<p>Plan for graduation and college</p> <p>Help to solve problems</p>
Administration	<p>Supportive and involved principal</p>

A summary of the students' perceptions is:

I like the teachers that let you know they are glad you are there. They are enthused and happy like my math teacher. They know your name and don't treat you as if you were just filling up space in their room. I am more comfortable working in a class with a teacher that makes me feel like they care and makes sure that we understand everything.

Most teachers kind of get annoyed with me because of my choice in clothes and stuff. I value teachers that make me welcome and look beyond my appearance and want me

to develop my talents. My English teacher is like that. She doesn't mind me hanging around her class or asking questions.

I had a brother that was kind of wild and got into a lot of trouble. Some of my teachers saw my last name and made an assumption that I was a troublemaker. I'm glad that we have teachers like (the shop teacher). His only concern is that you do well in his class. I discovered that I am really good and woodworking and cabinet making and he has encouraged me to do my best. He always smiles and is friendly to everyone. There are kids in his class that most teachers hate, but he doesn't. I wish all teachers were like that.

I can walk into the counseling center at any time and know that a counselor will see me. If they are busy, they always call me down as soon as they can. Both of them show me that they care, and I think they are like this with all of the students. I know exactly what I need to do for college applications and they gave me a lot of resources for scholarships and grants. I will be the first person in my family to go to college. I couldn't have done it without their help.

I like the way that (the principal) tries to develop relationships with students. He tries to keep us motivated and he cares about our success. I also like the way he tries to interact with all of the students, not just the jocks and the popular people. I think that all of the trench coat kids really like him. He is strict, but he is fair.

School Climate/Environment for Learning

Based upon the interviews with the students, the researcher sensed that Hurricane High has a positive school climate and a “sense of community.” Students like being in a smaller school and for the most part, they believe that their teachers care about their success and their well-being. The principal was mentioned the most as the one in the school that promotes a positive learning atmosphere for students. The students believe that rules should be enforced more consistently and that the assistant principal has no sympathy or concern for the students.

Table XVII

School Climate Factors

Prominent Theme	Description
Rules	Enforced inconsistently
Administration	Principal is accessible and approachable Principal is caring Assistant Principal needs to enforce rules, but have sympathy

According to the students:

We need an assistant principal that is more like our principal. I like (our principal) because he relates well to the weird kids and teats us well. I would like an assistant principal that doesn't get manic glee from punishment and destroying the human will.

We don't need any human monsters. I don't have a problem getting a consequence for something I did or if I broke the rules. In middle school, (the assistant principal) treated you with some respect and I didn't even mind being suspended by him.

I know that we need rules, but our assistant principal gets more excited about certain rules. He won't bat an eyelash if a girl walks by wearing a boob tube, but if he sees a black trench coat or sees someone he doesn't like, then he goes ballistic.

(The principal) is easy to talk to and he doesn't mind meeting with you if you have an idea or a concern. I really like him, yet he is really, really strict and doesn't put up with guff. I've heard teachers talk about how (the principal) expects a lot out of them too. I even heard one complaining about it. I'm glad he expects a lot from the teachers. It's good that he is looking out for what we learn.

The assistant principal needs to be able to enforce the rules and keep control, but they don't need an attitude or have to be so intense all the time. I also want someone that won't stereotype people and label you as bad not matter what you do.

Student Activities/Involvement in School

There appeared to be a desire by most of the students to be involved in some way or another with school activities. Even the students that didn't consider themselves that involved said that they may not be a member of a club or team, but they will participate in school activities such as dances and games. Color Country High has several long-standing traditions such as homecoming and "C" days. The students look forward to

these activities and they enjoy them. Since Color Country is a smaller school, many of the students feel like they can be involved with more activities and participate in more than one sport. The students feel like the school offers a variety of ways for involvement, but it is up to students to make the effort to be involved. In addition, the consensus of the students was that participation in extracurricular activities makes the school experience more meaningful and makes them better students.

Table XVIII

Summary of Student Activity Factors

Prominent Theme	Description
Favorite Activities	Assemblies
	Dances
	Clubs
	Homecoming week
Impact of Participation on	
School Performance	Higher grades
	More discipline
	More organized

The students believe:

The assemblies are so much fun because everyone gets so excited and has a lot of fun. We have a lot of skits and performances by students. I also like it when the teachers get involved and do something weird in front of the students.

I'm really glad that I was able to be a part of the GYC (Governor's Youth Council).

We sponsor drug and alcohol awareness and do a lot of service projects. We spent a full day at the Shriner's Hospital in Salt Lake City. I met a girl that is 18 and is dying of cancer. The time I spent with her changed my whole perspective about my life and what I am doing.

Homecoming Week is my favorite. There are activities every day and all of the clubs are involved. I like being part of a school with traditions. Some of the schools in the district are new and they don't have these traditions. It sets us apart and helps us have pride in our school.

When I was on the golf team, we would have to miss school for the tournaments. I would make sure that I was on top of my work and this helped me to be more responsible.

When you are on a team, sometimes things go really well and other times they don't go so well. This helps prepare you for life because we will not always work with people that you like. I have been in some activities with people that I probably would not have chosen to talk to, but the activity provides a common purpose and goal.

It does help you with discipline. You have to rely on other people and be relied on. There is a lot of responsibility and learn the importance of teamwork. The discipline has helped me to be a better student.

Comparative Case Study Analysis

Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that that expand its readers' experiences (Merriam, 1998). The more cases in a study, the more compelling the interpretation is to be (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) add, "By looking at a broad range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying *how* and *where* and, if possible *why* it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29, original emphasis).

Since this is comparative case study, the data from both cases presented were analyzed using the research questions as a guide. The research questions are:

1. How do students perceive school climate in their school?
2. What factors in school climate do students consider valuable?
3. What changes in school climate need to occur to make the school experience more meaningful?
4. What factors in school climate would contribute to increased student involvement?

Both cases were analyzed to find common themes and data to interpret the research questions. This data will provide the generalizations of the students' perspective of the school experience. Table XIX summarizes which data were used to answer the research

questions. Tables XX and XXI show the similarities and differences between the two cases.

Table XIX

Data Source to Answer Research Questions

Research Question	Data Source	Answers
1	NSSE Survey; Open-ended survey question	What?
2	Focus group interviews	Why?
3	Focus group interviews	Why?
4	Focus group interviews	How?

Table XX

Similarities Between Color Country High School and Central High School

Focus Group Findings that both Schools have in Common

Value opportunities for involvement in school activities

Value Advanced Placement and Concurrent Enrolment courses

Do not like “busy work”

Value caring counselors and the SEOP

Teachers should check for understanding

Teachers should have rigor/high expectations

Class work and homework should be meaningful

Value caring teachers

Rules should be enforced consistently

Assistant principal should enforce rules, but with empathy

Would like more access to school administration

Being involved in school activities has resulted in higher grades, self-discipline, and organization

Teachers should be prepared and know the content

Teachers should know the names of their students

Instruction should be interesting and meaningful

Poor teachers should be "let go"

Table XXI

Differences Between Color Country High School and Central High School

Focus Group Findings that Show Differences Between the Schools

Attendance policy is not fair (Central)

Attendance policy is fair (Color Country)

New building has made school more enjoyable (Central)

Technology labs are up-to-date and useful (Central)

Technology labs need to be updated (Color Country)

Small school makes school more enjoyable (Color Country)

Students should not be judged by income, family, or background (Central)

Want supportive and involved principal (Central)

Principal interacts with principals regularly (Color Country)

Drugs and Alcohol is a problem (Central)

How do Students Perceive School Climate in their School?

The NSSE Student Opinion Inventory is generally used by schools to gather perceptions of stakeholders for the school improvement process. All secondary schools in Utah are required to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan that includes a school profile as a part of the accreditation of schools. The survey uses a 5-point Likert Scale with scores closer to five showing higher satisfaction levels of students.

According to the NSSE data, Color Country High School students perceive higher levels of positive school climate (average of 3.65 with a standard deviation of 1.02) than their counterparts at Central High School (average of 3.38 with a standard deviation of 1.03). However, overall, both schools rate school climate factors in the positive category (combined school average of 3.52 with a standard deviation of 1.02).

Students at Central High School ranked the following factors highest (3.7 average or higher):

- Our school provides students with educational programs that are appropriate to their learning needs (3.76 average).
- In our school students have access to a variety of resources to help them succeed in learning, such as technology, media centers, and libraries (3.84 average).
- Students feel safe traveling to and from school (3.73 average).
- I am in the student activities (clubs, plays, sports, student government, music, etc.) that I want to be in (3.89 average).

Students at Color Country High School ranked the following factors highest (3.7 average or higher):

- My schoolwork is challenging and requires my best effort (3.71 average).

- Our school provides students with educational programs that are appropriate to their learning needs (3.81 average).
- In my classes teachers use ways of teaching that help students achieve the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn (3.91 average).
- Teachers involve instructional activities that involve students in their learning (3.93 average).
- In my classes a variety of teaching and learning activities is provided for students to help them learn.
- I use additional resources, beyond the textbooks for my classes, to help me with my school work (3.95 average).
- I have been taught how to use the resources of the school and community to help me with my school work (3.74 average).
- In addition to written tests, students are provided with a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning such as completing projects or portfolios (3.87 average).
- The grading and evaluation of my class work is fair (3.73 average).
- Teachers are concerned that students learn subjects they teach (3.89 average).
- Teachers hold high expectations for student learning (3.72 average).
- School counselors/advisors offer students the help students need in program planning (i.e., course selection) (3.95 average).
- School counselors/advisors offer students the help they need in the selection of a vocation or career (3.94 average).

- A counselor is available if I need help in solving personal problems (3.89 average).
- The people in the principal's office care about students as individuals (3.74 average).
- The school recognizes all types of high achievement demonstrated by students (3.84 average).
- Sensitivity to issues of racial and ethnic fairness is demonstrated by students, teachers, and administrators at our school (3.74 average).
- Our school provides students and teachers with a safe and orderly environment for learning (3.95 average).
- Students feel safe traveling to and from school (4.02 average).
- Parents feel welcome in our school (3.97 average).
- Teachers in our school are respected in the community (3.89 average).
- I am in the student activities (clubs, plays, sports, student government, music, etc.) that I want to be in (4.03 average).

Students at Central High School ranked the following factors lowest (2.99 average or lower):

- Teachers are motivated to their best work (2.93 average).
- The people in the principal's office care about students as individuals (2.99 average).
- I am satisfied with the extent to which the administration includes students in making decisions about matters that directly affect students (e.g., dress standards, assemblies, hall passes, etc.) (2.94 average).

- Discipline policies are fair at this school (2.92 average).
- I look forward to going to school each day (2.64 average).

The students at Color Country High School did not rank any factor with a 2.99 average or below. The lowest factor they identified was: There is not a significant problem with substance abuse (e.g., drug and/or alcohol problems) among the students of this school (3.07 average).

In Chapter One of this study, school climate was defined as a general concept to describe the enduring quality of organizational life. It is further defined by shared perceptions of behavior (Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Ashworth, 1995). Based upon the data from the NSSE survey and the open-ended question, the general perception of the students from both cases is that positive school climate is average. In both cases, they perceive school as something that is done to them and not for them, they are very perceptive of what poor teaching is, they perceive policies as unfair if they have no say in their development, and they perceive a need to have a stable and orderly environment where rules are applied fairly to all.

What Factors in School Climate do Students Consider Valuable?

The researcher has discussed this research project with several of his colleagues and many of them stated that doing such a project would only result in students' complaining about issues that they have no right to complain about. Indeed, that was not the case. The students in this study identified several factors that they consider positive and valuable to them. The students from both schools identified the following valuable school climate factors: (1) Caring teachers; (2) Caring counselors; (3) Caring principal; (4)

Opportunities for involvement with school activities; and (5) AP and concurrent enrollment classes.

These students value teachers that care about them as individuals and care about them as learners. Being known as an individual means that the teacher knows their name and has made the effort to get to know them so they are aware of what they do outside of the classroom. This personalization from the teacher creates a more positive climate in the classroom, and in turn, helps the students to be more motivated. Caring about the student as a learner has several implications, but the students in this study identified teachers that care about students as learners as teachers that know there are several ways to learn, provide meaningful work, and check often with students to make sure they understand. These students want variety with instructional strategies so that they understand the content and value teachers that address their learning styles. Finally, they place a high value with teachers that show enough care to make sure they understand concepts and if concepts are not understood, they are willing to do what is necessary until the students understand them.

The guidance counselor is often referred to as the true student advocate. According to these students, that is indeed the case. The students described a caring counselor as one that is available, is willing to listen to students' concerns, checks on students' graduation credit requirements, and helps students plan and prepare for post high school experiences. The students value their association and personal relationship with a guidance counselor. They also value the Student Educational Occupation Plan (SEOP) conferences they attend with their parent.

Another factor that the students' value is having a principal that interacts with students, is visible, attends school activities, and makes a concerted effort to improve teaching in the school. The students at both schools described how they liked interacting with the principal in the halls between class, during lunch, and before and after school. They also value the principal if they interact with *all* of the students and not just the athletes or the troublemakers. The students notice when the principal is in attendance at school activities such as games, dances, and concerts. The principal's presence makes them feel valued and even validated. Finally, it is interesting to note that the students at Color Country High School were aware of their principal's involvement with classroom instruction. They indicated that they value this involvement.

It was apparent that these students want to be involved in school and they value opportunities to participate in an array of activities. Students at both schools identified school activities and involvement as a means to help them perform better in school and to teach them organizational skills and interpersonal skills. Participation in school activities gives the students a sense of belonging and a niche in the school.

Finally, the students' value having AP classes and concurrent enrollment classes. These courses are available for student so that they can generate college credit while in high school. Even the students that had never taken an AP or concurrent enrollment class said that the program was valuable to the school. These courses give students options to take more rigorous classes and they enjoy earning the college credit.

What Changes in School Climate Need to Occur to Make the School Experience More Personally Relevant?

Thoughtful, deliberate, and meaningful discussions took place in the course of this study. However, the most meaningful information that these students shared addressed changes that need to occur to make the school experience more personally relevant. The following factors were identified: (1) Schoolwork needs to be more meaningful. “Busy work” needs to be eliminated; (2) Need more caring teachers; (3) Rules need to be enforced consistently and fairly; (4) Involve students in decision-making; and (5) Assistant principals should enforce consequences, but show empathy.

By far, the most prominent theme throughout this study was that students want meaningful work that will help them to learn and master the concepts. The students in this study are not lazy or unmotivated, but they become lazy and unmotivated in classrooms that provide busy work and projects that do not help them learn. One may suspect that seniors in high school want easy classes, but that is not the case here. These students want rigor, but the rigor must be meaningful and relevant to what they are learning. Teachers at the high school level are still using meaningless worksheets, word searches, and crossword puzzles. Yet, the students are practically screaming that this type of work means nothing to them and turns them off to learning.

While these students value caring teachers, they believe that there are still too many uncaring teachers in their schools. They identified uncaring teachers as mean, too easy, has no control of the class, too lazy to teach meaningful material, treat students as if they are an inconvenience to their time, and get angry or irritated if students ask for help or clarification. The researcher ended each focus group with the question: I am a school

principal and a researcher. Please tell me what I should share with other principals concerning what we can do to make the high school experience more meaningful. The most common answer provided was that principals need to hire teachers that like to work with teens and know how to help teens learn, and that principals need to get rid of uncaring teachers.

Rules and policies are necessary and needed in the school system and the students in this study agreed with that. However, they believe that rules should be enforced and that all students should be treated equally in relationship to rules. One of their frustrations is when they see a so-called popular student blatantly violate the dress code, or even smell like alcohol and nothing is done. They get even more frustrated when they see another student that is not popular get in trouble for doing something they consider minor like wearing a hat in the building.

Both schools in this study have very specific and some would say strict attendance policies. The students at Central High School were much more vocal about their policy being negative than the students at Color Country High. However, the students at both schools agreed that there needs to be a policy for attendance, but that the students should be invited to help design what it should look like. They believe that they have meaningful ideas that they should be able to share with school officials in relationship to school rules and policies. They acknowledge that the school and district administration and the Board of Education make the final decisions with rules and policies. They want to provide their point-of-view too.

These students acknowledged that the role of the assistant principal puts them in a situation many times as the “enforcer” in the school and the one that works with student

discipline issues. Several students in the focus groups had been suspended from school or been reprimanded for making poor choices. The students that had received consequences believe that there should be consequences for poor choices. However, those students and their peers in the focus groups want the assistant principal to also show some empathy and humanism with students. They felt like students behave better and are more cooperative when the students respect the assistant principal and know that he or she will be fair and understanding.

What Factors in School Climate Would Contribute to Increased Student Involvement?

The students at both schools value student involvement. For the most part, they are satisfied with the choices and variety that they have in relationship to school activities and involvement. They identified three factors that would increase student involvement: (1) Make involvement by students a priority, and make it visible; (2) Provide a variety of involvement activities that appeal to all students; and (3) Administrators should meet with students in focus groups and ask them about their perceptions of the school experience.

These students believe that many students that are not involved in school because they don't know what to do to be involved and they are not aware of the options for involvement. They believe that the administration needs to emphasize involvement and that there needs to be ways to showcase the types of involvement that are available. Some ideas presented included having counselors talk to students about being involved, having teachers let students know if there are clubs in their content area (e.g., Spanish Club, Book Club, Service Club, etc.), having an area in the school that displays the clubs,

and having a type of fair at the beginning of each year where all of the clubs set up some type of booth so that students can see what is available.

Involvement will not be widespread if there are not student activities that appeal to all groups. These students believe that it is important to have small clubs that appeal to groups that are not generally involved. Some examples they shared included a skateboard club, in-line skating club, ceramics club, and poetry club. When students see that the school is making a concerted effort, even an invitation to involve them, they are more likely to be involved.

Although it is not related to school activities involvement, another factor that the students at both schools shared was that all schools should develop a system of having focus groups between the principal and students. During the focus groups that were designed by the researcher, students in all of the groups at both schools described that they really liked the process and that they enjoyed talking about *their* opinions and ideas while an adult listened and even recorded them. They said that they would suggest this practice by all principals so that principals can find out what the *students* ideas and opinions are. One of the students summed it up this way:

I think that the administration from all schools should do something like this (focus group interviews) where they sit down with the kids to find out what they think. I think that more students would have the ideal high school experience if some things were changed that the students hate, but that the administration doesn't seem to care about what the students think. They could learn a lot from group discussion.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTION

Chapter 1 was an introduction to the study and Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature which included quality instruction, support for student learning, school climate, student activities, and student voice. Chapter 3 described the methods for this study and Chapter 4 reported the cases. The purpose of this chapter is to provide implications of the study in relation to school leadership. The implications will be based upon the research questions and the theoretical framework of invitational education and critical theory. The research questions for this study are:

1. How do students perceive school climate in their school?
2. What factors in school climate do students consider valuable?
3. What changes in school climate do students consider valuable?
4. What factors in school climate would contribute to increased student involvement?

In addition, implications and recommendations for further research will be included.

Finally, a personal reflection by the author will be provided.

Implications for School Leaders

How do Students Perceive School Climate in their School?

Based upon the data from the NSSE survey and the open-ended question, the general perception of the students from both cases is that positive school climate is average. In both cases, they perceive school as something that is done to them and not for them, they are very perceptive of what poor teaching is, they perceive policies as unfair if they have no say in their development, and they perceive a need to have a stable and orderly environment where rules are applied fairly to all.

Although school climate is based upon perceptions and many times students' perceptions become their reality, the school principal has a direct impact upon the climate in a school. Every decision including who to hire, what policies to adopt, how teachers are evaluated, and direct contact with students will impact school climate. The students in this study support the educational research base in that they want a safe and orderly environment, and they want to feel like they are part of the school decision making process even if rules and policies cannot be changed. Based upon the findings in this study, the implications for school leaders are:

- Deliberately and systematically seek the perceptions of students through continual formal (surveys and interviews) and informal (observations and conversations with students) methods. Leaders cannot keep a pulse of the students unless they are actively seeking their pulse. This process cannot be done just for the sake of doing it. The process and the data need to be used to seek out and use student voice to enhance school climate and to improve school programs.

- Involve students in the decision making process. This does not mean that students are to get their way. In fact, adults may have to make unpopular decisions for the safety and well being of minors. However, many times the students will develop more reasonable solutions and approaches to a problem. Even if the students cannot change a policy, their involvement will help to create a school culture where things are done with students instead of to them.
- Know that the students watch school leaders and know what they are about by their actions. For example, if the principal complains about trash in the halls and he or she does not pick any up when they are in the halls, the students notice. They also know if a so-called popular student is allowed to break a rule and when an unpopular student cannot. They know if principals value teaching and learning by their presence in classrooms and their conversations with students.

What Factors in School Climate do Students Consider Valuable?

The students in this study identified several factors that they consider positive and valuable to them. The students from both schools identified the following valuable school climate factors: (1) Caring teachers; (2) Caring counselors; (3) Caring principal; (4) Opportunities for involvement with school activities; and (5) AP and concurrent enrollment classes. They want teachers that value them as a person and as a learner. They perceive counselors that follow the comprehensive guidance model as supportive and as advocates. They want the school principal to interact with students and who likes to be around them. They like to have an opportunity to be involved

with a school activity of their choosing, and want challenging courses where they can earn college credit.

Based upon the findings of this study, the implications for school leaders are:

- The hiring process matters. Principals must hire teachers that have an ethic of care and who can also teach content in a meaningful way. Principals need to take the time and energy that is necessary to find the right teacher for the position.
- The school principal needs to support, mentor and assist caring teachers by providing them with meaningful feedback, providing needed resources, and allowing the caring teacher to do their job without interference or interruptions.
- Guidance counselors are an integral part of the students' schooling experience. Principals need to hire competent and caring counselors that will be advocates for students. The principal needs to interact and collaborate with counselors and provide them this the resources and time to meet with students and parents.
- Students value interaction with the school principal. The principal needs to be visible, meaning that he or she interacts with students in the halls during class changes, in classrooms, with students in the cafeteria, and at school events.
- The principal needs to guarantee a strong and viable curriculum for students. Course offerings and instruction need to be both meaningful and rigorous, and meet the needs of diversified learners.

What Changes in School Climate Need to Occur to Make the School Experience More Personally Relevant?

The changes that the students addressed to make the school experience more personally relevant were (1) Schoolwork needs to be more meaningful. “Busy work” needs to be eliminated; (2) Need more caring teachers; (3) Rules need to be enforced consistently and fairly; (4) Involve students in decision-making; and (5) Assistant principals should enforce consequences, but show empathy. However, the most prominent theme generated was that students want meaning work that will help them to learn and master. They do not like, nor learn from “busy work” type of assignments such as crossword puzzles, word searches, and worksheets.

Based upon the findings of this study, the implications for school leaders are:

- The principal, as instructional leader, must expect that teachers provide students with meaningful and effective instruction and schoolwork. The principal must take the lead in a coherent professional development and school improvement plan and assure that the means (resources and people) are in place for implementation. Teachers are learners and need to stay abreast of valid and reliable research-based strategies and collaborate with other teachers for student achievement.
- The principal needs to be in classrooms often and provide teachers with feedback about their instruction and student work. The feedback should focus more upon what the students are learning than what the teacher is doing or not doing. Principals should not only complete thorough formal evaluations of teachers, but also frequent informal classroom visits.

- Principals need to hire teachers that are not only qualified in their content, but that also enjoy working with adolescents. The principal also needs to discipline teachers that do not teach effectively and that have students that are not learning. The prevailing question for all principals should be: *Would I want my own child in this teacher's classroom?*
- The principal has a direct impact upon the tone and approach used with school discipline. The principal, in concert with the assistant principal and/or those that work with student discipline must develop a coherent and research-based approach with discipline. The focus must be on helping students learn new and appropriate behavior and not upon punishment.

What Factors in School Climate Would Contribute to Increased Student Involvement?

For the most part, the students in both cases are satisfied with the choices and variety that they have in relationship to school activities. However, they also consider meeting with the administration and talking about school issues as student involvement. They identified three factors that would increase student involvement: (1) Make involvement by students a priority and make it visible; (2) Provide a variety of involvement activities that appeal to all students; and (3) Administrators should meet with students in focus groups and ask them about their perceptions of the school experience.

Based upon the findings of this study, the implications for school leaders are:

- The principal needs to assure that there are enough activities in the school to meet the diverse needs of students. This balance may include athletics as well as academic clubs, service clubs, and multi-cultural clubs and events.

- In today's NCLB environment, it may become very tempting for school leaders to focus on academic achievement and downsize or even eliminate extra curricular and co-curricular activities. The principal must understand the balance and need between classroom instruction and extra involvement.
- The principal needs to meet with students in focus groups and discuss topics of importance with them. This will provide the principal with vital information and data about school programs and it will build a relationship of trust between students and the principal.
- The principal needs to provide teachers with the feedback that students provide about the school and its various programs.

Implications for Further Research

Borg and Gall (1989) state that "the major reason for educational research is to develop a new knowledge about teaching, learning, and administration" (p. 4). The findings from this study do have implications to help develop new knowledge in teaching and educational leadership. This study included two unique schools in the state of Utah. This study should be replicated by using three schools: one large, one medium and one small. This may provide some insights into the differences in climate and student perceptions based upon school size. It may also be intriguing to include two or three schools in different states in the study to see if student perceptions are similar or different based upon region. More insights may be developed by replicating this study with the same participants in this study in five years to see the differences in their perceptions of the school experience stay constant. In addition,

this study should be replicated with parents, and there are research implications in adolescent development, democratic schools, and the interactions between students and non-certified personnel such as bus drivers, custodians and office secretaries.

Indeed, one element of this study that stood out was the value that the students placed upon their guidance counselors. Utah uses the Comprehensive Guidance model developed by Gysbers (1994; 2000) for counseling. It is compelling to generate more research on the impact of this model concerning student achievement, satisfaction of school and the graduation rate.

The methods used in this study also have implications for further research in the field of education. Researchers should not hesitate to utilize a mixed-design method as a means to get more clear answers to their research questions. It is the contention of the researcher that both qualitative and quantitative data are vital for the research base and to improve student achievement, and teacher and principal effectiveness. However, positivist and naturalistic methods do not have to be used in isolation.

Reflection

When I presented the idea of completing a dissertation study about student voice, I was initially discouraged from studying the concept. I was told that students will not cooperate, they will share frivolous ideas, and they will complain about things that they have no control over. Indeed, this was not the case. I did not hear a frivolous comment and I did not have a focus group spend time complaining. The students were honest, reflective and willing to share their values and feelings about the school

experience. The purpose of this section is to reflect upon the findings of this study and its impact upon myself as a school building leader and researcher.

First of all, students are sincerely interested in the quality of their school and they want to learn *meaningful* information. I emphasize meaningful because time and time again, the students described the busy work that they still get as seniors in high school. They find such work demeaning and worthless. In my role as a school leader, I must make a more concerted effort to see the type of work that students produce. Research studies have indicated that studying student work is an effective way for educators to see assess student understanding. I need to look beyond the instructional role of the teacher and look at the type of work that students are doing.

For example, when completing classroom walkthroughs (a 15-minute visit to a classroom using a simple non-evaluative tool to provide feedback to teachers), I need to look at the work students are completing and ask students what they are learning from their assignments. Does the work reflect the school mission, beliefs, vision, and goals? Does the work reflect the content standards? What will the student gain by completing the assignment? If teachers are assigning work that is not meaningful (such as a word search, crossword puzzle or poorly designed worksheet), then I need to address this factor with the teacher and provide the teacher with needed mentoring and coaching to enhance the quality of work for students.

Second, students want rigorous, but caring teachers. Interestingly enough, they do not value the so-called “easy” or “pushover” teacher. They actually resent these type of teachers more than the so-called strict teacher. I was intrigued how they equate

care with high expectations, knowing the students by name, interacting with *all* of the students in the class, and providing additional help and support as necessary.

The implication of this concept for myself as a school leader is two-fold. First, I need to make sure that I take the hiring process very seriously and find teachers that will be caring and rigorous. It is really tempting to hire quickly and get it over with. However, I need to review applicants very carefully by checking background information, references, and if at all possible ask the applicant to come and teach some students or watch them teaching in their current work setting. Second, I need to make sure that I am proving teachers with the professional development, mentoring and modeling of effective management of students. This may include relationship building, knowing and understanding standards for what students should know, understand and be able to do, and research-based strategies for instruction and management of adolescents.

The final aspect of this finding is also the most difficult. Teachers that cannot effectively teach students and/or intentionally treat students in uncaring ways need to go through the disciplinary process. Although I know that this is vital to student learning to confront poor teachers, it is hard to write memorandums of warning, written reprimands, and other forms of formal discipline. The reason that I find it hard is that many times teachers will complain about poor teachers and lament that “nothing is done” to address the issue. However, when you do address it, those same teachers complain about your mistreatment of the poor teacher. However, if students are to have rigorous and caring teachers, then it needs to be done. My personal litmus test is this: *Would I want my own child in this teacher's classroom?*

The next item of personal relevance is the most compelling. Using the orange and blue card metaphor (described in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1), I need to be what Purkey and Siegel (2003) call “blue leader one.” A blue leader is intentionally inviting with themselves and with those that they are with. A blue leader in a school will not tolerate the mistreatment of students and will guarantee that we work with students instead of doing things to them. For example, as a school leader I can talk more often with student focus groups about their opinions and values in the school setting. In addition, I can seek out students for their opinions and ideas as it relates to school policies and procedures that directly affect them (such as a tardy policy or the school dress code). Based upon the findings in this study and my own personal experiences, I believe that the students will rise to the challenge and come up with ideas the adults would never have considered.

Another factor of importance for the blue leader is the issue of school discipline. I need to look deep at how we discipline students. Do we punish students or do we help students learn from poor choices and behavior by implementing reasonable consequences in an empathetic manner? As school principal, I must meet often with the assistant principal in regards to school discipline. I need to model the types of behavior that I want he or she to use with students. In addition, I can facilitate a cooperative school through the use of structures and policies that foster a caring community.

Finally, I need to change my paradigm in relationship to the power and importance of the student voice. In the past, I have always considered myself to be a very student-focused educator and school leader. Yet, often times I find myself feeling like I do not

need to consider the student perspective and that my personal knowledge and experience is more important. Yet, this business of education is ultimately about the student. The buildings are built to house *students* for learning. The teachers are hired for the sake of the *student*. The secretaries, custodians, lunch workers, and teacher aides are hired to help facilitate a better education for the *student*. The principal is hired to provide leadership for *student* learning and should be most concerned with what happens to and with *students*.

In conclusion, I keep coming back to the words of two students from the focus groups, because they said it best:

I think that the administration from all schools should do something like this (focus group interviews) where they sit down with the kids to find out what they think. I think that more students would have the ideal high school experience if some things were changed that the students hate, but that the administration doesn't seem to care about what the students think. They could learn a lot from group discussion.

(The principal) is easy to talk to and he doesn't mind meeting with you if you have an idea or a concern. I really like him, yet he is really, really strict and doesn't put up with guff. I've heard teachers talk about how (the principal) expects a lot out of them too. I even heard one complaining about it. I'm glad that he expects a lot from the teachers. It's good that he is looking out for what we learn.

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT

University of Nevada, Las Vegas **Department of Educational Leadership**

INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: “The School Experience from the Student Perspective: A Comparative Case Study Analysis”

INVESTIGATOR: John Goldhardt

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 303S0303-081

Purpose of the Study

Your high school senior is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opinions of Utah high school seniors as it relates to their school experience and how school leaders can improve the school system from the student point-of-view.

Participants

We are asking your student to participate in the study because they are a high school senior and their insight will be valuable for the study.

Procedures

If you allow your student to volunteer as a participant in this study, they will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a focus group interview with the researcher and approximately nine (9) other senior students.
2. The focus group will be asked a series of questions as they relate to their opinions about their secondary school experience.
3. Your student may spend up to four (4) hours in the focus group interview.

4. The students will be “school excused” for the time they are involved with the interview.
5. The students will be given restroom breaks and snack breaks.
- 6.

Benefits of Participation

There may be no direct benefits to your student as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn from your student’s input how to improve the secondary school experience. This will potentially benefit future students.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. The risk may be the student feeling uncomfortable answering a question with other members of the focus group.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you or your student to participate in this study. The study will take up to four (4) hours of your student’s time. Your student will be provided with snacks and a \$10.00 gift certificate to Best Buy. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas may not provide compensation or free medical care for an unanticipated injury sustained as a result of participating in this research study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact John Goldhardt by leaving a message with Dr. Robert S. McCord at 702-895-4195 or directly through e-mail at johng@mail.burgoyne.com

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation

Your student’s participation in this study is voluntary. They may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. They may withdraw at any time without prejudice to their relations with the university or their school. Your student will be encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely **confidential**. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you or your student to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility by the researcher for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to have my son or daughter participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Parent/Guardian Name (Please Print)

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Department of Educational Leadership

YOUTH ASSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: “The School Experience from the Students’ Perspective: A Comparative Case Study Analysis”

INVESTIGATOR: John Goldhardt

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 303S0303-081

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to get your opinion about your Utah secondary school experience. This information will then be used so that school leaders can improve the school system for students.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a Utah high school senior.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a focus group interview with the researcher and approximately nine (9) other seniors from your school. A focus group is a group of people that represent a larger group of people. The focus groups in this study will represent the senior class at your school.
2. Your focus group will be asked a series of questions as they relate to your opinions about your secondary school experience.
3. You may spend up to three hours in the focus group interview.
4. You will be “school excused” for the time you are involved with the interview.

Benefits of Participation

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn from your input how to improve the secondary school experience.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. The risk may be feeling uncomfortable answering a question with other members of the focus group.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you or your parent/guardian to participate in this study. The study will take up to three (3) hours of your time. You will be provided with snacks and breaks and a \$10.00 gift certificate to Best Buy. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas may not provide compensation or free medical care for an unanticipated injury sustained as a result of participating in this research study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact John Goldhardt by leaving a message with Dr. Robert S. McCord at 702-895-4167 or directly through e-mail at johng@mail.burgoyne.com

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university or your school. You will be encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely **confidential**. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility by the researcher for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have discussed this with my parent/guardian and they have a copy of the Informed Consent form. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX II

NSSE DATA TABLES AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Table III

NSSE Student Opinion Inventory -- Summary of Statistics by Topic for Color Country High School

Section	Number of Items	Average	Standard Deviation
(n = 95)			
Quality of the Instructional Program	18	3.64	1.01
Support for Student Learning	11	3.71	0.96
School Climate/ Environment for Learning	15	3.60	1.03
Student Activities/ Involvement in School	6	3.68	1.12
Composite:	50	3.65	1.02

Note: Average is based upon a 5-point Likert Scale

Table IV

NSSE Student Opinion Inventory – Summary of Demographical Data for Color Country High School

Question/Topic	Percentage
(n = 94)	
Male	49.5%
Female	49.5%
Students that will attend Hurricane High their senior year	91.3%
African American	0%
American Indian	1.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.4%
Caucasian	87.8%
Hispanic/Latino	1.1%
Other	5.6%
Athletic participation (includes cheerleading and drill team)	34.0%
Instrumental or vocal music participation	6.0%
Drama/Speech/Debate participation	8.0%
Academic clubs participation	8.0%
Other clubs participation	14.0%
Not connected to any club or extra curricular activity	30.0%

Table V

What do You Wish Was Different about High School (Color Country High School)?

Theme	Description
Social/People	Groups that exclude others
	Competition between students
	Look beyond the small town
Rules/Policies	Attendance policy
	Dress code
	Rules enforced
Instruction	Too much busy work
	Less homework
	More technology
	Relate information to life
Teachers	Grading needs to be more fair
	Grading needs to be more consistent
	Care more about student success
	Provide challenging but meaningful work
	Care about students as people
Administration	Enforce rules for <i>all</i> students
	Assistant principal more positive
	Care about students and their concerns
Activities	More involvement
	More variety

Table VI

NSSE Student Opinion Inventory -- Summary of Statistics by Topic for Central High School

Section	Number of Items	Average	Standard Deviation
(n = 320)			
Quality of the Instructional Program	18	3.47	0.97
Support for Student Learning	11	3.34	1.02
School Climate/ Environment for Learning	15	3.23	1.08
Student Activities/ Involvement in School	6	3.56	1.03
Composite:	50	3.38	1.03

Note: Average is based upon a 5-point Likert Scale

Table VII

NSSE Student Opinion Inventory – Summary of Demographical Data for Central High School

Question/Topic	Percentage
(n = 320)	
Male	50.6%
Female	48.7%
Students that will attend Murray High their senior year	93.9%
African American	1.0%
American Indian	1.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.2%
Caucasian	80.4%
Hispanic/Latino	13.1%
Other	6.5%
Athletic participation (includes cheerleading and drill team)	31.7%
Instrumental or vocal music participation	9.3%
Drama/Speech/Debate participation	3.3%
Academic clubs participation	6.6%
Other clubs participation	13.1%
Not connected to any club or extra curricular activity	36.1%

Table VIII

What do You Wish Was Different about High School (Central High School)?

Theme	Description
Social/People	Students need to be less dramatic
	Fewer rumors and gossip
	No cliques
	Be more serious about grades
Rules/Policies	Attendance policy
	Dress code
	Rules enforced
Instruction	Too much busy work
	Less homework
	More technology
	Smaller classes
	Focus more on careers/goals
	School starts too early
Teachers	Treat students as adults
	Qualified in subject
	Positive attitudes
	Explain why grade is bad or good
	Care about students as people
Administration	Enforce rules
	More accessible
	Care about students and their concerns
	More positive

Activities

More involvement

More variety

Clubs that involve the outdoors

These questions have been developed after analyzing the results of the NSSE survey and the open-ended questions with the survey. The questions are designed for clarification and expansion of student opinions and to answer the research questions. After each question, the type of question is identified in parentheses.

Color Country High School Interview Questions

1. One way to describe the school experience is through metaphors (find out if they know what a metaphor is – if not describe). One metaphor I am going to use today is the blue card. A blue card means that you treated as able, responsible and reliable and it describes the best in human behavior and care. Using the blue card metaphor, please tell me what the blue cards are at Color Country High (Interpretive Question).
2. Another metaphor is the orange card. It is the exact opposite of a blue card. It says that you are unable, irresponsible and we do not want you. Using the orange card metaphor, please tell me what the orange cards are at Color Country High (Interpretive Question).
3. According to the survey that you took last spring, one of the most positive issues that you identified about your school, is also the most negative: your peers.
4. Tell me about cliques and stereotyping (Interpretive Question)

5. Why are cliques and stereotypes a problem (Interpretive Question)?
6. How should this problem be addressed (Interpretive Question)?
7. It appears that there are some really negative feelings about the restitution policy here.
8. What are the negative outcomes of this policy (Interpretive Question)?
9. What are the positive outcomes of this policy (Interpretive Question)?
10. What do you think would be the ideal attendance policy for a high school (Ideal Position Question)?
11. Why should the dress code be enforced (Interpretive Question)?
12. School starts pretty early here. There are some school districts that are having high school start later and end later. There are some parents and educators that say that we should leave the start times alone. They say that teenagers are just too lazy to get up on time. What would you tell these people (Devil's Advocate Question)?
13. If you were a teacher, what would you do to make grading more fair (Hypothetical Question)?
14. What types of homework help you to learn or develop greater understanding (Interpretive Question; Ideal Position Question)?
15. I'm sure that all of you have had a teacher that had great value for you. What makes this teacher valuable (Interpretive Question)?
16. Perhaps you have a teacher that you did not value. Describe for me why you did not value this teacher (Interpretive Question).
17. Let's suppose that you are in charge of hiring teachers at Color Country High School. What will the teachers be like that you hire (Hypothetical Question)?

18. Let's suppose that you are in charge of hiring the principal and the assistant principal for this school. What will the principal and assistant principal that you hire be like (Hypothetical Question)?
19. What would you tell people that don't think high school students should have more access to technology or more technology classes (Devil's Advocate Question)?
20. There seems to be some support from students here to have a block schedule. What advantages would this provide for you (Interpretive Question)?
21. Let's suppose that I am a new student at this school. What advice would you give me so that I could fit in. Would this advice be different if I was female (Hypothetical Question)?
22. What types of activities that the school sponsors are your favorites? Why (Interpretive Question)?
23. If you have participated in an extra-curricular or co-curricular activity, tell me what you learned from and how it impacted your academic performance (Interpretive Question).
24. There are some state legislators that believe that school activities are a waste of time and money and that they don't help students to learn anything. What would you tell these legislators with this belief (Devil's Advocate Question)?
25. I administered the same survey your class took to students at a school in Salt Lake County. You had much higher levels of satisfaction with your school than your peers did in Salt Lake County. Why is this so (Interpretive Question)?

26. You have just been appointed as the principal of Color Country High. Describe for me what the school will be like under your leadership Hypothetical Question; Ideal Position Question).

27. What do you believe the administration should be doing to support you in your high school experience (Interpretive Question)?

28. I am a school principal and a researcher. Please tell me what I should share with other principals concerning what we can do to make the high school experience more meaningful (Interpretive Question; Ideal Position Question)?

Interview Questions for Central High School

These questions have been developed after analyzing the results of the NSSE survey and the open-ended questions with the survey. The questions are designed for clarification and expansion of student opinions and to answer the research questions.

1. According to the survey your class took last spring, one of the prevalent issues that you identified as a problem concern your peers.
2. Tell me about the cliques and the “drama” (Interpretive Question)
3. Why are cliques and “drama” a problem (Interpretive Question)?
4. How should this problem be addressed (Interpretive Question)?
5. It appears that there are some strong feelings about the attendance policy here.
6. What are negative outcomes of this policy (Interpretive Question)?
7. What are the positive outcomes of this policy (Interpretive Question)?

8. What do you think would be the ideal attendance policy for a high school (Ideal Position Question)?
9. Why should the dress code be enforced (Interpretive Question)?
10. School starts pretty early here. There are some school districts that are having high school start later and end later. There are some parents and educators out there that say we should leave the start times alone. They say that teenagers are just too lazy to get up on time. What would you tell these people (Devil's Advocate Question)?
11. I've heard a lot about what is called "busy work."
12. What exactly is busy work (Interpretive Question)?
13. Which classes assign the most busy work (Interpretive Question)?
14. What types of homework help you to learn or develop greater understanding (Interpretive Question)?
15. I'm sure that all of you have had a teacher that had great value to you. Describe for me why you valued this particular teacher (Interpretive Question).
16. You may have had a teacher that you did not value. Describe for me why you did not value this teacher (Interpretive Question).
17. Let's suppose that you are in charge of hiring teachers at Murray High. Describe what the teachers will be like that you will hire (Hypothetical Question).
18. Which activities that school sponsors are your favorites? Why (Interpretive Question)?
19. If you have participated in an extra-curricular or co-curricular activity, please tell me what you learned from participating and what impact it had on your academic performance (Interpretive Question).

20. There are some members of the state legislature that believe that school activities are a waste of time and money. What would you tell these legislators (Devil's Advocate Question)?
21. Let's suppose that I am a new student. What advice would you give me so that I could fit in (Interpretive Question)?
22. You have just been appointed as the principal of Central High. Describe for me what the school will be like with you in charge (Hypothetical Question).
23. What do you believe the administration should be doing to support you in your high school experience (Interpretive Question)?
24. You are now in this brand new building. How has the new building impacted your school experience (Interpretive Question)?
25. One way to describe the school experience is through metaphors (find out if they know what a metaphor is – if not describe). One metaphor I am going to use today is the blue card. A blue card means that you are treated as able, valuable and responsible. It describes the best in behavior and care. Using the blue card metaphor, please tell me what the blue cards are at Central High (Interpretive Question).
26. Another metaphor is the orange card. It is the exact opposite of the blue card. It says you are unable, irresponsible and we don't want you. Using the orange card metaphor, please tell me what the orange cards are at Central High (Interpretive Question).
27. Let's suppose that you are responsible for hiring a principal at Central High. Tell me what qualities you will look for (Hypothetical Question; Ideal Position Question).
28. From your point of view, what should the ideal high school experience be like (Ideal Position Question)?

29. I am a school principal and a researcher. Please tell me what I should share with other principals about how they can make the high school experience more meaningful (Interpretive Question; Ideal Position Question).

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

John Goldhardt

Home Address:

1151 Wesley Powell Drive
St. George, Utah 84790

Degrees:

Bachelor of Science, Interpersonal Communication, 1989
Southern Utah University

Master of Public Administration, Local Government Administration
and School Administration, 1995
University of Utah

Special Honors and Awards:

Fellow, Utah Principals Academy, 1997-98
Utah State Office of Education

Facilitator and Trainer, "Collaborating for Student Achievement," 2000
Utah State Office of Education

National Administrator of the Year, Character Education, 2003
Community of Caring (Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation)

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, 2004

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Dissertation Examination Committee:

Co-Chairperson, Dr. Robert S. McCord, Ed.D.
Co-Chairperson, Dr. LeAnn Putney, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. James Crawford, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Teresa Jordan, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Peggy Perkins, Ph.D.

