Sample Parent Engagement Survey

		Poor				Okay					Super
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Welcoming Environment	1. When I was new to town I could readily find the building and the main entrance										
	2. I am always greeted and offered assistance										
	3. I am regularly encouraged to observe in classrooms										
	4. I am invited in more than one way to events at the school.										
	5. There are easy to follow directions or a person to direct me to locations in the school.										
	6. There are signs of what the school is all about from the moment I walk in the door.										
	7. I feel special and at home at our school										
	8. I feel like a guest rather than a family member when I come to school										
	TOTALS										
The school supports learning at home	9. I know what my child is expected to do for homework										
	10. I get regular communication about assignments										
	11. I have the materials my child needs to complete assignments										
	12. I could attend a homework class so I can help my child with math										
	13. The amount of homework assigned is appropriate and allows for family time										
	TOTALS										

Demarest 2008 Charter Start Workshop

	Effective two-way communication between home and school												
	14. The school gave me a parent handbook with helpful, current info												
	15. I get a weekly newsletter												
	16. The website helps me keep up with what's happening at our school												
	17. My child's teacher calls or emails me when she has concerns and when my child does something neat												
	18. The principal and teachers call me by name.												
	19. I'm comfortable initiating contact with the school.												
	20. The communication plan helps me know who to contact with a concern.												
	TOTALS												
	21. School policies are fair and clear and consistently applied.												
	22. The school recognizes that I know my child best.												
	23. If I'm upset about something at school I know I would be listened to.												
	24. I feel included in major decisions at the school												
	25. My child's teacher and I work as a team to help him/her be successful.												
	26. I have been invited into a leadership position.												
	27. The parent council really represents my points of view.												
	TOTALS												
	Grand Totals												

Left sidebar label (rows 14–20): Effective two-way communication between home and school

Left sidebar label (rows 21–27): Other important engagement issues

Ways that Parents Engage in their Child's Education	
1. Parenting	
2. Communicating	
3. Supporting the School	
4. Learning at Home	
5. Decision Making	
6. Collaborating with the Community	

Family Friendly Schools, LLC

411 North Main St.

Galax, VA 24333

www.familyfriendlyschools.com
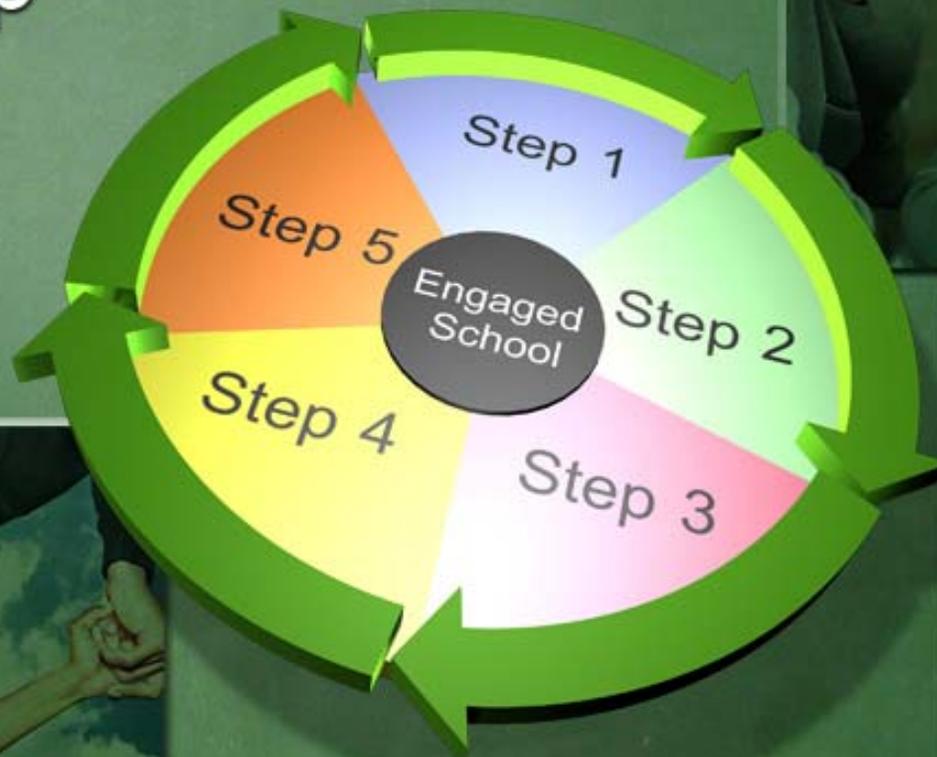
STEP 1:
<u>Baseline Data Collection</u>

Where are we?
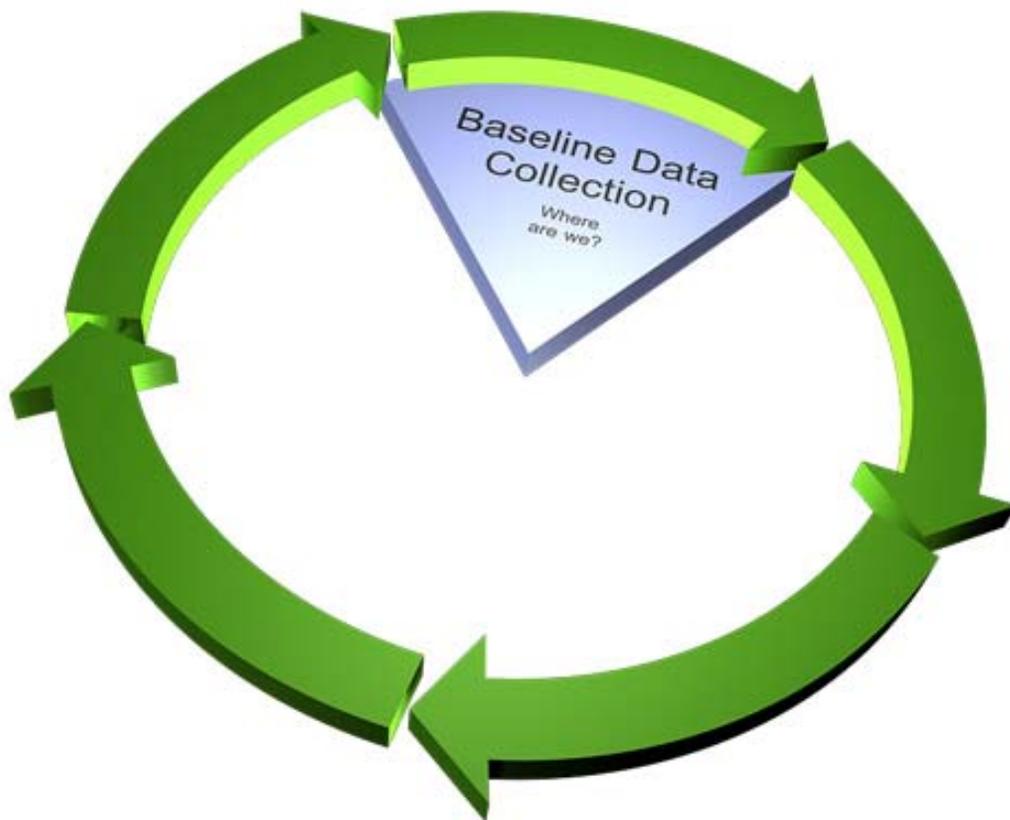
The Family Engagement Survey

32-question family engagement survey

Available in both English and Spanish

Gathers information in 4 domains:

1. *The welcoming environment of the school toward families*

2. *The degree to which the school supports learning at home*

3. *Effective two-way communication between home and school*

4. *Important issues in family engagement (i.e. policy, governance, parental efficacy)*

STEP 1:
<u>Baseline Data Collection</u>

Where are we?
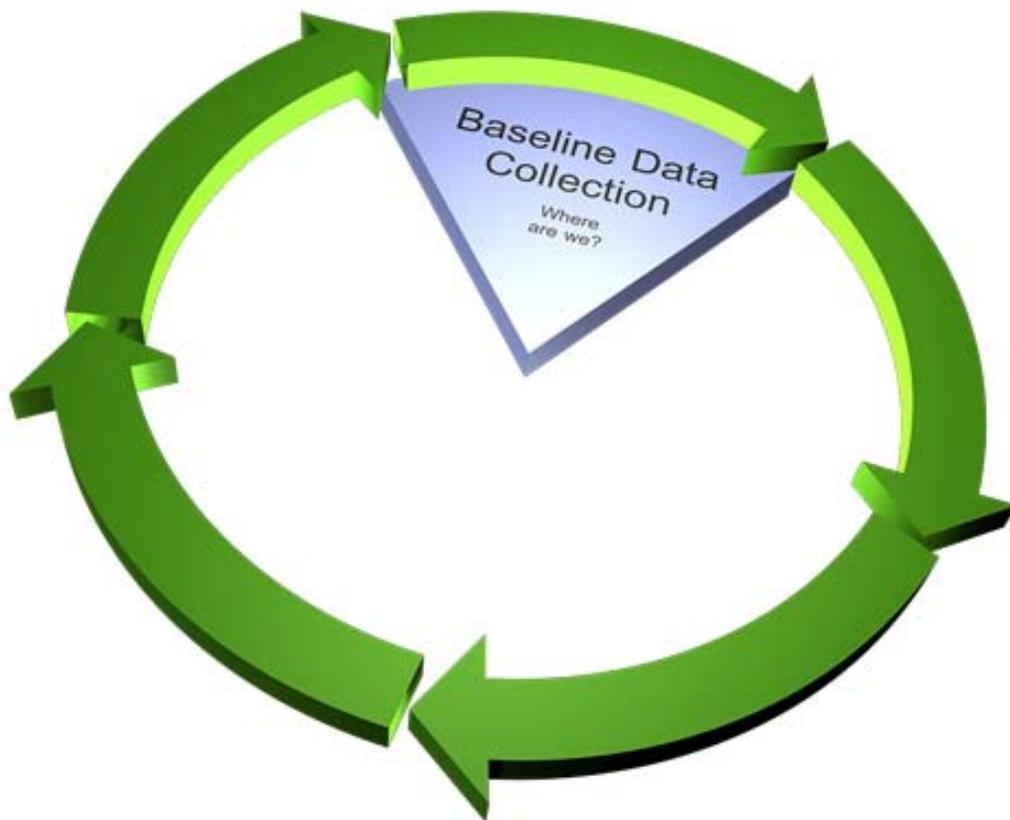
Data Reporting

FFS generates a customized Family Engagement Quantitative Report of the data collected for the school or district. This comprehensive analysis reveals specific areas of development to create measurable, strategic Family Engagement processes.

STEP 1:
<u>Baseline Data Collection</u>

Where are we?
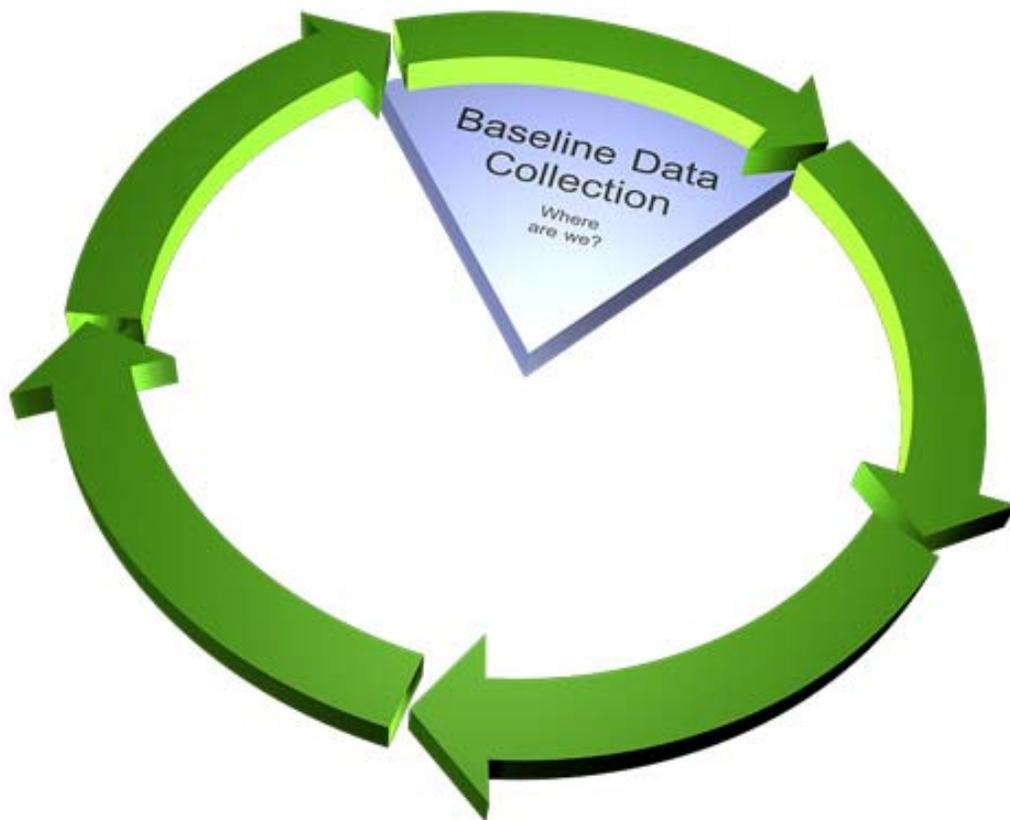
Public Opinion Research

In addition to the survey results, FFS can provide family and community opinion research through Qualitative analysis. Through focus group and individual interview research, FFS obtains important community based information to enhance your engage all families process.

STEP 2:
Engage! Institute

Learn, Plan, Execute
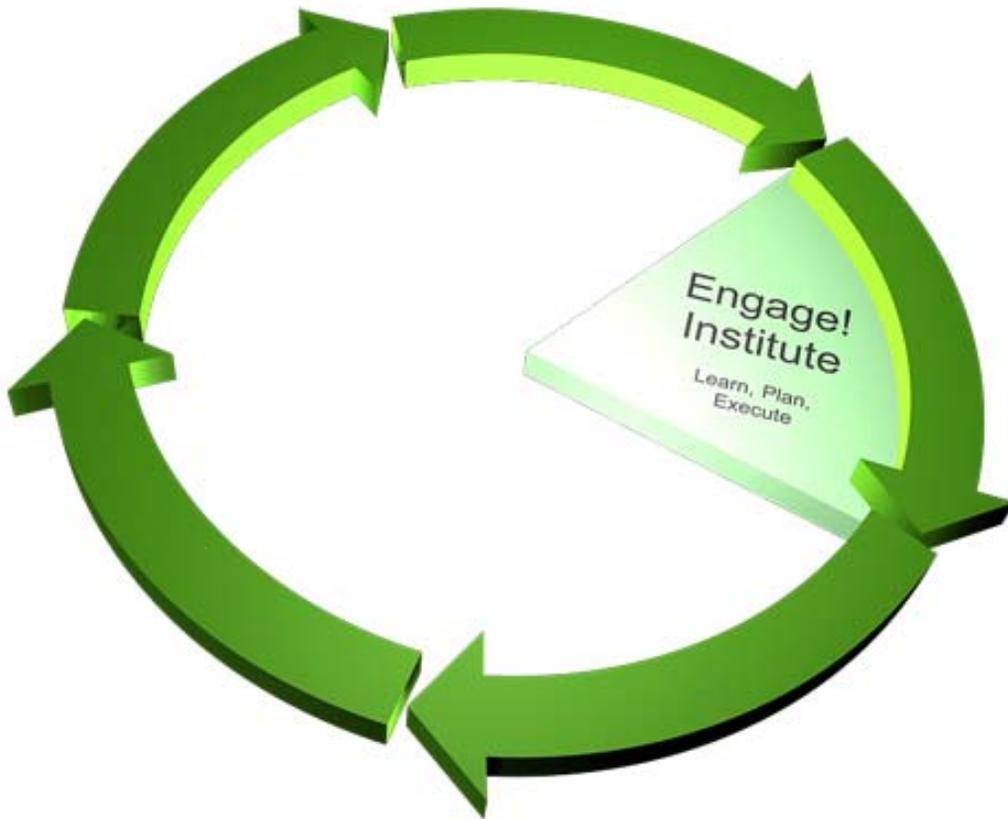
The Engage! Institute

Three Day Event

Designed to create positive and productive school cultures to advance the achievement of all students through explicit family engagement processes.

At the conclusion of the institute participants will be able to:

1. Develop dynamic relationships between Leadership, Staff, and Families.

2. Assess individual school dynamics, identify programs, practices, procedures, and policies which are Family Friendly; and identify those that lead to disenfranchised and disengaged families.

STEP 2:
Engage! Institute

Learn, Plan, Execute
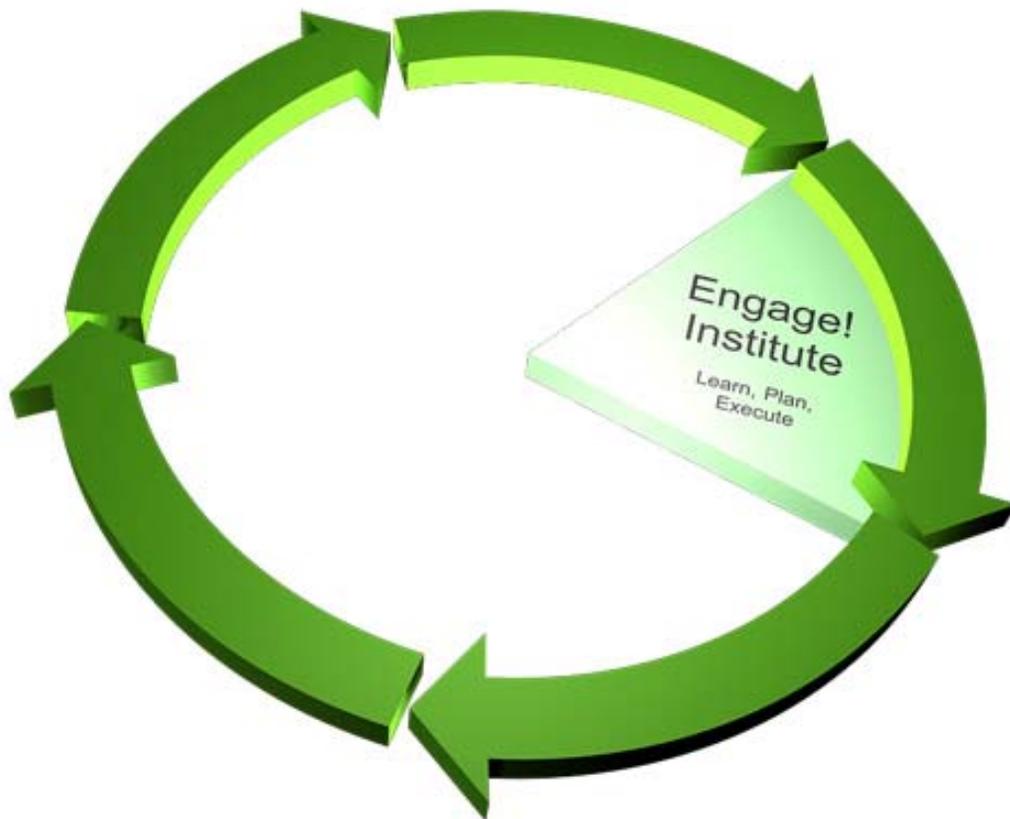
The Engage! Institute

3. Use collected data to create and implement a measurable process to create dynamic family engagement.

4. Measure and improve student achievement through systemic family engagement practices.

5. Create a school culture that supports achievement of all students.

STEP 3:
Distance Coaching

Nurturing Accountability

Distance Coaching

Nurturing Accountability

Distance Coaching

FFS designed Distance Coaching, sometimes called EdCoach™, as a practical, cost-effective way for Dr. Constantino and other Family Engagement Specialists to maintain close and consistent contacts with the cadre team participating in the Institute.

Through external moderation, Distance Coaching increases the likelihood that Institute customers will return to their schools and implement, execute, and maintain an engaged culture.

STEP 3:
<u>Distance Coaching</u>

Nurturing Accountability

Distance Coaching

Distance Coaching includes the following:

1. Two (post institute) web/tele-coaching per school with Dr. Constantino and/or another FFS Certified family engagement specialist using state-of-the-art, web-based software.

2. Focused time during these 45 minute to one hour sessions to work on opportunities and challenges teams are facing implementing the family engagement process and to provide support, guidance, and leadership.

3. Access to an archive of sessions for repetitive learning and for team members unable to attend live sessions.

STEP 4:
Tracking Survey

Progress Report & Mid Course Corrections

Tracking Survey

The FFS Tracking Survey provides the ability to follow or "track" the progress of individual school family engagement plans by soliciting feedback from both families and school staff.

Two tracking surveys are conducted, one at the mid-mark and one at the end of the Engage process.

Mid-Mark Survey = Progress Report

If the results do not meet expectations, we adjust and make the necessary mid-course corrections to keep you on track.

 Year-End Survey = Report Card

In comparing the baseline to this survey we determine the effectiveness in implementing the Family Engagement Model.

STEP 5:
Onsite Coaching

Motivation, Training & Staff Capacity Building

Onsite Coaching

Engagement is all about relationships and at FFS we believe in building meaningful relationships with our clients that liberate greatness. Consequently, step five involves onsite visits for executive planning, team building, and professional development sessions lead by members of the FFS team of engagement specialists.

We recommend a minimum of two onsite visits per school year.

FFS will assist you in selecting the right professional programs for your organization based on data collection and progress.

The Engaged! School
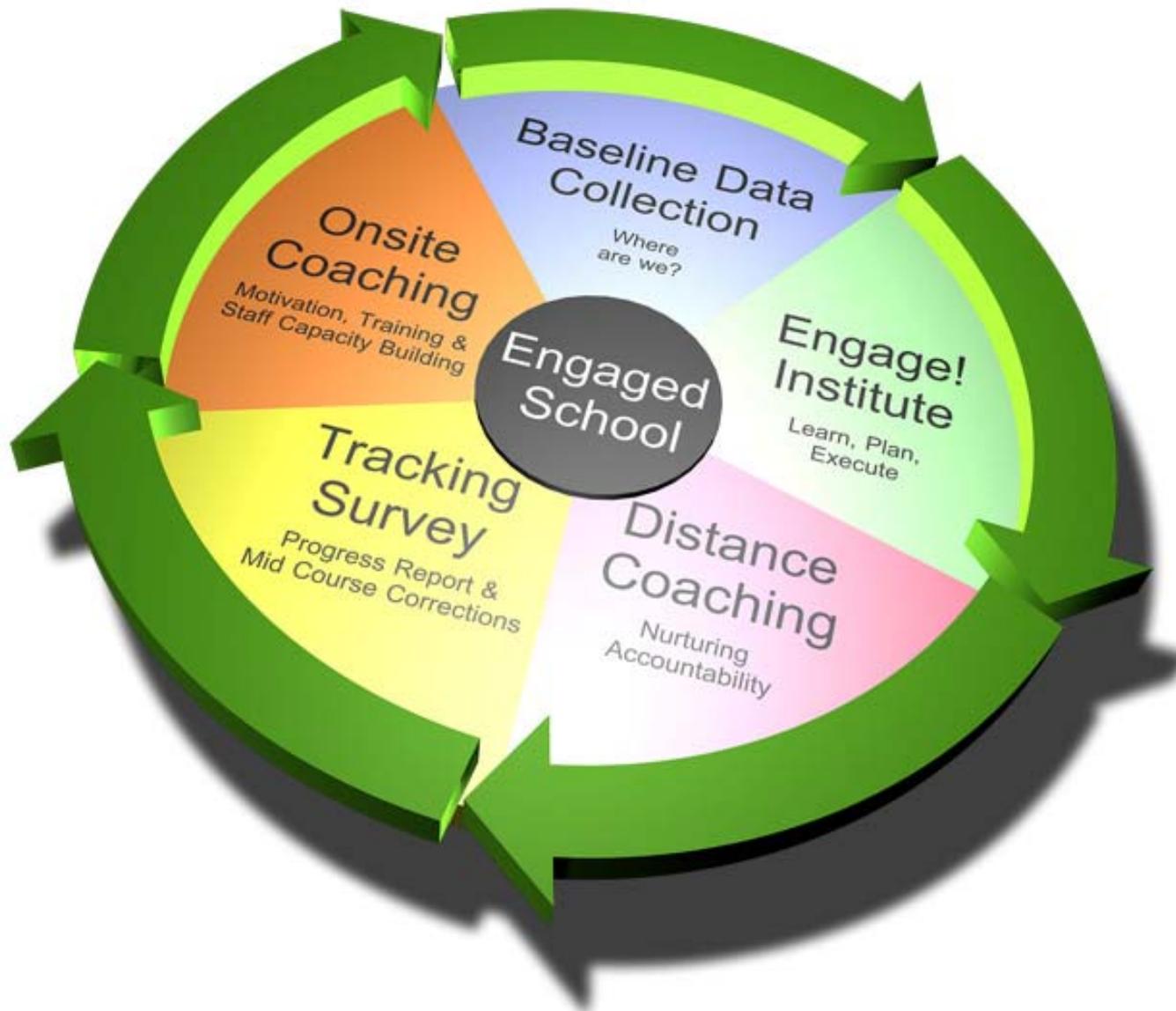
THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Technology provides only an opportunity; an active interest on the school's part in increasing parental involvement is necessary if the opportunity is to be used.
—James Coleman

Technology can significantly bolster the partnerships between home and school provided school leadership understands the value in strong family partnerships. Students can also attain the autonomy in their education and accountability for learning, which is essential to long-term success. With the advent of technological applications in education, school leaders have new resources at their disposal. Blanchard (1997) explains how technology can serve the family-school connection: (1) communication and information, (2) learning and instruction, (3) interest and motivation, and (4) resources and costs. He expands on these four areas by highlighting specific technological applications: establishing two-way communication between homes and schools; discussing school experiences within and among families and communities; involving families who are presently difficult to reach; helping teachers and families acquire needed knowledge and skills; building the capacity of the schools to improve the educational health of the family; helping parents extend learning to the home in more meaningful ways by allowing them to be instructors or coaches as well as learning partners; helping families and schools motivate children; providing support and coordination for homes and schools to sustain involvement; and reducing resource costs of educating children.

VOICE-MAIL APPLICATIONS

The first school-wide application of voice-messaging technology was in 1987. Experiments resulted in the Transparent School Model, which could be used in any school (Bauch 1997). The model provides voice-based information between teachers and parents and has at its core two primary functions: First, parents can call and listen to the teacher's daily message; and second, the system can send automated calls to parents with information that the families need. In most schools the results are astonishing. At least half of the parents call every day to hear teacher messages. Parent involvement rates go up by 500–800 percent. Student learning performance goes up and success rates improve (Bauch 1997). New technology can now link the voice-messaging system with the school's web page, allowing Internet access to the same school and class information as well as attendance and achievement data for individual students. Voice mail, e-mail, interactive websites, and other two-way communication systems are now established ways to open schools to virtually all homes. But it is the telephone that continues to have all the advantages of familiarity, easy use, and widespread availability. In order for schools to be

successful with using technology to promote true parent involvement, rather than defaulting to a more traditional, one-way "homework hotline" communications approach, teacher training and the personal involvement of the individual school's leader are critical to long-term success.

A logical step in the lineage of voice-messaging applications was the creation of the Bridge Project. Funded by the American Business Collaboration and in partnership with Vanderbilt University, schools across the country had the opportunity to apply for grant funding to install voice-messaging technology as a way to garner more parent involvement with school. In 1995, 104 schools successfully completed grants and were funded for the Bridge Project. Before starting the Bridge program, the mean number of parent contacts per teacher per day for Bridge Project schools was 2.66. Only two to three parents had any type of interaction with their child's teacher on any given day; most parents had none. After one month of using the voice messaging technology, in tandem with concepts learned from Transparent School Model training, parent contacts per teacher per day increased to 11.46. This initial gain was about 430 percent. As more schools reported data, the figure rose to 487 percent. When adding messaging and actual contacts together, the overall increase in parent involvement is almost 500 percent.

The range of increase of Bridge Project schools was from 236 percent to 950 percent. There is also correlation between the effort a school placed on publicity to promote its new technology and the frequency of system use. Principals adapting the "five types" method of publicity (that is, promoting the system five different ways) were more successful in attaining high usage rates. The "five-type" system includes the three major categories of written, aural, and verbal communication. Under these headings there exist ideas such as newsletters, magnetized memo pads, pencils, signs, buttons, banners, feature stories, student projects depicting the event or practice, and so forth. The point made is a simple one: the more diversity in communicating your ideas, the more likely families and communities will comprehend the message and participate in the program being promoted. Stonewall Jackson High School acted as a pilot school for the Bridge Project.

Baseline data collected at the school before the Bridge Project implementation showed that the average rate of parent involvement was 1.3 contacts of all types per teacher per day. In the first month of project operation, there were 11,518 calls to the school. This represented 9.0 calls per teacher per day. Based on this data, there was a 592 percent increase in parent/teacher contacts, with approximately 50 percent of the school's families contacting the school daily.

The initial use of technology to promote family partnerships that incorporated telephone-based programs was later expanded to use Internet-based applications in tandem with the original concept of voice-mail messaging.

Parents can access the system with a personalized password to retrieve information about their child's cumulative grades, completed and missing assignments, and class attendance. Parents can listen to voice-mail messages about classroom work through their computers while perusing this grade and attendance information. Parents have the opportunity to e-mail specific teachers or send general e-mails to the school.

HOW TECHNOLOGY REMOVES BARRIERS

There is a recurring problem that can be addressed succinctly within the context of the applications of technology to promote the engagement of all families. Even though there are years of research supporting the notion that family involvement and engagement improves the academic achievement of children, family engagement continues to be relinquished to subsidiary priority lists of educators. Engaging families is seen as important, but barriers to that engagement make it difficult—and in many cases, impossible—to develop and implement strong family engagement programs. Technology, however, does provide a systemic solution to many of the barriers that plague the efforts of educators to promote strong family engagement in their schools. To understand how technology can help, it is important to understand what the barriers are.

Research suggests that **the largest barrier to family engagement is time**. Families of all kinds are finding it more and more difficult to manage families and careers. Many families indicate they have little time for their children and even less time to involve themselves in their children's school life. This is especially true in single-parent families or other families in which there is one parent, guardian, or family member responsible for children. The majority of two parent households find both mother and father working outside of the home, leaving available time at a premium.

Schools find dwindling attendance to meetings, conferences, and other school events and quickly assume that apathy exists among the families. There is nothing further from the truth. Time and long lists of responsibilities force families to make difficult choices; attending school events and being involved with their child's school life often drop on the list of priorities. It stands to reason that anything schools can do to assist parents in gathering information and monitoring their children's school development will be welcomed and appreciated by all families. Technology provides such a vehicle. Voice-mail applications and information coupled with web-based systems that provide basic information about student academic progress and attendance allow parents and families to monitor school activities at a convenient time during their schedule.

Listening to messages from teachers about class happenings and assignments gives families the information they need to have discussions with their children regarding expectations. All of this makes monitoring children much

easier as the barrier of time no longer stands between the home and school. **Culture is the second largest barrier** to family engagement. Often, non-English-speaking families are intimidated or unsure of the school environment and are unclear as to how to gather information. Add to this idea that many of these families are socio-economically disadvantaged, and becoming engaged with school is an impossibility. Technology allows for messages and information to be retrieved by families in an arena of security within their homes. Messages can be broadcast and sent in native languages, allowing these families the opportunity to learn about school events. This type of communication sends a distinct message to families that the school cares about them and wishes them to be engaged. This message resonates loudly among non-English-speaking communities.

The third largest barrier to family engagement is parental and family uncertainty. Adults responsible for children often had negative experiences as a child and have imposed those experiences and attitudes onto their children. Families who are uncertain are less likely to be involved with school, attend school events, or monitor their children's progress. Families who are skeptical of a school or who, for whatever reason, are negative or distrusting of a school seem to only be involved when there is a problem with their child, often siding with their child and making it difficult for the school to establish positive relationships.

Providing a technological solution to these types of families eliminates the barrier of uncertainty because they can engage in "invisible involvement." Providing technological solutions to family engagement enhances the probability that these parents and families will monitor their students and this ability may increase the likelihood of schools establishing more positive relationships. Other barriers of school size, location, curriculum, adolescence, number of teachers, and peer relationships also

> **3 Barriers to Family Engagement:**
> 1. **Time**
> 2. **Culture**
> 3. **Parental and family uncertainty**

provide unique challenges to educators. Technology can cut through these barriers as well. If families cannot get to the school because of transportation, technology allows them to stay involved. Teachers leaving messages designed to help families understand instructional concepts helps to relieve problems associated with curriculum. As children grow older and become more independent, they are less likely to be friendly to the idea of their parents' and families' physical presence and involvement with school. Technology becomes a wonderful resource for parents who wish to teach and respect their child's independence, yet, stay current in their educational lives.

DETERMINING APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

With numerous products on the market and a growing number of websites catering to school communication needs, determining how to select appropriate technology that will truly enhance the relationship between home and school becomes an important and significant step in building family engagement programs and practices. Understanding family engagement research, demographic data, and some technology knowledge should be coupled with a keen sense of the needs of one's own community. Research clearly establishes a need for family involvement in the educational lives of children. Much of that research points to the need of frequent and two-way communication between homes and schools and points to time, culture, curriculum, parental uncertainty, and issues of trust as barriers that need to be breached in order to create effective home-school relationships that support all children.

An important aspect of understanding the use of technology is the notion that more technology is not necessarily better in establishing two-way and frequent opportunities for communication. The salient issue is the degree of access to technology available to the community that surrounds the school and how best to establish communication with families. With the growing popularity of cell phones, the telephone continues to be the most popular technology available to the largest population in any given community and should be a central component when determining how to use technology to promote family engagement. Even with the explosion of the Internet and e-mail, telephone technology remains the best way to connect with all families. Designing a technology system that is accessible to everyone, every day, twenty-four hours per day, 365 days per year, is the advantage that no other means of home-school communication can offer.

FAMILIES, TEACHERS, AND THE TELEPHONE

At some time during every teacher's career, he or she sets a goal of making positive phone calls to or improving direct communication with parents. Although these goals are noble, they very often are not attained. The vast majority of teachers do not have access to a phone in their classrooms and, as a result, connecting with a teacher by telephone is very difficult for parents and families. It is as difficult for teachers to gain access to telephones to make or return phone calls. Often, a series of messages and callbacks play out over a series of days, until both parties are frustrated about their lack of ability to communicate. Administrators should do all they can to provide telephones in every classroom. This step alone will revolutionize the ability for educators to communicate with their external customers. It is also important to provide educationally designed voice-mail systems to further enhance the ability for teachers and families to communicate.

The concept of schools providing "homework hotlines" is not a new one. Using voice-mail technology to leave homework assignments is a popular use of technology. Expanding the use of this concept to include information to parents

about class activities, upcoming assignments, and how they can support their child's learning at home is an easy and effective way to improve the use of voice mail for those schools that have operative homework hotlines.

A typical "homework hotline" message might be:

"Tonight's homework for algebra I is chapter 1, pages 13–15. All students need to know the order of operations."

Even though this is a perfectly acceptable use of technology to simply list the homework assignment, it does little to include families in the varying aspects of children's school experience.

The following message, designed for parents, includes them in the process of their child's education:

" Hi. I am Mr. Smith, your child's period 2 algebra I teacher. Today is Monday, September 15th. We are working on the order of operations and tonight's homework is on pages 13–15 and should take twenty to thirty minutes to complete. The order of operations is a very important concept that all students need to know to continue to be successful in algebra this year. Parents, ask your children what the order of operations is; they should answer: multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction. Perhaps when you were in school the teacher helped you remember this by giving you the phrase, *my dear Aunt Sally.* We are having a quiz on Friday and when you call back I will tell you how that quiz went and what we will be doing next. If there is anything that I need to know about your child, please press the pound sign and leave me a message."

This message, which takes about a minute to record, provides insight into what the class is studying and how families can reinforce learning at home. It is also arguably more information than families would usually get about any aspect of their child's school day. Most importantly, it allows families to leave a message for the teacher with information about their children. It is essential that parents have the ability to leave messages directly for their child's individual teachers. Some systems allow for messages to be sent to a central location rather than directly to individual teachers in individual classroom "mailboxes."

The ability for parents and families to leave messages for teachers is important. Often, teachers can incorporate the approximate length of time homework should take and can invite parents to leave messages if their child spent to little or too much time. Also, it is a wonderful way for parents and families to give teachers information that will help the teacher work with the child. This concept is highlighted by the following story:

A classroom teacher arrived at school one day and even though her daily ritual of preparation included checking voice mails, the teacher had

other things to tend to and decided to check voice-mail messages later in the day. With the opening bell, the students filed into the classroom. One of the students, who was very rarely a problem for this teacher, arrived to his class and put his head down on the desk. After several attempts to engage the student, the teacher demanded that the student raise his head and participate in class. The student refused and continued to keep his head down. Frustrated, the teacher warned the student that further noncompliance would mean a discipline referral and removal from class. With that, the student stood up, knocking his chair over, grabbed his book bag, and stormed from the room muttering his lack of caring about whatever action the teacher would choose. It took several minutes to calm the class and refocus attention back on the lesson.

At the conclusion of the day and after the teacher wrote a discipline referral about the student earlier in the day, she finally checked her voice mail. There was one message that came in at midnight from the mother of the young man with whom she had difficulty earlier in the day. The message from the young man's mother alerted the teacher to the death of the beloved family dog. The mother went on to explain that all of the children had been up late crying, very upset about this situation, and that it seemed to affect her son the most, since he was the oldest and was just a toddler when the family got the dog. The boy and the dog were inseparable and the last night was the first night in eleven years the dog had not slept on her son's bed. Even though she encouraged her son to stay home, he insisted on going to school so that he would not miss his first class. The mother concluded the message by informing the teacher of where she could be reached should her son not be performing well in school. She indicated that she would come and pick her son up if the situation warranted. She thanked the teacher for her understanding and concluded the message.

➢ What would the classroom situation have been like had the teacher listened to her voice-mail message before the beginning of the school day?
➢ Would she have approached the difficult student a bit differently?

Hopefully, the answers to these questions are obvious and showcase the importance of technology allowing for two-way communication between home and school.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO SCHOOL INFORMATION

In addition to the important aspect of families having direct access to their children's teachers is the notion that the school must provide a great deal of information to the general public. Most consumers are accustomed to voicemail systems that provide a menu of options for information. The same concept can be used for school information as well. It is important for school administrators to determine the kind of information that families want to know and that is helpful to

families. Decisions have to be made to limit the options so callers do not become frustrated with an endless list of options. All systems should be designed to allow callers to input selections at any time, rather than listening to entire menus. Repeat callers do not need menus.

The following list of information is provided for administrators to consider in creating public information lines. The lines can be changed based on the time of year and the importance of the information. For example, enrollment and registration information is perhaps more important in the summer months than it is during the school year.

School hours	Meetings and events calendars
Administrator's names	PTA or other parent organization info
Voice mailbox numbers	Testing information and tips on testing
Principal's message	Unusual event or circumstances
Guidance and counseling information	Tip line information
Sports and activities schedules and updates	Emergency information
Community service and support information	Directory of voice mailboxes by keying
Fund-raising information	in the letters of the staff ' last names

Public Information Topics

School hours; administrator's names, voice mailbox numbers; principal's message; guidance and counseling information; sports and activities schedules and updates; community service and support information; fund-raising information; meetings and events calendars; PTA or other parent organization information; testing information and tips on testing; unusual event or circumstance information; tip line information; emergency information; and a directory of voice mailboxes that can be accessed by keying letters of the staff members' last names.

For every one of these suggested public information lines, there are numerous others that can be added. When marketed and advertised to the community, the use of the system increases and calls that need to be fielded by secretaries or other employees' decreases. The availability of this information twenty-four hours a day is also very accommodating to all schedules and greatly appreciated by families and the community at large.

Outbound Calling

Outbound dialing systems that can place attendance or general message calls are as common as homework hotlines. These dialers are usually inexpensive and provide a good way to mass-communicate important

information. **The drawback of these dialing systems seem to be centered on the limited messages that can be sent and are usually limited to one location or one person being able to set the outbound calling system up, thus constricting the potential uses of the system.** Outbound dialing should be a feature that is open to all staff members who have voice mailboxes on the system. When teachers, coaches, activities advisors, band directors, and other personnel all have outbound dialing capability, the opportunities to communicate are endless. Additionally, there should be a capability to create permanent and temporary "call groups" that can receive messages. A coach may establish a permanent call group of all team members, while a classroom teacher may wish to set up a temporary or one-time call group of students who might be struggling in a particular class.

With this kind of flexibility, the opportunity to communicate grows exponentially.
The following story demonstrates the usefulness of this type of communication. A marching band director took the band to a competition. Because the contest ran late and the band members had demanded a fast-food stop, the busses would be arriving at school almost two hours after the scheduled time. The band director, not wanting to face a parking lot full of angry parents, stopped at a pay phone and recorded a message to the marching band call group, indicating the new arrival time of the band. Within minutes, the message was being received in the homes of band members. Parents were able to stay at home and not worry about the late arrival of the busses.

This ability to communicate and share important information creates positive feelings and trust between parents and teachers and promotes the image of a caring school. Another important aspect of outbound calling features is the ability to send messages in multiple languages. While there is no technology yet available that automatically translates a message, there are systems that allow for messages to be recorded in different languages and, using the student management system, match the first language of the family to the appropriate message language. Simply put, families for whom Spanish is the primary language can receive an outbound message in Spanish as long as there was a message recorded in Spanish. Using the ethnicity code or other data available on the student management system makes this an easy process when the telephone and voice-mail system has the capability.

The last function of a successful outbound calling system is the ability for the system to leave messages on voice mail and answering machines, determine completed calls and hang-ups, and have the ability to be programmed to continue placing a call to a number that does not answer. Better quality systems provide a printout of successfully completed calls and any problems that the system experiences while trying to place the calls.

LINKING THE TELEPHONE TO THE INTERNET

Futurists continue to predict that we are not far from the time when all Americans will have access to the Internet in their homes, cars, televisions, and PDAs. For some, the future is already here; for others, the concept remains an Orwellian fantasy. Internet connectivity and operability has made its way to the majority of schools in the United States. More and more school districts and individual schools have posted websites with a large amount of good information for web visitors.

As familiar a tool as the Internet is to those who are computer and web savvy, it is not yet a means of communication for many, especially those who are non-English speakers and those whose socioeconomic status does not allow them the luxury of a home computer with world-wide web access. It is difficult to estimate the percentage of the American public that has access to computers and more difficult yet to determine the access to the Internet. The degree to which a particular community has access to Internet technology varies greatly from almost no family having access to all families having access. School leaders need to determine Internet access capabilities within their own communities to get accurate information.

There are numerous products available to schools that use the Internet to bring information to parents and families. Grades, assignments, and attendance information are the most popular, with lunch information, transportation information, or other individual student data also gaining in popularity. However, this information remains out of reach for those families who do not have access to the Internet. The key to solving this problem is to find the technology that provides the same information in a voice-digitized fashion so that families can retrieve it via the telephone.

The challenge to school leaders is to find a computer-based system that allows for both a telephone-based voice-mail system as well as an Internet based system with voice-digitization capacity to allow for Internet information to be retrieved by telephone.

THE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION

School leaders should conduct extensive evaluations of the available technology that promotes school-family engagement. The technology system chosen should be one that is developed solely for educational use and not a system that was adapted to education from the business world. The company providing the product should be well versed in the educational needs of schools and families and should be able to demonstrate how their product reflects appropriate research and practice within schools and school districts. The successful product should have the ability to be accessed by both phone and Internet; ease of use, both by school staff and parents, should be a high priority.

The system should also have features that allow families to set thresholds for information delivery and decide the best way information should be communicated.

Each school and school district has different communities, and within those communities, families with different needs. The overarching principle in selecting technology that will best enhance family-school relationships is for school leaders to understand technology is not the sole answer or response to issues of family engagement, and that whatever choice is made, it becomes a logical step in a sequence of efforts by the school to promote more harmony and interaction between students, their families, and schools.

THE EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Stonewall Jackson's programs of family involvement are most noticeable when analyzing the interaction of students and parents and the school's technology system, and are by far the most far-reaching of the school's efforts to promote family interaction with the academic lives of their children. Students perceive their parents' ability to acquire this information on a regular basis as a positive aspect of being involved with school but students sometimes suffer negative repercussions of parents seeing poor grades or missed assignments. The use of technology has helped to change parental perceptions of the school. Students admit that the system has helped them to improve their levels of achievement, but readily admit they do not like the fact that their parents have access to this type of information at regular intervals throughout the year. The ease of use of the system benefits students and motivates them to stay current. Students report that parents use the system frequently and in many cases, the system is the stimulus for the educational dialog between families and their children.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of families in education for this new century will have to be both universal and frequent. To implement a computerized telecommunications system and have it be more than just a homework retrieval system, and to use all available technology to enhance family partnerships, has, at its nucleus, a belief in community-based education and a vision for student excellence.
School leaders who believe that all children can learn have attached to their vision the idea that family involvement including students, while not the only conduit to academic excellence, is critical to the success of every child. School leaders who see the technological revolution sweeping American schools know it to be a strong ally in promoting strong families and strong schools. Technology can open any school in America to the homes of students. With a solid leadership, vision, collaboration, and consistent communication with every family,

student, and teacher, educational leaders can foster a deeper and more meaningful association between families and schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
RESEARCH EXCHANGE

PARENT ENGAGEMENT
AND
LEADERSHIP

Debbie Pushor
Claudia Ruitenberg
with co-researchers at
Princess Alexandra Community School

The purpose of the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching is to fund research, inquiry and dissemination of information focusing on instruction (both teaching and learning) in the context of the public elementary and secondary education system. Specifically, it will:

1) contribute to knowledge about teaching and learning;

2) encourage educational inquiry through a wide range of methodologies;

3) support the involvement of practising teachers in active research projects;

4) encourage organizations as well as individuals to determine and act in areas of research and inquiry; and

5) encourage experimentation with innovative ideas and methodologies related to teaching and learning.

The Foundation is an independent charitable organization formed by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation in 1991. It is governed by a Board of Directors with the assistance of an Advisory Committee of representatives from the educational and business communities. The selection and evaluation of projects funded by the Foundation is carried out by a teacher-led Project Review Committee. Inquiries concerning research supported by the McDowell Foundation may be directed to the following address:

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IN SHORT During the 2004/05 school year, we conducted a study into parent engagement and leadership at Princess Alexandra Community School, an urban elementary school (pre-Kindergarten through grade eight) in the Riversdale community in Saskatoon. We examined the conditions that enabled school practices to move along the continuum from parent involvement to parent engagement and leadership. We also examined why some parents remained distanced from the school, and how more parents might become engaged in the school.

We worked with a large research team comprised of parents, teacher assistants, teachers, community and adult education coordinators, administrators, and teacher educators. Working with co-researchers meant that we could do research *with* the school rather than *on* the school.

Although the common term in this field of research is "parent involvement," we chose to use the term "parent engagement" because it reflects the reciprocity and mutual commitment we feel is essential in developing lasting relations between schools and families. The methodological approach for this research was narrative inquiry, which enabled a close look at individual lived experiences situated in place, over time, and in personal and social contexts. Our data consisted largely of the co-researchers' and participants' stories of their experiences, told from their own perspectives and in their own words.

In the analysis of the field text, several themes emerged, three of which we discuss in this report. We found that the staff at Princess are consciously working to live their positive *assumptions* about parents, and their *beliefs* about the engagement of parents within their school, in practice. We learned that *hospitality* at Princess Alexandra is not about teachers and administrators inviting people to their place, but about creating a place that is owned as much by students, parents, and other community members as it is by staff and administrators. And we observed and heard about practices at Princess which move away from the institutionalized, ritualistic, and often public interactions between teachers and parents typical of most school landscapes to an emphasis on building *trust* and *relationships* in ways which are much less formal and more intimate. Within each of these themes, Assumptions and Beliefs, Invitation and Hospitality, and Trust and Relationship, we attended to the significant part played by the individual, the school team, and the broader school community.

While the school and community created deliberate interruptions of well-rehearsed stories about schooling and about the positioning of parents on school landscapes, there was also much happening that disrupted these efforts: changes to administration and staff, new families moving into the neighbourhood and school community, crises in health, housing, and family relations, and so forth. Changing the positioning of parents on the school landscape is not a matter of gaining ground on a smooth continuum, from parent involvement to engagement, and then working to extend these practices further into leadership. It is also about continuous efforts to maintain current ground or even to regain ground previously claimed.

Just as physical structures can be designed and built to better withstand earthquakes, we see possibility in attending to the structures both within and outside of the school landscape as a means of reducing the effects of disruptions. Such structures include staffing and orientation practices, teacher education curriculum, and decision-making processes that are inclusive of parents and other caregivers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lodged right in the middle of this term that we extend to honor the people who have influenced and cared for us, is the word 'knowledge.' An acknowledgment is an admission. It makes explicit what is tacit, or sometimes denied, in every scholarly monologue: none of us knows alone. (Grumet, 1988, p. ix)

Notes
to the
Reader

REPRESENTATION One day, as we were walking into the front entrance of Princess Alexandra Community School, arms full of food for a research team meeting that was soon to begin, a young boy dashed by us, calling out cheerfully as he passed by, "Hello university people carrying food!" Although we were dressed casually in jeans and we were not laden with books and briefcases, the young boy knew instantly that we were outsiders … newcomers … visitors on his school landscape.[1] Our positioning as "university people," and as non-Aboriginal, as middle-class, as women, was not only apparent to others but apparent to ourselves. We recognize that the very extent and multiplicity of our personal backgrounds influenced who we were in the research, what we noticed and what we did not notice, and how we made sense of those observations. We recognize that no matter how much we try to de-center our own voices as authors and enable the voices of co-researchers and research participants to "speak for themselves," there is an inevitable interpreting and mediating influence that we as authors have. As a result, in thinking about ways to represent the research we did at Princess Alexandra and what we came to understand about parent engagement and leadership, we did not feel comfortable with a typical, generally quite linear, form of reporting. Instead, we wanted to find a form of representation in our research text that would position the voices of our co-researchers alongside our own voices, rather than subsumed under them.

In such a positioning of co-researcher voices – those of parents, teachers, and staff – we wanted to profile their ways of knowing Princess, and the neighbourhood of Riversdale in which it is situated, as stories which interrupt the more official or policy stories told of the school and the community in school division, municipal and provincial documents and policies; in news media; and in demographic reports. We wanted the stories told by "insiders," individuals who live and/or work within the community and who hold personal and particular knowledge of Princess to be seen as stories which interrupt; stories which replace old, often stereotypical and judgmental stories, with new stories of school and parents.

In order to figure out how to honour our intentions in representation, we turned to the work of researchers who had struggled with similar challenges. In *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS* (1997), Patti Lather and Chris Smithies chose to present their research findings in a non-traditional way. They note that their book

> is NOT a chronicle where [they] as researchers record events as unobtrusively as possible.
> The book is laid out so that, rather than only 'giving voice' to the stories of others, this is also
> a book about researchers both getting out of the way and getting in the way. (pp. xiii-xiv)

The young boy who greeted us as "university people" knew that our presence at Princess wasn't always going to enable us to "get out of the way." Nor did we want it to. We came to do research at Princess Alexandra Community School because we knew their story of parent engagement wasn't the same old story being lived out at other schools. We knew they were creating a new story – and we wanted to know why, and how, and what might be next for them. We had many questions to ask, and we wanted to "get in the way" of the work they were doing with parents so we could learn from it, so they could examine what they were doing more closely and more consciously, and so others could learn from it too.

Lather and Smithies consider it their responsibility

> to not drown the poem of the other with the sound of [their] own voices, as the ones who
> know, the 'experts' about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for
> meaning means. Hence the book is organized as layers of various kinds of information, shifts
> of register, turns of different faces toward the reader…. (p. xvi)

Similarly, we want our voices to speak alongside the voices of our co-researchers – neither speaking over top and drowning theirs out or hesitating to speak and silencing our own. Lather and Smithies write that their book "walks a fine line between making a spectacle of these women's struggles and a wanting to speak quietly, with respect, with all that it means to tell the stories of people willing to put their lives on public display in the hope that it will make it better for others" (p. xiii). In this telling of our research at Princess, we also walk a fine line: in writing this report, we risk turning the hard work of parents, students, teachers, and administrators in a core neighbourhood in Saskatoon into a spectacle for distant, middle-class, predominantly white and often academic audiences. What we seek to do, however, is to write in a way that respects the stories of people willing to share their experiences in the hope that "it will make it better for others," in the hope that their stories of experience will resonate with others and present new possibilities for the engagement of parents on many and varied school landscapes.

To enable our voices to speak alongside one another, we have worked with two strands of representation. As authors of the research text, our voices speak continuously along the bottom half of each page. The voices of our co-researchers and participants, their stories and the stories of interruption around parent engagement, are represented on the top half of each page.

INTERRUPTION AND DISRUPTION Throughout our experience in and with Princess, it has been clear that change figures centrally in the life of the school and the community. There are many different kinds of change, of course: big change and small change, gradual change and radical change, individual change and institutional change, anticipated and unanticipated change, planned change and circumstantial change and so on and so forth. As we analyzed and reflected on our field text, we found ourselves talking more and more frequently and with increasing interest about the concepts of *disruption* and *interruption.*

Both the word disruption and the word interruption are derived from the Latin *rumpere,* to break, but the prefixes give each kind of breaking its own flavour. *Disrupting* is breaking apart, for instance of a flow or process. Disrupting creates a fault line, a crack that impedes continuation. *Interrupting,* on the other hand, is breaking in on, breaking to put something else in the place of. Interrupting puts something in the place of what came before, as in, "We interrupt our programming for an important message."

In what we have experienced and learned at Princess, disruption and interruption both have a significant influence on the school landscape. The landscape of the school and community is constantly disrupted by imposed change: change because the school administrator gets transferred, change because new teachers are assigned to the school, change because families move into and out of the neighbourhood, change because families are confronted with crisis. But the school and community also create deliberate interruptions: they interrupt well-rehearsed and well-known stories of school and of parent involvement which do not do justice to their beliefs, they interrupt taken-for-granted ideas about core neighbourhoods and the people who reside within them, they interrupt low expectations of students and parents.

In the representation of our research findings, we have attempted not only to talk about disruption and interruption but to create a visual experience of them. Sometimes one story will literally break into another story. At other times a piece of information may be pushed to the background by a new way of seeing. And at several points the flow of text will be disrupted by a shift in one direction or other. On our part, this is a deliberate interruption of the expectations you as a reader may have of a research report; it is a deliberate interruption of a taken-for-granted form in order to create a new form that more closely aligns with our beliefs about "research with" and that places voices side by side.

ABOUT

THE

RESEARCH

CONTEXT AND QUESTION The topic of parents has long been absent from teacher education programs and quite insignificant in the agendas of departments of education, curriculum-makers, school board personnel, educators and school staff. Typically, parents have been a part of the taken-for-grantedness of schooling, seen as peripheral to the core work surrounding teaching and learning. While the term "partnership" became the language of the 1990s and policies around the development of school councils were formulated throughout the country, "many parents [continue to] feel ignored and shut out, or patronized and brushed off. They feel much more like poor cousins than equal partners in their relations with the education system" (Benson, 1999, p. 6). As a result of the nature of this broad educational context, learning about Princess Alexandra Community School and the work being done there to engage parents in their children's schooling felt like a great gift! Debbie recalls her first visit:

As I drove up to Princess Alexandra Community School that first day, I remember thinking how non-descript the long, low, yellow-brown brick school building looked and I recall wondering why someone would have chosen purple as the color to paint all the window frames and eaves. As I walked from my van toward the school, I was struck by the backdrop the barbed wire at the top of the industrial fence next to the school provided for three large murals – Aboriginal paintings entitled "Harmony," "Education," and "Community." As I approached the front doors, trimmed in that same purple paint as the windows and eaves along the school's front, I wasn't so sure I was at the right entrance. There were no signs directing me, as a visitor, to report to the office; in fact, there were no signs at all.

Inside, the entranceway was lined on both sides with large posters. Faces peered out at me from these posters – brown, white, young, old, female, male – telling stories of how they try, as parents, teachers, students, elders, administrators, community members, to live a certain tipi value in their daily lives, perhaps of "love," or "good child-rearing," or "obedience," or "respect." Students' work in the glass cases highlighted the importance of the circle and the number four to Aboriginal people: the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements of wind, water, fire, and air.

Princess Alexandra Community School is an urban, public elementary school (pre-Kindergarten to grade 8) in the Riversdale community of Saskatoon. In 1980 it was one of eleven elementary schools in the core areas of Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert to be designated "Community Schools." This designation was part of the Saskatchewan Community School Program, developed by Saskatchewan Learning (then Saskatchewan Education) and aimed at addressing issues related to urban Aboriginal poverty. The Saskatchewan Community Schools Association (2005) explains,

> The Saskatchewan Community School Program provides additional resources and supports to school divisions based on demographic information indicating that a high number of students and their families are impacted by complex socio-economic factors. Designation is also based on indicators that the school division and individual school are ready to adopt the community education philosophy.

As I stepped out of the entranceway and into a central corridor on the main floor, I saw more photographs. Rows of family photos, which had been matted and clustered within composite frames, stretched down the long corridor. As I paused to look more closely, I saw large and small families, single parent and dual parent families, extended families, children alone without adults, families in which teen children are holding their own children, families headed by grandparents rather than parents.

While I was standing in this space, an elderly Aboriginal woman passed by. She took my hand warmly, smiled broadly, and greeted me with "Tansi" – and more Cree words that it seemed okay I didn't understand. (Later I learned her name is Ina Ahenakew and that she is an elder, the school's "kokum," who spends her days in the school, sometimes just visiting with students, staff, and parents; sometimes working in classrooms telling stories and passing on Aboriginal teachings.)

Upon entering the school office, I met Yves Bousquet, then principal of Princess Alexandra, and Ted Amendt, a community education consultant with Saskatchewan Learning (and former community school coordinator at Princess) who had arranged my visit that day. Yves suggested we walk up the street to a little Vietnamese diner to have lunch while he and Ted told me about Princess and I talked to them about my research and writing around the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes. Our conversation seemed to explode with an intensity borne of common passions. I was captured by the many stories they told of working to engage parents at Princess Alexandra, of their deep commitment to the work they were doing, and of the strength and consistency of the beliefs which I heard them mention over and over again.

As Yves and Ted told stories, I learned that the posters I saw in the entranceway of the school are called "Honouring our People" posters. I listened intently to their stories of some of the people honoured there, particularly stories of parents and grandparents who are playing a significant role in the lives of their families, the school, and the community – stories of individuals such as Vernon Linklater, Jennifer Trimble, Delores Dumais, and of course, Ina Ahenakew. I learned how

Beautiful people ~
You live in the same world
as I do
but somehow I never noticed you...
before today
I'm ashamed to say.
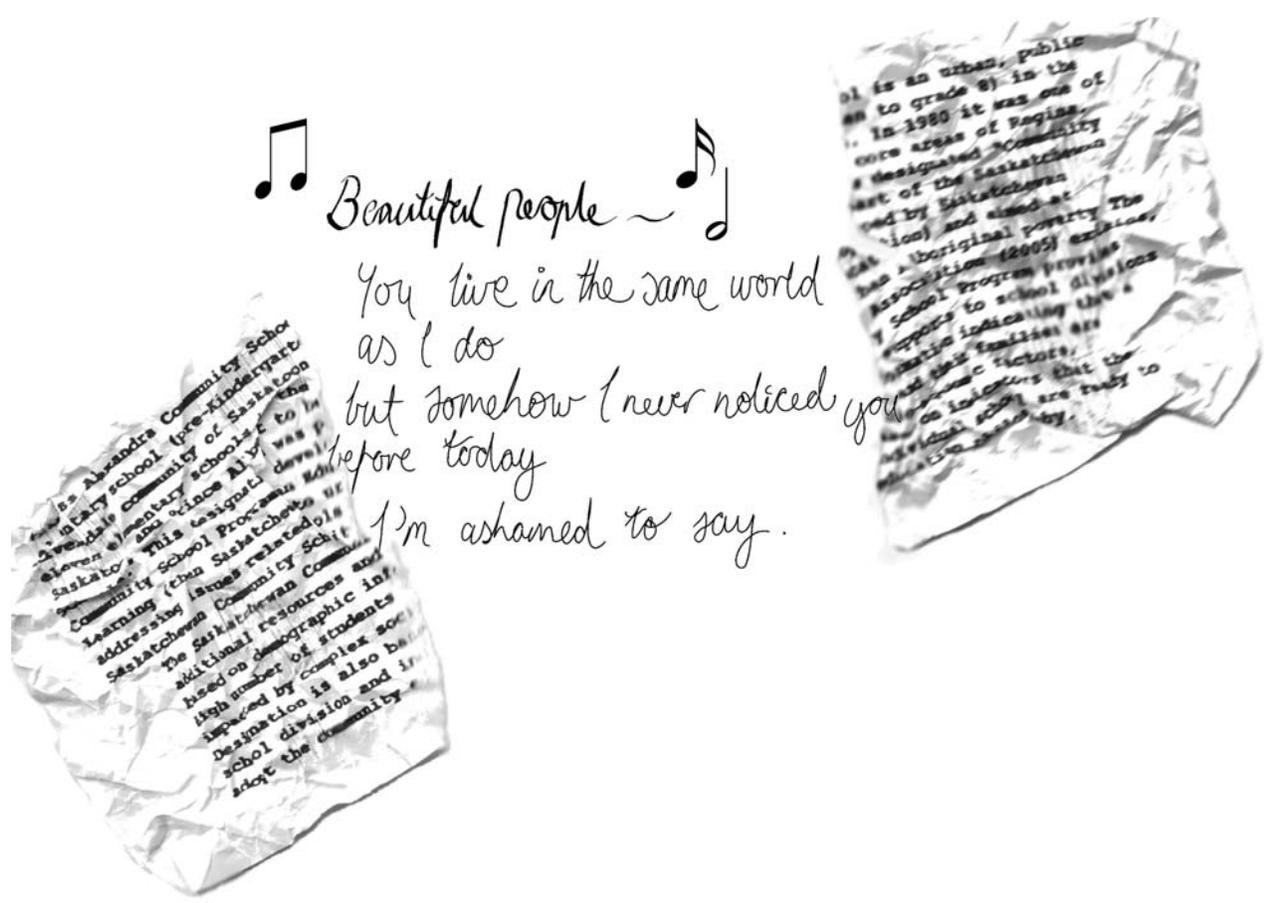
the family photos had come to be. Yves and Ted expressed their sense that the family photos are symbolic of the value placed on family at Princess Alexandra and in the community. As Ted and Yves continued to talk I learned how the school's beliefs – respect, connectedness, safety, and self-esteem – had come to be articulated over the course of a year long conversation with parents, community members, students and staff. I was struck by how many people they were able to draw to their school one stormy, cold January evening to begin this conversation over a soup and bannock supper and how patient they were in continuing this conversation for a whole year until they got to a place of agreement. Thinking about the display cases in the front hall focusing on the significance of the number four to Aboriginal peoples, I remember wondering if it was coincidental that they settled on four words to define their beliefs. Although their stories and our conversation could have continued endlessly, we returned to the school to meet and talk with other staff and with parents.

Upon arriving back at Princess, I scanned the foyer and the hallways, looking to see if I could spot a belief statement on the walls which made the school's beliefs public and visible. I remember making a mental note to ask someone if the beliefs were posted somewhere. Yves, Ted, and I gathered around a table in the office of the community school coordinator, Laureen Sawatsky, and the adult education coordinator, Carmen McCrae, along with the assistant principal, Martina Cain, and parents, James and June Pelletier, and David Fineday. The stories began to flow once again – some of the same stories retold from another perspective, and new stories told as well. What struck me as significant during this conversation was how strongly I could hear those four words – respect, connectedness, belonging, and safety – in the talk of each individual. It became very evident that the beliefs were shared and that they guided the lived actions of both parents and staff in their decisions and their practices at Princess.

When my visit at Princess came to a close, I sat in my van for a moment before driving away, staring out at the long, low building constructed of yellow-brown bricks. Non-descript? Not any more! Suddenly it seemed right that the windows and doors were framed in purple paint. It was like the purple was a signal that not everything happening inside this

9. ACCEPTANCE

It is understood that all research outlined in this application that is sponsored by the McDowell Foundation will belong to the Foundation and be subject to evaluation and monitoring by the Foundation, as outlined in a written agreement between the Foundation and the researcher(s).

Date	Signature
March 31, 2004	Debbie Pusher
April 1 / 04	June Pelletier
April 1 /04	Michelle Timm
April /04	Carmen McCrae
April 1 /04	Laureen Sawatsky
April 1/04	Shirley Côté
april 2/04	
april 1/04	
April 1/04	
April 1/04	
April 1/04	
april 1/04	Roberton
Apr. 1/04	
Apr 1 /04	Aleta Nellin
Apr 5/04	james pelletier

building was ordinary . . . expected . . . the known story of school. I smiled as my thoughts turned to a children's book, *Mabel Murple* (Fitch & Kovalski, 1995) and to the words which begin the book:

> What if …
> There was a purple planet
>   With purple people on it
> Would those purple people play
>   Whatever purple way they wanted?

As I ran in the river valley after my visit, my head was filled with thoughts and images of Princess Alexandra, of the staff and parents I'd met, and of how true it seemed to be that they were 'playing' school the "purple way they wanted." How much adrenalin seemed to be pumping through my body during that run! I continued to be struck by the many practices at Princess Alexandra Community School that spoke to a new story of parents – a story of engagement and leadership, rather than one simply of parent involvement. Stories that Yves and Ted told me, the conversation I had with Martina, Laureen, Carmen, and parents James, June, and David were replaying in my head. That parents were welcome participants in all staff meetings and professional development sessions at the school, sitting in equal places within the circle, amazed me. In all of my readings and research on the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes this was the first time I had seen such a practice. The fact that parents planned a recent professional development day on Aboriginal cultural practices and that parents and staff joined together for a sweat intrigued me. The fact that the multigraded structure of the school was changed to a single-graded structure because of the voice of parents in an open forum held within the school community spoke to how far from "being patronized and brushed off" parents at Princess were.

From these stories – and so many more – it was apparent to me that parents were considered "beautiful people" in the sense that Mathilde Santing sings about – people that "look like friends," people with whom they've "got so much in common," people going in "the same direction" as they are[2]. From these stories, it was apparent to me that parents and

PROJECT TITLE: Parent Engagement and Leadership

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March 31, 2004	*Debbie Busher*
October 1, 2004	Tammy Chief
April 1 /04	*Michelle Timm*
April /04	*Carmen McCrae*
April 1 /04	*Laureen Sautatsk*
October 1, 2004	Sandi Harper
april 2/04	*(signature)*
April 1/04	
October 1, 2004	Shane Skjerven
April 1/04	*(signature)*
April 1/04	*Cindy Bell*
October 1, 2004	Marge Roszell
Apr. 1/04	*(signature)*
Apr 1 /04	*(signature)*
October 1, 2004	Delores Dumais

teachers were working together at Princess, in ways I hadn't witnessed anywhere before, committed to working together to make a difference in the lives of children.

Yves asked me at the end of my visit if I was interested in doing research at their school. While I entered the school that day as a learner and a visitor, I was excited about the possibility of research. As I ran, I considered what research questions there were to be asked.

At a staff meeting at Princess shortly afterward, in a circle comprised of both parents and staff, we began to talk about possibilities for research and about research questions they might like to pursue. Individuals present wanted to look more closely at what it was that enabled this move on the continuum from parent involvement to parent engagement and leadership to take place, at why some parents remained distanced from the school – not involved or engaged, at how to increase the numbers of parents engaged in the school, at how to move other practices more toward engagement and leadership and away from involvement. By the end of the meeting, we were convinced there was much to be learned at Princess Alexandra from such a reflective analysis of practice – for me as a researcher from the 'outside' and for them as researchers on the 'inside.' We were also convinced there was much to be learned within the broader educational landscape from the experiences being lived out at Princess Alexandra.

Through a series of meetings, we established a research team at Princess Alexandra School – a team comprised of parents, teacher assistants, teachers, community school and adult education coordinators, administrators, and teacher educators. The reason for this large and diverse research team was that we were interested in doing research within the school context, not research on the school. Interested in the reflections and analyses of those living on the 'inside,' we saw this research program as an opportunity to take a deep and thoughtful look at parents' current positioning at Princess, to look backward through the school's history to determine how history has influenced current practice, and to look forward to the school's future to imagine what more is possible.

TYPE 1	PARENTING: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
TYPE 2	COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
TYPE 3	VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
TYPE 4	LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
TYPE 5	DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
TYPE 6	COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK Although the common term in this field of research is "parent involvement," we choose to use the term "parent engagement." For us, the term is different in meaning and intent. Benson (1999) notes that "'involvement' comes from the Latin, 'involvere,' which means 'to roll into' and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system" (p. 48). Beare (1993) adds that "the implication in the word is that the person 'involved' is co-opted, brought into the act by another party" (p. 207, as cited in Benson, 1999, p. 48). Parents who are "involved" serve the school's agenda by doing the things educators ask or expect them to do – volunteering at school, parenting in positive ways, and supporting and assisting their children at home with their schoolwork – while knowledge, voice and decision-making continue to rest with the educators (Pushor, 2001).

To date, it is the story of parent involvement in schools which is the well-known and well-rehearsed story (Pushor, 2001). Parents are asked by educators to serve as "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides, organizers" (McGilp & Michael, 1994, p. 2). It is most often the role of parents to carry out the tasks professional educators determine to be needed. Epstein's (1995) comprehensive parent involvement framework is well-known and highly regarded within educational communities. The six types of parental involvement Epstein outlines include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (p. 15). Our concern with models for parent involvement, such as Epstein's, is that they maintain the hierarchical structure of schools, where school personnel maintain power and authority, and the focus remains on what parents can do for the school. In the current literature, many new ways are being presented to do the 'same old things' with parents, ways which do not change the story of parents and schooling. We propose the writing of a new story – one of parent engagement and leadership.

"Engagement," in comparison to involvement, comes from en, meaning "make," and gage, meaning "pledge" – to make a pledge (Harper, 2001), to make a moral commitment (Sykes, 1976, p. 343). The word

engagement is further defined as "contact by fitting together; ... the meshing of gears" (Engagement). The implication is that the person 'engaged' is an integral and essential part of a process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. By extension, engagement implies enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, of teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial.

As someone engaged in the process of schooling, a parent may sometimes find him/herself walking alongside others, sometimes following the lead of others, sometimes taking the lead position. DePree (1989) writes about roving leadership, a capacity within an organization for the leadership role to fall to the individual(s) with the most knowledge or skill, or best positioned to take the lead, at that point in time. "Leadership, therefore, is contextual. Each context is different from the next, and the requirements for leadership – who should lead, how leadership should unfold, toward what end the process should be directed – depend on those differences (Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, Richert, 1997, p. 148). In this conceptualization, leadership is broad-based – engaging students, staff, parents, community members, and the administrative team – rather than falling solely into the domain of the principal and vice-principal.

> The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. . . . When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7)

In parent involvement frameworks, the emphasis is often placed on how such involvement enhances schooling outcomes for children. In other words, it is the school's mandate to school children irrespective

My name is **Aleta Hillier**.

This is my fifth year at Princess. I'm a community teacher associate -- I guess on paper I'm a literacy/numeracy teacher associate, but I do both roles. My background is that I worked in a day care at the YWCA here, and then I ran my own home day care for four years, and I did Montessori pre-school. Then I was at Pleasant Hill as a teacher associate for a short term, then I was signing facilitator for deaf students for three years and then I came here.

I'm **Carmen McCrae**,

and I'm an adult education TA at Princess Alexandra school. I started here about three years ago, as a TA2 working with one individual student. I then moved to a community TA position, where I worked with the community and the school, and I took a position the next year as Adult Education Support System for people in the community that want to get their adult education. For the past three years I've been assisting mostly parents in community achieve their higher levels of learning, whether it be literacy programs, adult 10 and 12 programs, or GED programs.
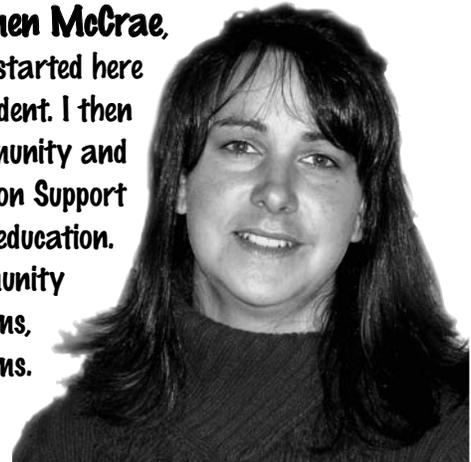
of the knowledge, hopes and dreams present in the family and community, that typically drives what parents are asked to do. The viewpoint seems to be one of "seek[ing] to determine what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for families" (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 5). Although parent literacy, employment skills, housing and food security, and so on, contribute to the child's success and well-being, they also contribute to the success and well-being of the parents themselves and the community more generally.

While we, too, are excited by the schooling success which results for children when their families are involved at school, we feel there is a lack of attention to reciprocity in these frameworks. As parents contribute to realizing the school's mandate, how, in turn, are educators and staff contributing to the realization of the parents', family's, and community's growth and development? In asking this question of Joyce Epstein at a graduate student seminar at the University of Alberta in 2000, Debbie was told that if a focus within parent involvement efforts became benefits for parents, we would then be talking about adult education, a very different thing from children's schooling. We disagree. Turning back to the definition of engagement – making a moral commitment – and imagining how engagements are lived out in personal arenas in our lives (in life partnerships, in friendships, in family relationships), we believe that reciprocity is a central, and in fact essential, characteristic of all forms of successful and fulfilling engagements.

Typically, parent involvement frameworks, like any kind of school reform, are conceived and enacted by educators who work within the educational system. They see the role of the school through specific educational lenses. They look to such things as parent role definition, parent education, policies (e.g., on homework), curricular initiatives (e.g., literacy for life), and school councils when they seek ways to enhance learning outcomes for students. In moving toward parent engagement and thus toward attention to reciprocal benefit for the school and for families, we believe there is much more to attend to both within and outside of the boundaries of the school's agenda of student achievement – such things as the difference

I'm Cindy Bell
and I'm TA3 at Princess Alexandra, but I'm in the offsite classroom at the Friendship Inn.
I've been at Princess three years. I started out as a TA2, working with individual students. I did a couple of short term community TA jobs, working with families in the community and this year I took the position at the Friendship Inn.
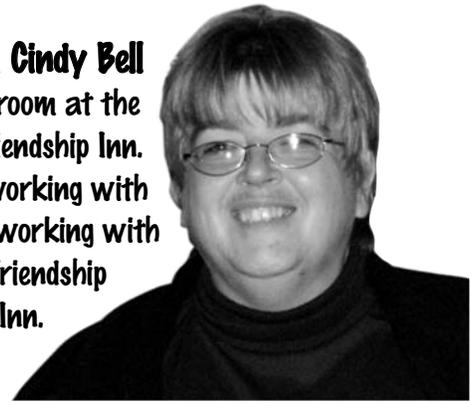
I'm Ann Fofonoff.
This is my seventh year at Princess, and this is the third community school that I've been at. I started at King George. Yeah, I've been at community schools for the last 15 years!
I started at King George. I was both resource room teacher and I taught grade one/two there, and after that I moved to Mayfair and I had the classroom for children with special needs there for six years.
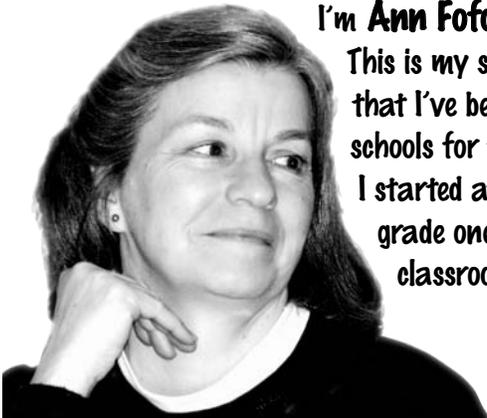
culturally appropriate programming makes to school attendance and participation, and to positive identity formation for both students and their parents; the influence of adult education classes on student engagement and retention and on parental success and well-being; the provision of easy and open access to computers, internet, newspapers and resources in enhancing both school and home literacies; and the provision of opportunity for voice, for sharing "personal, practical knowledge," (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, 1988, 1999) for influencing decisions of personal, family, and community consequence in strengthening students' and parents' sense of personal power and autonomy.

Our work with parent engagement and leadership, then, differs in multiple ways from Epstein's and others in the field who propose typologies of parent involvement. It differs in that it recognizes that both educators and parents hold knowledge; it promotes teacher and parent knowledge[3] being acted upon in side-by-side relationships, resulting in shared power and decision-making, and mutually established agendas; and it calls for reciprocal benefit for schools and families in all parent engagement practices. In doing so, it moves away from the typical hierarchical structure of power and relationship within schools, from the unidirectional agendas set by the schools, from the sense of ownership assumed by educators for these agendas, and from a single focus of parent involvement being on its benefits for children.

M E T H O D O L O G Y The methodological approach for this program of research was narrative inquiry. With Dewey's (1938) expression of the need for a philosophy of education based on a philosophy of experience as foundational, the focus of narrative inquiry is "lived experience – that is, lives and how they are lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). Narrative inquiry enabled a close look at individual experiences situated in place, over time, and in personal and social contexts. The intention in this narrative

I'm **Marge Roszell**.
This is my first year at Princess as teacher librarian.

I'm half-time at Caswell as well and I was at John Lake last year. Last Wednesday we started Munch 'n Mingle, where students eat breakfast in the library and read books, and parents came as well. I loved it. There were some older boys that had never sat and listened to poetry, but I read poetry and they loved it.

My name is **Shane Skjerven**.

This is my first year at Princess as principal, and my first year as principal in a Saskatoon Public School. I started teaching twelve years ago in a small town two hours north of here, adjacent to three First Nation reserves, so we had students from various backgrounds at our school. I taught high school, social studies, English and math. From there I transferred to Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, where I taught in a K-12 school, with fifty students in the entire school. From there I moved to Melfort, Saskatchewan, where I was principal of an elementary school for three years. After Melfort I came into Saskatoon, took a vice-principalship at Roland Michener for two years and then at River Heights School for one year.
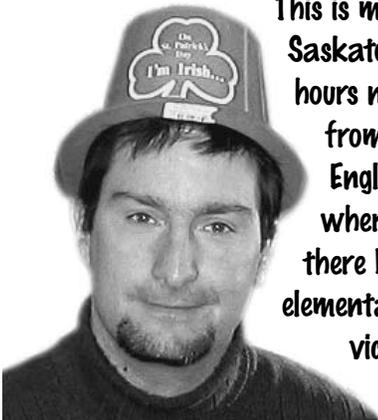
inquiry was to understand staff and parents at Princess Alexandra from their own perspective, to have them give accounts of their experience in their own terms (Clandinin, 1986).

As human beings, we live storied lives and we tell stories of those lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Telling stories is how we communicate with others about who we are, about what we do, and about why we do what we do. It is how we share our unfolding lives with others. As we tell our stories over and over again, and as others respond as we tell these narratives of experience, we open ourselves up to seeing them and understanding them in new ways, to being able to imagine new possibilities within them. "People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). Within our narrative inquiry at Princess Alexandra, it is through the stories lived and told that we, and others, become better educated about parent engagement and leadership.

This inquiry into parent engagement and leadership took place in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call a "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (p. 50). As co-researchers and participants telling stories, we moved backward and forward in time between past, present and future. We came together in the present, recalling and sharing stories from our past experiences, hoping to retell and relive those stories in the future with new possibilities. As co-researchers we gathered our field text within particular places, within "specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (p. 51). As co-researchers and participants we moved between the inner, personal space of our own memories, thoughts, and feelings, and the outer, social space of sharing, speaking, and listening. Our positioning in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space was influenced by the present physical environment in which the conversation took place, and by the places we arrived at when stories caused us to travel backward and forward in time and inward and outward between the space of the personal and the space of the social.
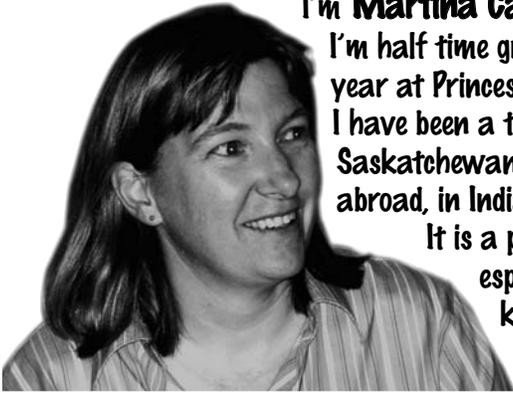
I'm **Martina Cain**.

I'm half time grade eight teacher and half time vice-principal. This is my third year at Princess.

I have been a teacher and administrator for twenty years, in northern Saskatchewan (La Ronge and Stony Rapids), rural Saskatchewan, and abroad, in India and Nigeria.

It is a privilege to learn from the people with whom I am working, especially the students, who teach us what we really ought to know.

I'm **Laureen Sawatsky**.

I'm the Community School Coordinator here at Princess Alex. I think I'm at the beginning of my eighth year here.

When I first came, I came as a literacy/numeracy TA, and from there I became a community TA, and then I worked as the liaison worker. And then I became the coordinator; I'm just in my third year as the coordinator and I love my job.

To enable co-researchers to give accounts of their lived experience in their own terms, we generally invited them to talk about anything that might have struck them in the time since the last research meeting. Sometimes they used their journal notes or photographs they had taken as prompts; at other times someone might prompt a colleague, for instance, to share a story s/he had told over lunch, or to recall what happened during a field trip. Questions would arise as the people at the table told their stories: "Can you say more about that? How does that work exactly? Has this changed from what you have experienced in previous years, or at other schools?"

Situated in the present time and the place of Princess, stories carried co-researchers backward in time and to moments with parents, perhaps to the place of the parent's home, of the classroom, of the location of a field trip or a school event. Stories also carried co-researchers forward in time, again sometimes to locations in the school, sometimes to homes, and sometimes into the community, to imagined moments in which practices of parent engagement and leadership were being lived in new ways or in which new practices were being lived out. Stories told by one co-researcher often prompted stories from others, pulling the stories forward from the personal space of the co-researcher's thoughts and memories into the social space of the telling and retelling within the research team meeting.

GATHERING FIELD TEXT To limit the number of teachers who would be away from their classroom at any one same time, and to make research conversations more manageable, co-researchers were divided into two teams. Each team met regularly, mostly on a bi-weekly basis, in the staff room at Princess. Transcripts of these taped research team conversations comprise a great deal of our field text. Co-researchers were also asked to keep field notes, either in a journal or tape-recorded with a dictaphone. These field notes were sometimes used solely by co-researchers as prompts during research meetings and at other times they were typed or transcribed and included as a part of the field text. Cameras were also given

My name is **Claudette Bear**.
I started out here five years ago as a volunteer with the kids.
I have nieces and nephews that go here. When they were in grade one,
kindergarten, pre-K, I went with them on field trips, and then the next year I got
hired to work in the nutrition room. During that Fall they mentioned they were
going to do the TA course again, and I said I'd like to take it. I did my practicum
here. I've been on the sub list, and last year I worked here for six months, and
also at King George, West Mount, Pleasant Hill, Caswell, Bedford.
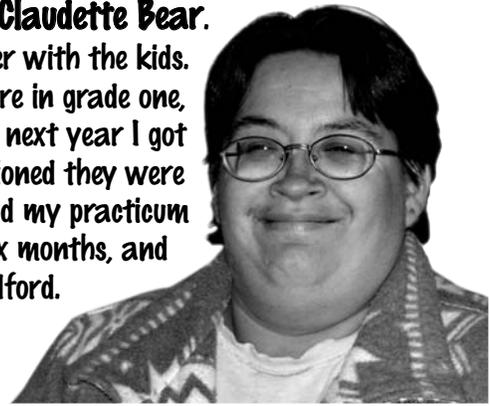
I'm **Delores Dumais** and I've been a parent here at Princess Alexandra
for six years.
I don't live in the community anymore, I actually live in Confederation, but
I drive the kids here every day and pick them up.
I've been a single parent for ten years. I guess the biggest reason why I
came here was because for all of the kids that are with me, I'm trying to
bring peace in their life to the best way that I can.

to co-researchers to enable them to capture moments in time – to record the daily engagement or leadership of parents within the school or classroom or to capture their engagement or leadership in special events such as field trips and feasts. Large accordion folders enabled co-researchers to gather artifacts such as school or classroom newsletters, drawings by children, and notes from parents. As with the field notes, sometimes these artifacts were used by co-researchers as prompts during our conversations and at other times they became a part of our field text.

Field text was also generated through co-researchers' conversations with participants. Many co-researchers engaged in conversations with former Princess Alexandra staff members, with current staff not on the research team, and with parents. Research participants included Yves Bousquet (former principal), Patricia Payne (teacher associate, White Buffalo Youth Lodge), Cec Chambul (former teacher associate, Friendship Inn), Vera Robertson (teacher), Brett Adams (former school counsellor) and many parents, most of whom chose to remain anonymous. Co-researchers who had conversations with parents or other research participants used their own judgement in these situations – sometimes they audio recorded the conversations and other times they took notes. These recordings and notes were transcribed or typed, and became another element within the field text.

Another aspect of our inquiry involved visiting other schools within the province, recommended by Ted Amendt and Pat Erhardt, community education consultants with Saskatchewan Learning, as having rich practices of parent engagement. Small clusters of co-researchers visited schools from La Ronge to Moose Jaw (please see the Postscript to this report for a complete listing of field trips) to discover what was happening in other places and to learn from other parents, staff, and educators who were also thinking hard about the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes. These visits enabled our co-researchers to return to Princess and to collectively revisit their own beliefs and practices in light of what

My name is **Sandi Harper**.

I'm a teacher at an off-site program that is now offered at White Buffalo Youth Lodge.

My involvement with Princess started probably when my son was two. He's now 13, so approximately 11 years ago I started working here at Princess. And I started in the capacity of pre-kindergarten teacher. Both my kids attended Princess Alexandra all the way up until grade six or eight. So this has been our home: we've lived in the community for a number of years, this has been my kids' main school, plus my work place, so it feels like I'm the neighbour.

My name is **Tammy Chief**.
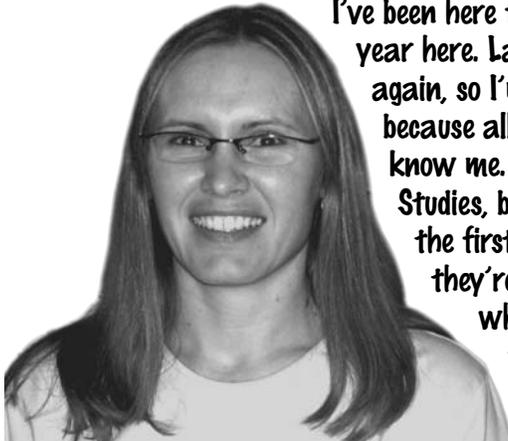
I've been here for one complete year prior to this year so this is my second year here. Last year I taught grade five and this year I have the same group again, so I'm teaching grade six. That helped, especially with the parents, because all of the kids I have this year, with the exception of two, already know me. I'm supposed to be a high school teacher, I have my BA in Native Studies, but they asked me to teach French and I taught core French for the first four years. I taught at a variety of different schools. Parents, they're the same wherever you go, just like the kids are the same wherever you go: everybody wants to know that you care about their kids, and you care about what happens to them, and you care about their education.

they observed in other locations. They provided an opportunity for our full research team to gather together and to re-evaluate the work they were doing to engage parents – to affirm certain practices; to re-open conversations about other practices and, in so doing, to challenge what they were doing and why; and to talk about new practices they had seen that had potential to address struggles they were facing or to strengthen the work they were doing to engage families. These field trips, and the resulting conversations around them, also contributed to our field text through the addition of photographs, artifacts, field notes, and research team notes.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION In narrative inquiry, narrative is both "phenomenon and method" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2), both what is studied and the way in which it is studied. The phenomena, the 'what is studied,' are the stories people tell of their experiences. The method, the way in which it is studied, is the storied inquiry into those experiences. As a result, as we began to analyze our field texts we began to look for story lines – "story lines that inter[wove] and interconnect[ed], gaps or silences that [became] apparent, tensions that emerg[ed], and continuities and discontinuities that appear[ed]" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). Having field text from multiple sources enabled us to attend to details and particulars which became foregrounded over time, and with various people and situations.

In the analysis process, we spent many hours reading and rereading the field texts in order to gain a strong sense of what was contained within the vast amount of material we had amassed. In this process, we first read separately, each marking the transcripts for points we saw as significant, making notations in the margins, and keeping notes of our thinking. Then we met together to talk about our reading of, and thinking about, the transcripts. This pattern of reading separately and then talking together was repeated throughout the analysis. As we discussed emerging narrative threads, we often talked about different field

My name is **Michelle Timm** and I am at Princess for the third year. The last two years I taught pre-K, and this year I'm doing the pre-K program and the Kindergarten program. I have worked in early childhood for probably the last six years.

I've taught a gamut of grades, from pre-K up to grade nine, but my experience at Princess has been in the early years. For the first three years of my teaching I lived on the reserve in northern Saskatchewan. Then I went down to a grade one/two split in rural Saskatchewan, and then I came to Saskatoon.

I am **Sheila Kennedy** and I have been teaching Cree at Princess Alexandra full-time for six years. Prior to that I taught Cree at two other community schools: Pleasant Hill and King George. I have been leading our student Dance Troupe in the practice of fancy, jingle, hoop, and grass dance. We have performed in various schools in Saskatoon and some outside the city.
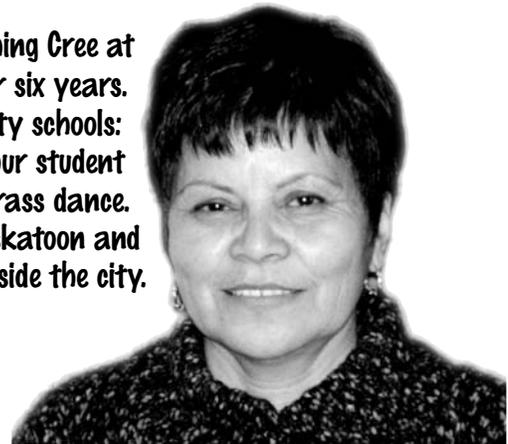
texts in relation to other field texts and in relation to literature in the field. We talked about how what we were figuring out complemented, added to, or stepped away from other literature on parents with which we are familiar.

NARRATIVE THREADS Immediately evident to both of us were the threads of *disruption* and *interruption* that wove through the field texts. As described in the "Note to the Reader," disruption is a term we are using to describe the things that happened that got in the way of the work parents and staff were trying to do to engage parents at Princess Alexandra, or that made that work more difficult or more complex to do. Examples of disruption include stories of the transfer of a principal or staff members from the school, the mobility of families within the Riversdale neighbourhood, and the challenging life circumstances in which some families are trying to live. Interruption is a term we are using to describe the conscious efforts of staff and parents at Princess Alexandra to create a new story of school; to interrupt the taken-for-grantedness of many typical school practices. Examples of interruption include stories of inviting parents to be a part of staff meetings and professional development sessions, hanging family photos and Honouring Our People posters in the hallways, and taking down signs which are not welcoming to parents. These threads of disruption and interruption were encompassing, weaving through all other significant themes which also emerged in the analysis.

Three significant themes emerged in our analysis that we have chosen to write about in this research text. These are themes which we feel have both meaning and social significance for schools and in the field of parent involvement literature to which this narrative inquiry contributes. They include: Assumptions and Beliefs, Invitation and Hospitality, and Trust and Relationship. Within each of the themes, we inquire into its conceptualization and its significance as a story of interruption and we attend to it through the lens of the individual, the lens of the school team, and the lens of the broader school community. Further, within

"Final Thoughts," we inquire into the ways in which disruption plays out within each theme. Our accounts of our analysis and interpretation reflect the intimate, particular, and detailed understanding of parent engagement and leadership which have developed for us through this narrative inquiry.

ASSUMPTIONS

AND

BELIEFS

WHAT DO YOU SEE?   Much about schools is consistent from one building to another, from one place to another. Walking into a school in which you have never been before, you would easily identify it as a school: the messages posted inside and out, the flow of children and adults, the displays on the walls, the use of space, the activities being carried out. Because we have all attended school, worked in schools, perhaps accompanied our own children to school, attended community meetings and functions in school buildings, hearing the word 'school' pulls forward a fairly consistent image and understanding for all of us. It is this familiarity that creates a taken-for-grantedness about school, a sense of becoming so comfortable with the landscape of school that we stop asking questions about it.

We invite you to interrupt this taken-for-grantedness by walking through a school which is familiar to you, as if you are a parent new to that school. Stop and take a careful look at each of the messages. What do the signs say? What messages do they send to you as a parent? How do they make you feel? Walk up and down the hallways. As a parent, do you see yourself represented? Can you see yourself in the displays, the photographs, the activities – particularly if you are a parent of Aboriginal or minority heritage? Walk in and out of the spaces of the school. Where are you welcome to be? How do you know?

It is likely that on this school landscape you will see signs that say, "Staff parking only," "Drop off zone, 5 minute limit," "Visitors please report to the office," and "Please remove wet and muddy footwear." It is likely inside, that as well as seeing spaces labeled with room and grade numbers and teacher names, you will see spaces labeled "Staff Room," "Staff Workroom," and "Staff Washroom." It is likely that you will see beautiful displays of student work and photographs of students engaged in classroom and extracurricular activities. It is likely you will see photos of current staff members or at least former principals, school board members, or the namesake of the school. How will you come to see yourself as a parent within that school landscape? Will you see yourself at all? What, will you determine, is your position within that school?

While, generally in education, administrators and teachers speak of parents as partners, tell parents in school newsletters that there is an open door policy, and talk about parents as their children's first teachers, we as educators unconsciously send other strong messages to parents. With our signs, our displays, our activities and our labeling of space, we position parents in the margins of our school landscape. At best we extend them the privileges of guests and at worst we treat them as unwelcome or bothersome interlopers.

P O S I T I O N I N G   P A R E N T S   In the research we have done (Pushor, 2001; Pushor & Murphy, 2004; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005), we have come to see the activity of challenging the assumptions underlying our educational practices as critical to the work of engaging parents. Everything we do in schools is based on assumptions – sometimes explicitly translated into practice and other times implicitly inferred. While administrators can legitimately justify signs about visitors reporting to the office and removing wet and muddy footwear as being important to safety and to cleanliness, we need to ask ourselves what those signs also say about the position of parents on school landscapes. If we truly believe parents are our partners, is it possible to ensure our schools are, as in the above example, safe and clean, and a place for parents as well as children and staff? We believe it is. Work being done to engage parents at Princess Alexandra Community School helps us to see how one school is creating new possibilities for the positioning of parents.

P R I N C E S S   We invite you to take another walk through a school, this time through Princess rather than your own school, still imagining you are a parent new to the school. Remember Debbie's first visit to Princess? You may note some of the same things she noted: the yellow-brown brick of the school building accented by the purple trim of the door and window frames, the three large Aboriginal murals entitled "Harmony," "Education," and "Community" framed against the barbed wire backdrop of the industrial fence.

Like Debbie, you may wonder if you are at the right entrance when you do not see the typical school entranceway signs that say, "Visitors please report to the office" or "Please remove your wet and muddy footwear."

Inside the entranceway, you may notice, as Debbie did, the "Honouring our People" posters, and the cultural aspects of the student work and the artifacts on display. You may be equally struck by the family photographs which line the hallways and celebrate the many families and family compositions that make up a significant part of the school's community.

We're certain that as you stand in this central space you, too, will be greeted by Kokum Ina – with a smile, an extended hand, and the greeting, "Tansi." We're certain that someone else will come by as well and welcome you, possibly asking you if you are there for the soup and bannock lunch … or perhaps inviting you to visit your child's teacher and spend time in his or her classroom … or maybe inviting you to come in and have coffee and a visit.

CONSIDERING THE CONTRASTS As an imagined parent on this second school landscape, ask yourself once again the questions you asked during the first school tour. What do the signs at Princess say? What messages do they send to you as a parent? How do they make you feel? As a parent, do you see yourself represented? Can you see yourself in the displays, the photographs, the activities – particularly if you are a parent of Aboriginal or minority heritage? Where are you welcome to be within the physical spaces of Princess? How do you know?

As we stated earlier, everything we do in schools is based on assumptions – sometimes explicitly translated into practice and sometimes implicitly inferred. The practices you observed during your school tour of Princess – the murals, the purple trim, the "Honouring our People" posters, the Aboriginal content, the

Neighbourhood	Average income	Percentage of income under $20,000
City of Saskatoon	$62,451	16.09%
Riversdale	$29,272	22.00%

Source: City of Saskatoon Neighbourhood Profiles 7th Edition – December 2003

Neighbourhood	Average income	Percentage of income under $20,000
City of Saskatoon – all populations	$48,927	16.09%
City of Saskatoon – aboriginal propulation	$20,876	66.40%
Core Neighbourhoods – aboriginal population	$16,497	73.54%
Riversdale	$20,839	61.90%

Source: City of Saskatoon Neighbourhood Profiles of Aboriginal Population- 1999

family photographs, the presence of an elder – are examples of conscious ways the staff at Princess are working to live their positive assumptions about parents, and the engagement of parents within their school, in practice. It has involved a process of holding everything they do up to scrutiny and of asking themselves why they do it; of affirming practices which reflect their beliefs and which reflect positive assumptions about parents; of discarding practices which, when examined, are found to be in contradiction to their beliefs or based on negative assumptions of parents; of being open to new possibilities; and of being cognizant that because times, people, and context change this process of challenge and affirmation will be a continuous one.

While information commonly cited in news reports and stories of the community surrounding Princess tells you one story of individuals residing in Riversdale – often a story of poverty and crime, of housing and food insecurity, of physical and substance abuse – your tour through Princess tells you another story. Consider the contrasts. Alongside the barbed wire, you see murals of harmony, education, and community. Alongside the standard conventional bricks of the school, you see purple frames (the color of harmony, we learned). Alongside news articles which paint a dire picture of urban Aboriginal demographics, you see a featuring and honouring of First Nations culture and ways of being. Alongside teachers and staff who are positioned with more education, income, power, and privilege, you see parents who have a place and a voice within the school landscape.

MOVING INWARD Consider another significant contrast. Typically, when a school invites parents onto the landscape, perhaps for a school council meeting, parent teacher conferences, or a guest presentation, and parent attendance turns out to be limited, staff of the school will look outward to determine why. In thinking about their parent community, they may wonder how attendance may have improved if they had offered a meal, complimentary babysitting, or a door prize. They may wonder about
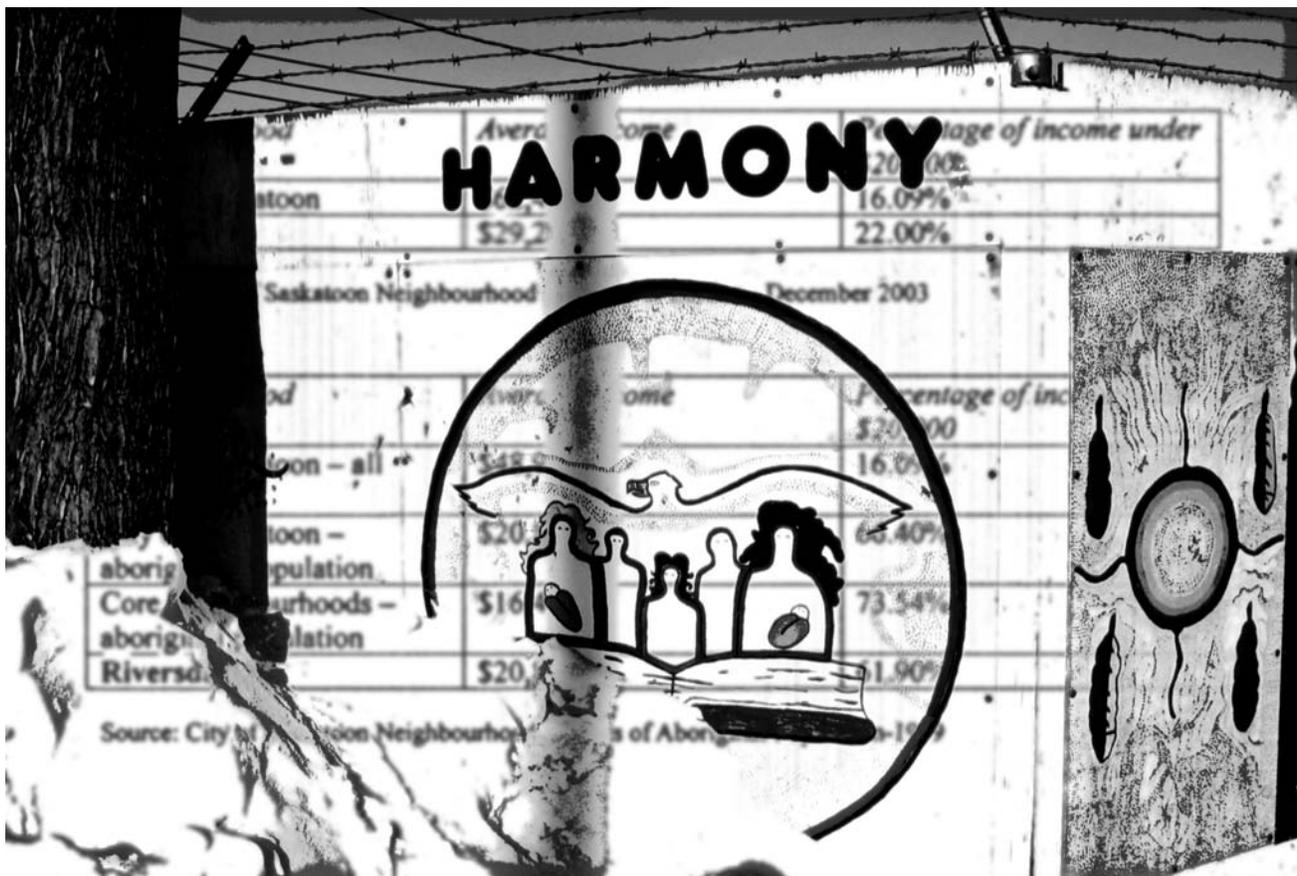
parent schedules and what else might have been competing for parents' time that evening – children's sports activities or clubs, parents' work schedules, community events. Sometimes, when parents don't attend school activities, out of frustration staff will make statements such as, "These parents just don't care" or "These parents just don't get involved in their kids' education." In all of these examples, the staff look outward to parents and families, and to the community, to determine what the reasons for the poor parental attendance might be and make assumptions about parents' attendance or commitment based on what they see. We have noticed a different response at Princess Alexandra. In considering why parents may choose not to be involved or engaged in the school, staff first move inward – to first look at themselves and at their beliefs and assumptions – before looking outward at parents and community. From our field text, it appears this moving inward is often multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous: staff move inward as individuals, they move inward together as a school team, and they move inward as a broad school community.

AS INDIVIDUALS   In Laureen's, in Sandi's, and in Brett's words, (p. 30) you hear them asking questions such as, "Who am I as a person? What kind of respect do I have for the parents I work with? How do I see them?" They speak of looking at where their own hearts are, of looking at themselves, of reflecting on their own attitudes. They speak of looking inside themselves in regard to what personal beliefs and assumptions they may be unconsciously conveying to parents that may cause parents to feel unwelcome at the school, uncomfortable, or judged lesser in some way.

We recall vividly a research conversation we were having one afternoon at Princess. Members of the research team were talking about a situation that had occurred that morning. A new supply secretary, at Princess for the first time, was approached by someone on the street outside of the school; someone asking for money. The new secretary was quite shaken by the experience and spoke judgmentally about the individual who had approached her. The secretary's response caused research team members to travel backward to their

Laureen: One thing we try to do is we ... challenge each other to look at where our hearts are, and ... where you are with your own ... whether it's racism or whatever because, really, where your own heart is it's going to come out in your behavior and in your actions and in your attitude. And so, we really try to get everybody to look at [themselves] and self-evaluate where they really are (January 17, 2005).

Brett Adams, School Counsellor, formerly at Princess: Our attitude [has changed], that these people aren't just on welfare, aren't drunks, aren't 'no goods,' okay? The attitude switch is that these people have potential. These people do care about their kids. These kids do have abilities. Instead of saying that these kids will never learn, these kids will always be in poverty, will never amount to anything in their education, to turn around and say, "They can be doctors, lawyers, and anybody they want to, we just have to believe in them and provide." And so it's an attitude change. It's also an invitation to go out and say, "I don't know the answer." To actually say, "I don't have the answer to bullying, I don't have the answer to attendance problems. I need your help." To honestly go out and say [to parents], "I need your help, can we find a solution? As opposed to [us] as the experts saying, "I have the answers, you'll listen to me, this is what [we're] going to do." That's not engagement. Engagement is going out and saying, "I truly don't know the answer, help me and we'll work together and go in a direction" (April, 2005).

Sandi: You have to really want to be here for it to work, you have to really, really want it. You have to be genuine. And the people who can see whether you're genuine or not are the families and the parents (May 16, 2005). ...And if you ever get the ... uncomfortable feeling that you're ... that you don't fit or it's not fitting for you or something's not working well, then it's time to look at yourself. It's time to say, "Well, then, I've got some changing to do." ...And I think for most teachers, it's really hard to look at yourself and say, "Maybe it's time I change ... ." (February 28, 2005)

own first days at Princess and to their unquestioned assumptions when they began their work in a core community. Martina spoke to this shift which has occurred in their assumptions and beliefs over time and through contact with parents and members of the community. Laureen helps us to see the complexity of making this shift and awakens us to the importance of colleagues both challenging and supporting one another in order for the shift to happen. Co-researchers stories, collectively, help us to see how very important this moving inward as individuals is if staff are truly going to work side by side with parents.

AS A TEAM Just as staff at Princess move inward to explore their beliefs and assumptions as individuals, they also move inward to look at their collectively-held beliefs. The kinds of questions that we asked you to ask yourself on the 'school tours' you just took are the kinds of questions staff at Princess ask of themselves. They are questions of, "Why do we do what we do? What assumptions underlie our practices? Is there a match between what we say we believe and what we do?"

As you can see from Yves' talk about conflict, (p. 31) getting to this place of moving inward together is a process that has happened at Princess over time and with a great deal of thoughtful leadership. It appears to have taken a commitment of time together in staff sessions; a willingness to express personal thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; an openness to allowing anything to be held up for examination, and a pledge to learn how to disagree with one another respectfully.

One of the things we have been struck by throughout our year of inquiry at Princess has been the consistent expression of beliefs we hear in the conversations and stories of our co-researchers and participants. While the school's four beliefs – respect, connectedness, safety, and self-esteem – are not painted on the wall in the entranceway or posted in a prominent location for everyone to see, they are beliefs which are constantly articulated and deeply held by staff members. The staff's commitment to challenging

Yves Bousquet, principal, formerly at Princess: The administrative team – was looking at trying to help the staff understand that with change sometimes comes conflict. Conflict between what we know and what we don't know, what we avoid, and so on. So we turned that around and we said to people [on staff at Princess], "Let's learn to welcome conflict. … We are going to meet conflict and so let's not avoid conflict, but let's learn to be respectful during conflict. … [The staff] made a list of how they wanted other people to behave [in conflict], then we turned it around. … You can't make somebody else do all of that stuff but what you can do is you, yourself, can say, "I pledge that's how I'm going to behave during conflict." And that was very helpful because a month later we were in conflict.

We were talking to people about what is and what could be. And suddenly, some people were saying, "Well, if we believe this, then why are we doing these things?" And I had staff members coming to me and saying, "Yves, why are we not allowing the kids to use the front door? If this is what we believe, why are we making these rules?" And so I could see that we were a bit of a broken front, with some people saying, "I don't think our beliefs match our actions."

… And about a month later we had conflict but it was beautiful because we had respectful conflict. … Conflict can be positive because it brings new things. … Conflict can either reaffirm that what we're doing is indeed the right thing, we don't need to change, or conflict can say, "Hey, there's another, a better way."

And when we look at [kids using] the front door, which was one of our early opportunities for conflict, we were able to use our conversation and say, "Well, if this is what we believe about who we are, then how is the front door rule supporting that?" Because the rules are there to protect our beliefs; that's the purpose of rules. Rules are not for convenience; rules are there to protect what is dear to us. And so we said, "How is that rule protecting any of our beliefs? Does it match our beliefs?" And we found, actually, it doesn't match our beliefs because we have this belief around wholeness, "we," and this rule [separated us]. So we said, "If we are talking about "we," we can't have rules that negate the "we." (January 28, 2005)

practices in light of their assumptions and beliefs has interrupted the taken-for-grantedness of their school landscape; it has become a new story of school at Princess.

AS A SCHOOL COMMUNITY As Yves said, when they first began their work together as a staff team at Princess, they "were a bit of a broken front." It took time together in determined discussion to come to more consistent beliefs and to practices which translated those beliefs into lived action. This work as a school team, though, wasn't done completely apart from the same kind of moving inward with the broader parent community. While some beliefs and practices were being explored by the school team, other beliefs and practices were being explored in similar ways within the broader school community.

In Yves' move to engage parents in decision-making at the school, (pp. 32-33) we see the school's beliefs played out throughout the process. The sense of "we," the connectedness, is seen in the invitation extended to parents, elders, and senior students to participate in what had traditionally been *staff* meetings and professional development sessions, the places in which important information was generally shared only with members of the school team. The respect is seen in the belief that, having this information, these individuals would contribute something important to the discussions and decision-making – knowledge, context, experience, positioning – that provided different lenses through which to examine the alternatives before them and that brought different and varied insights to the table. The end choice of program to educate against bullying was one that was culturally appropriate in the context of the practices of parents and community members, the nature and self-esteem of middle years students, and the teacher judgment of educators who chose to follow the restitution model as well as those who chose to continue with other professional practices. A sense of safety is evident in the opportunity for individuals within the school community to express their thoughts and feelings because what they had to say was heard and attended to. Both teachers who wanted to move forward with a new model for responding to behaviour, and teachers

Yves: A good friend of mine, who is also a principal, once said to me, "Well, parents cannot take part in decisions because parents don't have the same information we do." And I thought, well, that makes sense, and then I thought, that's simple. We have to make sure the parents have the same information as us. So I said to the staff [at Princess] this is why I would like parents to participate in staff meetings, this is why I would like parents to come to PD. It's because then they will have the information and then they can decide with us about things. And I said, "I'm not going to force this." And we revisited it a couple of times and, I think, in December they said to me, "Okay Yves, we will try it once, just once, and then we'll see."

And so it was something like December 27th, 2000, and it was professional development around bully-proofing the school and it was one of those commercial programs. ... And I was not even there. ... What happened was the vice principal presented the stuff and all that and half the staff said, "Yeah, I think that would be good" and half the staff said, "I don't know." But they asked the parents and the parents said, "This is not culturally affirming who we are; this isn't appropriate." And they asked the kids and the kids said, "Well, I don't want to walk around with a little button that says I'm a goody two-shoes. This is offensive for me to be treated that way." This was a Friday and I got home and I got phone calls from several persons saying, "Oh, Yves, you should have been there because the parents had a voice today and they said no to this [program]. This is terrible. If you had been there you could have talked them into it." And I said, "My intent would not have been to try to talk them into it; that's why we had the parents there – to listen to them." So different people perceived that differently, and people saw it as Black Friday.

who didn't, were safe to make a decision knowing they would be supported in that decision. As a result of the connectedness, respect, and safety in this examination of some of the practices of the school and the rationale underlying them, the self-esteem of each school community member, whether parent, student, elder, or staff member, was preserved.

INTERRUPTING THE TAKEN-FOR-GRANTEDNESS In this process of moving inward, whether as individuals, as a school team, or as a broader school community, the staff at Princess interrupt the taken-for-grantedness of their landscape; a taken-for-grantedness which exists within many school landscapes. They interrupt the taken-for-grantedness of educators looking outward at others first – of not questioning who they are themselves and why they do what they do and so believing whatever problem or concern they are experiencing must originate outside the school with parents or community. They interrupt the taken-for-grantedness of perpetuating typical school practices – of "tinkering around the edges" (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 51) to make common practices more appealing to more parents, using such things as door prizes and food, and so never examining the practices themselves to see what may be inherently at fault with them. They interrupt the taken-for-grantedness of educators' decision-making processes – of believing they must make the decisions because they have the information needed to plan programs and events and so not addressing the privileging built into their information sharing processes and structures. Through this interruption, the staff at Princess create new possibilities for engaging parents in their children's schooling. They break through the taken-for-grantedness of the school landscape to create new stories of school. They break through the taken-for-grantedness of parent involvement to create new stories of parent engagement and leadership.

But the interesting thing is that a month later we offered another workshop. This time it was a Saturday/Sunday and it was optional for the staff and it was optional for parents. We had most of the staff there and we had about ten, twelve parents and we had an elder, Mrs. Katie Poundmaker. ... The workshop was called Restitution and you could tell the parents seemed to be comfortable with it; lots of people on the staff were comfortable. But everybody was sort of holding their breath. ... And then at lunch time on Sunday I turned to Katie and said, "Well, is this appropriate for us to have?" And her answer to us was, "These are our teachings that we lost because of residential schools." So there was a sigh of relief because the parents loved it and people were coming to me on Saturday and Sunday morning at the coffee break saying, "I like this stuff here. Are we going to do this?" And I said, "I'm not going to make that decision. It's not going to be Yves saying yes we're going to do this or no we're not going to do this."

So we did this workshop and the elder said yes and the parents said yes, let's try this. So we came back to the staff, and I said to the staff, "Some of us are going to be working with the kids differently, but we're not going to make everybody work the same way. If you don't want to do this stuff, that's fine. ... We would like people to respect the fact that we are using this approach to work with kids, [and we will] respect that [others] are also using their own approach and respect the way they're doing things. (January 28, 2005)

From the stories and conversations of parent and staff co-researchers and participants at Princess, we have seen how foundational it is to parent engagement to make explicit the assumptions which underlie practices of parent involvement or engagement, and then to challenge or affirm those assumptions; to move inward to develop conscious individual and collective beliefs, and then to translate those beliefs into practice. We understand that this work is neither simple nor smooth, disrupted in many ways by the complexities of the school system and by the particularities of the broader community in which the school is located. Yet it offers the possibility of interrupting the taken-for-grantedness of the school landscape, with resulting benefit for children, for parents, and for educators.

INVITATION

AND

HOSPITALITY

When I walk into some place where people don't know me, I'm always looked at and asked what I'm doing there because I look too big and scary. But when I go to the school, they're saying hello, like 'Hi!,' shake your hand, and they ask, 'How can I help you?' (Vernon Linklater, parent, April 2005)

For it to be successful with parents you have to be inviting on a daily basis, not just when you need somebody for a field trip, or for this, or for that. You constantly have to be open to having parents in your room. (Sandi , May 16, 2005)

"Invite, invite, invite." We don't know how often these words were repeated during our research on parent engagement at Princess Alexandra Community School. Whenever we talked about ways to make parents feel welcome, ways to help parents decide to attend a school event, ways to encourage parents to share their thoughts in a staff meeting, the same words could be heard: "Invite, invite, invite." And they weren't just words, a formula that sounded good but meant little: behind these words a whole world of meaning lay hidden. Invitation and hospitality were themes that emerged time and time again during the analysis of the field text.

HOSPITALITY For some, the term hospitality might suggest ownership. It might suggest that if we are the ones extending the invitation, we are the ones who own and dictate the space into which guests are received. Hospitality might conjure up an image of a host who is in control of who is invited, what they should wear, when they should arrive and depart, and so on. But that is not how we are using the term hospitality here. When we talk about hospitality at Princess Alexandra, it is not about teachers and administrators who invite people to their place, but about creating a place that is owned as much by students, parents, and other community members as it is by staff and administrators.

Lambros Kamperidis (1990) writes that "only when we know how to behave as guests will we have the honor to act as hosts" (pp. 10-11). More importantly, perhaps, teachers, teacher associates, administrators, and non-teaching staff members understand that they are not the owners of the school community. On the contrary: they, themselves, are guests. They have been received into a community with relationships, culture, and history that began long before they, as "school workers," arrived at the school, and that will continue long after they leave. So when we say "hospitality," we mean the open door and outstretched hand extended by hosts who realize that they, themselves, are guests.

PACS maintains close ties with two alternative or "satellite" programs: one at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge and one at the Friendship Inn. (Both of these venues are in the Riversdale neighbourhood, at a short walking distance from PACS.) In its 2004 Annual Report *Strengthening our Learning Community* the Saskatoon Public School Board describes the program at White Buffalo Youth Lodge as "a culturally based elementary program for students of Aboriginal ancestry who have been out of school for three or more months. An holistic approach is followed in order to instill pride, confidence and self-esteem in students" (p. 14). During the 2004/05 school year, in which research efforts were concentrated, Sandi Harper was the teacher for this program.

This kind of hospitality may be a daunting prospect. School staff and administrators who are used to keeping the school agenda firmly in their own hands may wonder what might happen when parents are a legitimate presence in the school and when their voices are truly heard in decision making processes. What might happen is that long-standing practices or obvious "school truths" are questioned. What might happen is that parents become teachers and teachers learners. In the words of John Caputo (2000), "hospitality ... means to put your home at risk, which simultaneously requires both having a home and risking it" (p. 57). Offering hospitality to parents means being willing to take the "risk" that parents may have valuable suggestions school staff and administrators had not thought about, or that parents' perspectives may challenge common assumptions.

I N V I T A T I O N When parents, staff members, and former staff members told us, "invite, invite, invite," the repetition was not merely for emphasis. Invitation literally needs to be repeated, both before and after it has been accepted. A single statement in the school handbook or newsletter that "parents are always welcome" is most certainly not enough. And a single remark made by the principal on registration day or meet the teacher night will have little more effect. Parents and other family members and caregivers of students need to be invited over and over again.

Repeated invitation is important especially in the context of an Aboriginal community in which many people have had negative experiences with schooling, residential or not. Some parents believe they are "invited" to the school only when there are discipline issues. As Sandi described, many parents and grandparents will need to see repeated evidence that the school is truly a welcoming place before they are comfortable enough to enter the school and participate in its activities.

The off-site program that is now offered at White Buffalo Youth Lodge is a recent program – this is the third year it's been in operation – and it's in partnership with the Tribal Council. I like what it stands for and I believe what we're trying to do over there. We have too many First Nations kids on the streets, and that's my target group. The Tribal Council wanted a place where you could do cultural programming for kids because part of the reason that kids aren't successful in school is that they have no idea who they are and where they come from and what being Indian actually means. (Sandi Harper)

Change seems to be the only constant in the lives of many of the families in Riversdale. Whether it is a household move, an unexpected visit by members of the extended family, a health crisis, or the beginning or end of a job, many families have learned to be flexible and respond to who or what needs attention at any given moment. We heard numerous examples of parents and other caregivers not being able to confirm whether they would be able to participate in an event or meeting until shortly before. A lack of response to an invitation sent home in advance, however, should not be mistaken for a lack of interest. If a family does not come to a meeting or event for which they were invited, this does not mean that the family is not interested and that it is not worth the trouble inviting them for future events or meetings.

AS INDIVIDUALS So what does "invitation" look like? Is it a notice on a bulletin board? A message in the school newsletter? A pretty card with curly print asking one to RSVP? From the stories that the staff at Princess Alexandra shared with us, we learned that the most effective invitations are personal, face to face, so that they can be accompanied by a smile and a handshake. Invitations can be extended in any personal encounter: when a father comes to pick up a child at the end of the school day, it may be the community school coordinator who greets him, and reiterates that it would be wonderful to see him at the family reading event two days later. Or when an older sister comes to register her little brother, it may be a teacher associate who asks her if she would like to come to the pancake breakfast the next morning. An invitation, then, becomes a connection between two individuals, extending, receiving, respecting.

Because personal relationships, built and sustained over time, are what keep the Riversdale community together, parent leaders are asked to extend personal invitations to other parents. Invitations personally extended to parents by other parents are often more effective than those extended by school staff. Word of mouth is very important because many people in the community are related to each other and they trust each other's opinion more than teachers' or administrators' opinions. When school staff tell parents that

Michelle: Word of mouth is huge in this community because there are so many people who are related and so many people who trust [their family members'] opinions as opposed to teachers' or administrators' opinions. ... You can tell them as a teacher, 'Come out, it's great, you'll love it,' and yet, they need a little bit more back up, to hear it from someone else too. (November 15, 2004)

Laureen: During a feast or a powwow, it is hard for the parents to say, 'I am going to come and help. I hear there is a feast and I want to help.' It is an honour system, for someone to come to you and say 'We need your help.' That is when you get the help.

Sheila: The respect comes from asking, an invitation, asking and requesting, you know, and then honouring that request by doing the job that you were requested to do. (February 21, 2005)

Carmen: We had a substitute secretary today, and I noticed when I went by ... the front desk, there was a mother standing, registering her two kids, and ... I said, oh boy, the table in our room is full right now. So I took her down to the community room — we just bought new couches and a coffee table and there's books, a library, a little bookshelf — and the two kids went right to that bookshelf. Well, mom sat down at the table and I said if you need anything I'm just in the ... first office when you come in. (May 9, 2005)

Yves Bousquet, principal, formerly at Princess: If you went to another school, how would you want to be treated? If somebody comes to your home, how do you treat them? This is our home during the day and so when people come here, how should we treat them? We referred to our substitute teachers as guest-teachers, and every year we talked to the students about that. (January 28, 2005)

they have a "standing invitation" to come into the school, this invitation may not "stand" unless it is supported by a personal invitation.

Assumptions and beliefs are challenged and affirmed in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous ways. Similarly, invitation and hospitality work in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous ways. While staff extend personal invitations to parents or families, and individual parents invite other parents, invitation and hospitality also play a role within the school team. The school's hospitality to the community, furthermore, involves education about culturally appropriate ways of inviting, and creating opportunities for staff visits to the home as well as parent visits to the school.

AS A SCHOOL TEAM If hospitality and invitation are lived beliefs, they are practiced also within the school team, by staff members towards their colleagues. When a new staff member arrives, a concerted effort is made to make this person "feel welcome," which, of course, requires more than showing her or him where the coffee machine and the photocopier are. If a new staff member experiences that invitation and hospitality are lived beliefs in the school, s/he might share these practices more easily. Carmen's story illustrates how important it is that a secretary has experienced and is able to share hospitality so that s/he, in turn, is able to welcome parents registering their children, by offering them a cup of coffee and a place to sit. As Yves' words about "guest-teachers" illustrate, if invitation and hospitality are part of the fabric of lived beliefs in the school, children and adults, parents and staff, permanent and substitute teachers will all be received hospitably.

We have said that welcoming parents onto the school landscape means being willing to take the "risk" that they may bring suggestions that staff and administrators had not thought about, or common assumptions may be challenged. Likewise, welcoming new staff members entails the "risk" of new perspectives. A

Aleta: Acceptance of where they are at and meeting them on their terms where they feel safe.

Cec Chambul, teacher associate formerly at Friendship Inn: For sure.

Aleta: By you going to their home, rather than having them come to you.

Cec: But you know what? It's important that they come to us too because they need to know that their kids are in a great place. (March 11, 2005)

Cec: I think the ultimate engagement would be that ... parents are invited to engage in the school, but as the school we are also invited to engage in that family's life. (March 11, 2005)

Shane: This week we're having our parent/teacher conferences – our three way conferences. This year we're having them on Thursday evening and Friday morning. We're inviting parents in on Thursday night for conferences and we're having a soup and bannock supper to coincide with the event. Friday morning there are interviews again. At about 11 am on Friday morning, for parents who have not come in for an interview, we're asking teachers to make home visits so they ensure they connect with every parent in their class. So what I'm asking is that by the end of this week, or early next week, every parent at our school has, in one shape or form, made a connection with a teacher or staff member to discuss their child's progress to date. Talk about building relationships. I think that it is critical to show the parents that we're interested and concerned about the progress of their child and about how we can work together to support them. (November 15, 2004)

Cec: It's not about colour-coordinating the napkins with the table cloth, it's about how you welcome people when they come through the doors. (March 11, 2005)

welcoming school culture is one where not all "guests" are forced to think alike, where differences can be accommodated. At Princess, we heard that the door was opened and staff were invited to learn about the restitution model, but staff were not forced to adopt this philosophy.

AS A SCHOOL COMMUNITY At Princess, it is evident that both being a guest and being a host are respected positions. Families are invited into the school, but teachers, teacher associates and administrators also visit families at home. Home visits have long been a practice at Princess Alexandra. To create comfort, trust, and relationship between the staff and parents, staff have taken time to visit parents in their homes, both spontaneously when occasions for such a visit arose and in planned ways during reporting periods.

As time has passed, the community has changed, relationships and comfort have developed for some parents, and the philosophy within the school has shifted. As a result, the practice of home visits has shifted as well, as we see from Shane's words. To accommodate the schedules of parents who work or go to school during the day and to enable parents to come in at a time when there is someone at home to care for young children, evening conferences are being offered at the school. The hope is that parents who may have had negative schooling experiences or who find school an intimidating place will over time grow comfortable enough to claim a space within the school. We see an intention to create a movement of hospitality and invitation for both parents and staff between school and home, home and school. We also see an intention to create patterns of relationship which bridge beyond a parent's connection with their child's teacher to a connection with a broader staff team.

The positions of "host" and "guest" are not fixed identities, but rather roles which different people can assume. We have already asserted that school staff are guests in the community, but parents and other

community members can also be positioned as hosts in the school. At Princess Alexandra, for instance, elder Ina Ahenakew might be the one welcoming visitors. But hospitality is a practice that is shared also by students.

In October 2004, we had an opportunity to observe this for ourselves. It was "Read-on, Count-on" morning at Princess Alexandra: parents and community volunteers were invited to come to the school to read stories and do math and science activities with the students. Teacher associate Aleta Hillier sat behind a table in the front hallway of the school and welcomed the parents and other volunteers. She checked in a binder what classroom they had been assigned to, and asked one of the older students to escort them to that classroom. She instructed the students to take the visitors' coats and ask them if they would like coffee. This was an explicit lesson in hospitality. When a small boy came running down the stairs, put his hands on the table in front of Aleta, and yelled, "What are you guys doing?!" Aleta smiled and answered calmly, "Welcoming visitors." She quite rightly made that sound like a project onto itself: "welcoming visitors." And the "visitors" notice that they are truly welcomed, whether they come to the school for a special event such as the "Read-on, Count-on," or just to see how their child is doing.

Both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff at Princess have learned about culturally appropriate ways to invite Aboriginal guests. For example, for significant events, such as a community feast, important guests must be invited personally, and the invitation must be accompanied by an offering of tobacco. The elders who are asked to say opening prayers must be invited with a piece of cloth that is symbolic of the quilt that would have been offered in earlier times.

INTERRUPTING THE TAKEN-FOR-GRANTEDNESS More than anything, our co-researchers and participants told us, hospitality must be a genuine attitude and invitation a genuine gesture. That is why we do not want to suggest any "best practice" of hospitality and invitation. An invitation becomes a reflection of a true shift in the values and beliefs of the staff when they come to see the school not as their territory, but as a space shared with parents and others who care for the children who attend the school. In much of the literature about parent involvement and engagement, suggestions are offered for drawing parents into a space and an agenda controlled by the school. We suggest, however, that many parents will not feel welcome unless school administrators and staff are willing to create the school space and agenda *with* parents and other caregivers as well as with the students. Hospitality and invitation remain empty gestures until they are made with the genuine intention to open up the school space and agenda.

Trust

AND

Relationship

RESEARCH REPORT: Parent Engagement and Leadership

Ann: Delores, you were one of the first parents that did challenge the school. You did come into the school when you did disagree with something and I found it was very positive, the feedback that you had. But you were one of the very first parents to do that.

Martina: I think that's the sign of a healthy organization. It's not just about the parent coming in and cutting paper and "Isn't that nice!" We feel you can have an opinion that may go against or question or challenge something. I think that's the sign of a school that's moving toward engagement. (November 22, 2004)

E N G A G E M E N T ...

I gaze at the framed pictures of friends on my desk beside my computer. In each one, we're standing close together, smiling, arms linked with one another, happy to be together.

I lean over the railing at the hockey rink, watching my two sons out on the ice. I watch the way in which a line of players works together, always seeming to know where everyone else is, anticipating where they will be next. I'm touched by the way all players, on both teams, bang their sticks on the ice when an injured player returns to his feet. I smile when teammates skate over to a player who just scored a goal and give him a high five or a pat on the back.

I flip through the Saturday newspaper. My eyes catch the words,

"… pleased to announce the engagement of …",
"… happily announce the engagement of … ."

I take a moment to look at the couples in the photographs. What is immediately apparent in their touch, in their expressions, in the way they look at one another is how close they are, how connected.

I watch the actors re-enter the stage of the Persephone Theatre at the end of the play, clasp hands, and bow to the audience. I rise with the rest of the audience to give them a standing ovation. As everyone claps, I watch the two actors face each other in an exchange of shared appreciation and celebration.

… meshing … interlocking … fitting together

… making a pledge … a moral commitment.

The "Children Not In School Program" at the Friendship Inn is the result of a partnership between Princess Alexandra Community School, Saskatoon City Police Community Services, White Buffalo Youth Lodge, City Hall Outreach Worker, Social Services Worker, and Community Health. The program offers "a full-time Teachers Associate who is working with children who have not been attending school, teaching them life skills and some academics, while focusing on the strengths of the individual students in a safe environment" (Saskatoon Friendship Inn). The program at the Friendship Inn has a lower threshold and is less academically oriented than the program at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge. The maximum age for students to enter the "Children Not In School Program" is fourteen. During the 2004/05 school year, Cindy Bell was the teacher associate for this program.

As we think about our observed moments of engagement being lived out between these individuals, we see how clearly engagement is about trust and relationship. Trust and relationship built through time and contact – getting to know one another, working and playing together, striving toward common goals, supporting one another. And we're drawn to wonder about trust and relationships on school landscapes – about trust and relationships between parents and school staff. As a parent, Debbie pulls forward recent experiences of interaction with her children's teachers.

I think about the parent teacher conferences I just attended at my son's high school – the map I was given at the doorway so that I could locate his classrooms, the five minute allotment of time with each of his teachers, the signs on the doors that asked parents to knock at their appointment time to help keep the teacher on schedule. I think about how the teachers and I were strangers to one another, and yet there was no time to make introductions. Each teacher ran quickly through marks and assignments. I wonder if I will even recognize my son's teachers the next time we meet, or they me.

I think about the Meet the Teacher Night which I was at a month or so ago with my two youngest sons. I looked around their classroom, learning about the fish, the lizards, and the crickets, while I waited for a turn to talk with their teacher. I visited with friends of the boys who were in the classroom at the same time. When the teacher had a moment, I made contact and introduced myself. The teacher provided me with an information sheet about the program and highlighted a few key aspects about classroom routines. Since other parents were also waiting to talk to the teacher, we did not linger in our conversation.

I think about the parent council meeting I attended in September. A great deal of time was spent on a discussion of fundraising – the financial position of the parent council, considerations for expenditure of those funds, what new fundraising dollars would be targeted towards, and what those fundraising initiatives might be. A great deal of time was

Part of my job is being visible, seeing any kids that are at the Friendship Inn who don't look like they're going to school. Kids of my program, some of them have behavioural problems, a lot of them have really low self-esteem... One of the things that I do is a lot of positive feedback for them. Sometimes we just play games, sometimes it's just connecting, communicating. The social skills and the self-esteem, and if you make a mistake, that's ok but what did you learn from it, how can you do it differently, you know that type of thing. Get them questioning themselves. (Cindy Bell)

also taken up by the principal's report – student enrolment numbers, resulting reorganization of classes, new staff and families, priorities for the school year. Most parents in attendance listened much more than they spoke.

Parent/teacher conferences, Meet the Teacher nights, parent council meetings – as Debbie has experienced – are typical activities on a school landscape which bring parents and teachers together. Like the signs and the messages, the use of space, and the displays on the walls which we looked at more closely in the chapter "Assumptions and Beliefs," these activities are common in schools across the city, the province, the country; they are another part of the taken-for-grantedness of school landscapes. In awakening to this taken-for-grantedness, it is important that we ask, How do we develop trust and relationship between parents and school staff? Can it be done in limited minutes of time, within structured frameworks, in public spaces, in formal settings?

POSITIONING PARENTS   In the body of literature on parents, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's (1978; 2003) work focuses extensively on relationships between parents and teachers. She writes:

> There are very few opportunities for parents and teachers to come together for meaningful, substantive discussion. In fact, schools organize public, ritualistic occasions that do not allow for real contact, negotiation, or criticism between parents and teachers. Rather, they are institutionalized ways of establishing boundaries between insiders (teachers) and interlopers (parents) under the guise of polite conversation and mature cooperation. (1978, pp. 27-29)

It is clear that these opportunities, in foregrounding teachers' professional boundaries – "boundaries … intended to define and protect the power, authority, and decision making derived from formal training and experience" (Sarason, 1995, p. 23) – do more to maintain distance between parents and educators than to

Delores: [Some teachers] don't understand] that each and every little head and what ever that's in the classroom is as important as the next one. Yeah, you got your certificate hanging there, so you're approved, you can go in that classroom. You know? But what do you know about these children? What do you know about how they feel? What do you know about what they woke up with this morning, or what they went to bed with last night? Do you know if they ate this morning? Do you know if they haven't had an infection of some kind for about a week that hasn't been taken care of? You know, you don't. People have to be open, they have to know this, they have to realize this. It doesn't matter where you are, you know; doesn't matter what certificate you have hanging on the wall. It just upsets me that people can't see that. (November 22, 2004)

Tammy: A teacher left half way through the year [because of declining enrolment], and then I got Delores's son in my classroom. I became his teacher in January. Yves [principal at that time] told me, "We need to talk with Delores." I didn't know her or anything. I guess that was the fear, not knowing that person. But he asked her, "Can you share with Tammy what works best with James?" If anybody ever asked me that about my son I would probably cry. Because I would be so relieved. I would; my tears would be tears of relief. Because only the parent knows what's best for their child. And then, after that, I had such positive experiences with her. (May 16, 2005)

reduce it. While we do believe in teacher knowledge and are not advocating for a replacement or downplaying of teacher expertise, we also believe in positioning parent knowledge (Pushor, 2005) and stories alongside those of teachers. This presents possibilities for building trust and relationships between parents and teachers and, correspondingly, for enriching schooling experiences for children, families, and educators. In this narrative inquiry at Princess Alexandra, we have come to see how building trust and relationship between parents and staff is another foundational piece in the work of engaging parents.

PRINCESS As you read in the chapter on assumptions and beliefs, Brett speaks of invitations being extended to parents at Princess to help find solutions for their children with teachers, to "work together and go in a direction." In this chapter, Delores helps us to see how much parents know about their children and about their families, knowledge which teachers just aren't privy to unless there is an exchange of stories between them. She asks us to be open to realizing that the knowledge residing within a family is really important to the work we do in the school. You see from Tammy's words what becomes possible when she, as Delores's son's teacher, invites Delores to share her knowledge.

Edwards, Pleasants, and Franklin (1999) affirm such parent/teacher relationships.

> Often schools and teachers take a "father-knows-best" approach; essentially parenting the parent. Schools must realize that while they may have expertise on pedagogy, curriculum, and child development, they are not experts on individual families or children. The parents know their child and what occurs in their family better than any outsider and schools/teachers need to respect and learn from their clientele. (p. xx)

Staff at Princess are interrupting the old story of parent and teacher interactions – the institutional, ritualistic, and perhaps patriarchal interactions – which play out on many school landscapes. Instead, they

Cindy: It's been interesting. I'm building lots and lots of relationships ... just talking. I mean I'm there before class starts and out on the floor talking to people. I've got one kokum who comes with her granddaughter, she's like three, ... but [the kokum's] raising her little granddaughter. The little girl comes to me and if I have a storybook or whatever, I'll send it home. She tells me about taking her to Pooh Corner and different things like that. She said if I ever want help beading [with my students] or whatever, she'd try and come and help. It's just building a relationship with the people that you see everyday. Taking an interest in their lives. ... You know, you can talk, you just build that bridge.

... I keep in contact with my kids' parents all the time. ... You kind of give them the play and they really appreciate that. They respect the fact that you are giving them some say in things they want for their children. I mean, just listening mostly.

... Well, and you kind of ask, "So, what do you need?" That's what I asked [a mom] this morning, "What do you need?" And she said, "Well, I'd like to get family counseling." And I said, "Okay. Do you know anything about it?" "Well, no I don't," she said. "Okay, so how about if I find some numbers and stuff for you, and I'll let you take it from there?" "Oh, that'd be wonderful," she said. So I mean it's just ... I certainly didn't have all the answers so I had to go get them, find them ... (May 9, 2005)

are working to get to know parents, to build trust, to develop relationships with them, to listen to parents' stories of their children, themselves, and their family life. This new story of trust and relationship, in interrupting the taken-for-grantedness of the school landscape, offers possibility for parents and teachers to work side by side in the schooling of children.

Just as assumptions and beliefs are challenged and affirmed in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous ways, and invitation and hospitality work in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous ways, relationships and trust are also built in multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous ways. While staff engage in developing personal relationships with individual parents or families, they also work on strengthening the relationships and trust within the school team. Moreover, they collectively revisit and rethink school practices to extend the school's relationships with their parent community, and they host feasts and cultural events to connect the school more strongly with the broader community.

AS INDIVIDUALS Cindy's description of her work in the satellite program at the Friendship Inn tells a strong story of trust and relationship. She mentions "just talking" and "just listening." She speaks about asking parents what it is they need, and about not having all the answers. Considered individually, each of these gestures seems like such a simple, little thing. Yet, together, they are the things that are so foundational to our work with parents that they often get ignored in the literature in the field or are never made explicit. They are not the things which are represented in policy documents, in handbooks, in staff orientations and yet they are the things which build relationships.

The value, to both teachers and parents, of asking parents what they think and then listening to their response is further seen in the comments to Delores, made by Ann and Martina in a research conversation (p. 47). "It is especially important in listening to parents as they tell their stories to simply collect the

Ann: We have an old friend, for years and years, who does repairs for us occasionally. He's a handyman, and we're just fixing up parts of our house and so we had W—— come over and disconnect the sinks because we were getting new counters. Then he came back and put the sinks in again and, lo and behold, he is the partner of T—— who is one of our moms at our school. He kind of talked when he came the first time and he said, "Do you know T——?" I said yes so we kind of chatted. Well, the next time he came to put the sinks back in, he brought her with him to our house. She came in and she's his right hand woman. When she came over, it was a Friday night and she helped and we just sort of chatted. Then Monday, when I came to school, well every one of the cousins and the siblings of that family knew that T—— has been to our house and that we were friends. They all came by, "Good morning!" It was kind of interesting. (May 13, 2005)

information and analyze it to match potential needs with available resources, not to pass moral, political, or personal judgment on what they are saying" (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999, p. xx). Because Cindy and Ann, like other staff at Princess, listen without comment, because they ask the parents what they need and then begin there, they win the parents' trust and respect.

From Ann's story of visiting with her handyman's partner, we see how important it is that parents and families have a sense of who the teachers and the staff are, as human beings as well as educators. At a pancake breakfast this past September, Michelle Timm, away from Princess on a maternity leave, attended with her new son Ethan. It was quite amazing to see how comfortable Michelle was with Ethan, her first child, being touched and tickled by the many students who stopped to stay hello to them and with Ethan being passed around among parents as she visited with them. Michelle's ease and presence within the group of parents helps us to see how trust builds collectively from this kind of contact; that a positive relationship with one or two individuals creates strong beginnings with many others as well. Here again, this speaks to the significance of the little things we do – of making contact, of engaging in conversation, of extending hospitality, of reciprocating respect, of becoming part of the community.

AS A SCHOOL TEAM Just as we have come to see how very foundational trust and relationship are to the engagement of staff and parents, we have come to see their significance within the school team itself. Trusting relationships between administrators, teachers, teacher associates, and support staff enable them to work together well – to mesh, to make moral commitments to one another. Like building relationships with parents, this, too, takes time and contact.

Over the course of our year at Princess, we have listened to staff talk about ideas for how to use staff meeting and professional development time, start up days and school retreat days. We have heard them

Sandi: The inclusiveness of the culture is relevant to developing your relationships. If you're not open to having any cultural – I don't know – ceremonies or activities or whatever you want to call them, you're never going to develop the relationship. It's always going to be you and me, not us. ... We all want to be accepted; that's what I think. (May 16, 2005)

Delores: The biggest reason why I came [to Princess] – my focus in life I guess is to make sure that all of the kids that are with me – I'm trying to bring peace in their life to the best way that I can, I guess. And I need help. This school has a lot of things to offer and one of them is culture. For most of my adult life I wandered into a different path, but being a single mother and wanting something in my kids' lives, I leaned on this school quite a bit to help me raise my kids to know their culture ... (November 22, 2004)

muse about ways to connect with and to orient new staff to the school. We have heard them express feelings of loss in regard to team members who have left. We have been a part of conversations in which they have revisited past practices such as cluster meetings and school-wide themes, internal structures which brought staff together regularly around a common purpose. Martina, as vice principal, often asks, "What does it mean to create a team?" "How do we care for the givers of care?"

The disruption experienced on Princess's landscape, as introduced in "Notes to the Reader," makes this work of team building especially hard. When change and transiency within families place greater and greater demands on staff in their work with students and parents, it appears challenging for them to find time to expend on building trust and relationships within the school team. We will explore this disruption further in our "Final Thoughts."

AS A SCHOOL COMMUNITY Sandi's comments about cultural events help us to think about establishing relationships within the broader school community. She is asking us to consider first what we know about the community, and who its members are, and then how to build relationships with community members in ways which reflect this knowing. At Princess, with a student population which is primarily of Aboriginal ancestry, building trust and relationship with the community often involves First Nations activities – hosting feasts and powwows, including pipe ceremonies and Native drumming, teaching hoop and jingle dancing, serving soup and bannock at school events. These activities demonstrate an acceptance and honouring of the identity of a majority of the individuals within the community. They also, as Delores's story tells us, support families in learning about and strengthening their own cultural traditions and practices.

Cindy: When I did the meal before Christmas with the two of my students and families, one of the boy's kokum came in and she made all the bannock biscuits for the hamburgers. That family was so ecstatic, I mean the glows on their faces! It was such a positive experience! And now that mom doesn't have any qualms, she phones me if her son is going to be away. ... You get them involved and everybody feels good; everybody feels more comfortable. (January 17, 2005)

Ann: We want parents to come and feel they will contribute. Claudette has two brothers who are artists; why aren't we getting these people to come in? What that does to someone like Wyatt to have his uncle come and show what he can do – and he's very good. That's going to make more impact on that little boy than anything else that I could do. (May 13, 2005)

Shane: We talk about literacy being a focus and important, not only for our kids but for our parents as well. Wouldn't it be nice if we would have an environment in our library, or in our school somewhere, where parents would feel comfortable if they were waiting to pick up their kids, walking into the library, sitting down on a nice comfy couch, picking up a book or a magazine or the newspaper and having a read? ... I think we would need to have an open door, where it's not the school's room, it's the community's room, where they feel comfortable ... about being at the school. [We] also give them an opportunity to do some learning as well.

Aleta: And it starts there. They have to be invited, they have to feel welcome, first develop those relationships and then move into involvement and helping, which turns into engagement and leadership. We can't just jump from here to here; it's one brick at a time. ... It's creating the conditions for them to come into the school, develop relationships from there, and move on. (November 15, 2004)

Staff at Princess attend to the cultural backgrounds and identity of the small percentage of students who are not Aboriginal as well. We have heard many of our co-researches and participants speak about culture in a broader world context as well as in the context of Riversdale or Saskatoon. They express a belief that exposure to multicultural materials and activities provides both mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1997, as cited in Mitchell, 2003, p. 200), enabling students to see themselves reflected back in what is presented to them or to see outward to people and cultures less familiar to them. In both instances, students' understanding of themselves and others is extended and enriched. In the staff's attention to the composition of their community, and to the position of their community in a bigger world, we see how their relationship building within the school community is contextual, situational, and not generalizable.

Ann and Cindy take the relationship building within the community to a more personal level. They share with us specific examples of expertise residing within members of the community and how that knowledge or expertise is being used or can be used to support children and their programs. We see how meaningful such a relationship can be for the individual community member, and for the children with whom they connect. We get a real sense of the meshing, the commitment, the reciprocal benefit inherent within these relationships.

Shane and Aleta's conversation about creating a literacy or learning space for parents speaks to further thinking about ways to invite parents on to the school landscape so that relationships can be built. There is a sense in this conversation of the desire for multiple connecting points – of relationships being built with parents that center around their children, and of relationships being built with parents that center around the parents themselves. Thinking again of the definition of engagement and imagining how engagements are lived out in other arenas in our lives, we see a reciprocity in the thinking expressed within this conversation which seems central to forming and sustaining successful relationships with parents.

INTERRUPTING THE TAKEN-FOR-GRANTEDNESS "Real changes in school will only begin to take place when relationships of power begin to change, that is when the voices of parents and the community are heard and the direction of the school reflects the values of all" (Cummins, 1996, p. 34). We see in the practices at Princess a move away from the institutionalized, ritualistic, and often public interactions between teachers and parents typical of most school landscapes to an emphasis on practices of building trust and relationship which are much less formal and more intimate. In so many ways, we see that their building of trust and relationship is about the little things they do – making contact, listening, talking, and just being present – as individuals, as a school team, and as a school community. In other ways, there is a real sense of multiplicity to their building of trust and relationship with parents and community members. Staff members are making connections with parents in different places, at different times of day, in different ways. They are paying attention to and honouring adults in their community, both as parents/caregivers to children and as individuals significant in their own right. They are extending an invitation to parents to join them in relationship within the school as contributors and decision-makers, as individuals with knowledge and voice, as people with power and responsibility. On the landscape at Princess, we see boundaries being softened, and distances being narrowed.

FINAL THOUGHTS
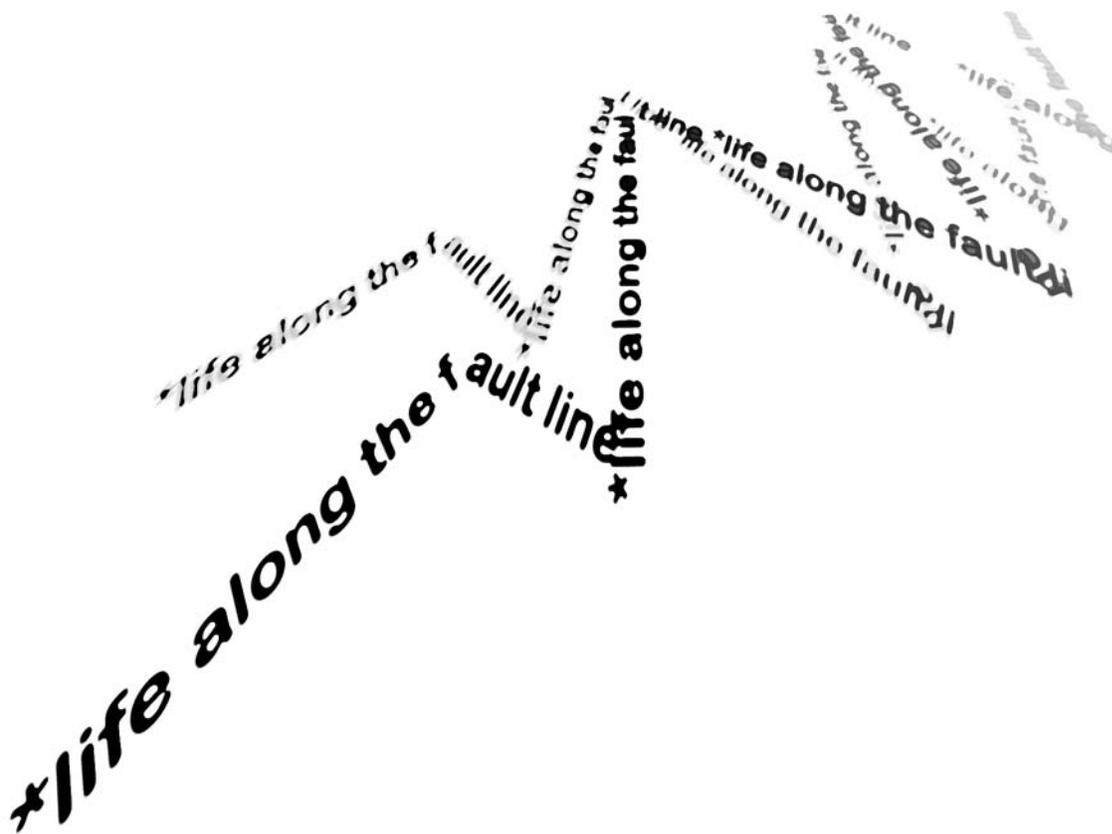
DISRUPTION: LIFE ALONG THE FAULT LINE When we started this research, we were thinking about parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent leadership as positioned on a continuum. As we mentioned earlier, we wanted to inquire into what it was that enabled Princess to move on the continuum from practices of parent involvement to practices of parent engagement and, in some instances, to practices of parent leadership. We wondered about why some parents remained distanced from the school – not involved at all, about how to increase the numbers of parents engaged in the school, and about how to move other practices of engagement more toward parent leadership. In these wonders, we expressed a sense that there was a continuous forward movement inherent within this continuum of practices.

What we learned from our inquiry is that such a movement is just not that smooth, simple, or easy. While much work was done at Princess to interrupt – to consciously break in on – old stories of parent involvement and to put in their place new stories of engagement and leadership, there also was much happening to disrupt these efforts. Interrupting the taken-for-grantedness of the school landscape was made more complex and difficult by disruptions such as the movement of families in and out of the Riversdale community, crises occurring within the lives of the families, staff and principal changes, and new staff appointments. As families underwent changes in composition, as Vera observed, or as parents struggled with crises, as in the story Aleta told (p. 60), some were, understandably, unable to maintain their engagement with the school. As new families joined the Princess community, there was no longer an implicit understanding among parents that they were welcome to attend staff meetings and professional development sessions. As a new principal entered the landscape or as new teachers joined the staff, the beliefs no longer belonged to the collective staff team nor were they jointly held or understood in the same way. The ground on which current practices and beliefs were situated was shaken.

Aleta: There's always a rebuilding of certain things that you've been working on – like with one parent [who was taking a leadership role], and now she's back. She's been here every day for a couple weeks now. She came here for help ... and I asked how I could support her; she was pretty much at an all time low. ... I asked her, "Out of all the things that are issues right now, what's the one thing that's bugging you the most?" Well, it was her addictions. So I asked, "What do you need?" She said she needed to see her worker, so I dropped her off there, she set up an appointment and it went from there. And she's been checking in here every day because she's trying to stay clean. Here she's in a place where she feels safe ... where she can have coffee, read the paper, where she can talk to people so she's not sitting by herself and being pulled. Laureen asked her if she wanted to get back into [running the program] but it was just way too soon for her to want to commit to anything. She wasn't ready for that step. (May 9, 2005)

Vera Robertson, I think the community - what I know of it - has changed. ... There seems to be more transiency. Some families come with some critical social issues, some sad stories. Over the years we have seen larger families, younger parents, and more grandparents who are assuming the parenting role. (May 13, 2005)

We see from the voices of our co-researchers and participants that the work of engaging parents is not just about gaining certain ground with parents in relation to a continuum of practices and then extending that ground further. It is also about continuous efforts to maintain current ground or even to regain ground previously claimed. As a result, as we imagine the line of the continuum from parent involvement to leadership, the line we see now is not one that is continuous and solid but one that is broken in places, one that turns back on itself for a distance before continuing forward again, one that becomes faint or blurred for awhile before becoming solid once more. The line we imagine now which represents this movement in practices of parent involvement, engagement and leadership indeed looks more like a fault line than a sight line.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTION: ATTENDING TO STRUCTURES So as educators, what can we do to stand strongly in the face of disruption? What can we do to hang on to the ground that is shaking beneath us? Just as physical structures can be designed and built to better withstand the tremors resulting from an earthquake, we see possibility in attending to structures both within and outside of the school landscape as a means of reducing the effects of the disruption.

Just as with an earthquake, the forces which cause disruptions in the school landscape of Princess Alexandra can originate in distant and nearby places: in decisions made in social planning departments, universities, and school division offices, as well as within the school itself. Correspondingly, in our research conversations, co-researchers presented possibilities for rethinking a number of educational structures both removed from the school and near to it: the curriculum in teacher education programs, the staffing policies and practices in schools and school divisions, the orientation of new staff to a community schools philosophy, and the use of non-instructional and professional development time for building shared beliefs amongst the staff and the school community. Within each of these structures, possibilities are presented for rethinking social and educational policies and practices and for reforming teacher education.

Tammy: If you think back to university, they never talked about parents. What do parents want for their kids, you never talked about stuff like that in university. ... We are not taught to involve parents right from the get-go; it's like the teacher's in charge. You take courses in university about managing your classroom, about being in control of the kids. (May 16, 2005)

Sandi: I've been on a couple of interviewing committees ... which I thought makes sense, rather than not having somebody there ... Sometimes we don't have any control over [staffing to beliefs] anyway because it's all about the system. And when you're looking at transfers, then you have to do what they're going to do ... (May 16, 2005)

Tammy questions the absence of courses in teacher education programs which attend to parents' positioning within their children's schooling. As teacher educators, researching parent engagement and parent knowledge we, too, are puzzled by this absence. We see a taken-for-grantedness regarding parents on university landscapes which parallels that of school landscapes. Yet, teacher candidates and beginning teachers continue to express both a fear of working with parents and a desire to learn how to do so more effectively. We believe the future is hopeful. Within the courses we teach, we are attending to the positioning of parents, as are some of our colleagues. School[PLUS] is now an important strand within the curriculum of educational foundations courses and staff members from community schools such as Princess are being asked to facilitate professional development opportunities for teacher candidates. An elective course, "Teaching and Learning in Community Education," is currently available at the University of Saskatchewan and a new course, "Working with Parents and Other Professionals," is being proposed. Tammy helps to foreground the importance of learning to listen to parent voice early in our development as teachers.

Sandi speaks to the need for members of the school staff to participate in interview processes so they can look for a match between the philosophy of the new staff member and the context and beliefs of the school. DePree (1989), in asserting "that what we believe precedes policy and practice" (p. 26), affirms Sandi's thinking. How do we rethink policies on hiring and staffing assignments in light of a school's stated assumptions and beliefs, and in light of their vision to position parents alongside educators in the schooling of children? What consideration is given to a contextual translation of policy into school-specific staffing assignments? The narratives of experience expressed within this research bring to the foreground the importance of the personal match between teacher and school.

Ann: Sometimes what happens when you get new staff is they want to get set up, get going. ... It's different for different people. ... When we're staffing, I think they need to pay more attention to getting people who are flexible, and a little bit on the creative side, and who have a lot of patience and are not easily stressed. (May 13, 2005)

Delores: So many teachers have left this school where I think they should have stayed because it's almost like they were made for this school and all of a sudden they just get ripped right out. My son was so upset when his teacher got moved in January. Honestly, he cried and was saying, "How come? Why?" He was even starting to get on the spiritual part I guess, saying, "You're always talking about how we want to bring good things into our lives and we want to keep good things in our lives. He goes, "Well how come every time something good happens, it gets taken away?" (November 22, 2004)

Ann causes us to think about the particularity of a context such as Princess's and the need to induct new staff to that context. In our conversations with our co-researchers, it became very clear that Princess is not the right place to be for every teacher or teacher associate. While some new staff feel a real affinity for the people and the place, others find it a very challenging school in which to work – possibly because of their personal assumptions and beliefs, possibly because they are unable to work in non-typical ways, possibly because they find life along the fault line too demanding and too exhausting. We wonder how time spent – both prior to the beginning of the school year and throughout the year – in an induction process specific to the context at Princess, to a philosophy of parent engagement, and to an incorporation of cultural practices may enhance the success of teachers new to the school. We wonder how engagement in a mentorship relationship with a staff member who has roots in the community may make a difference. While we know that staff are hired to a school division and not to a school, and we understand the need for flexibility in a large district, the stories of our co-researchers and our own lived experiences at Princess help us to see that while some teachers are well-suited to a school such as Princess, other people's talents are best realized in a different context. We wonder about the possibilities which are offered children, families, and teaching staff when teachers and staff are carefully matched to a school site; when they are consciously and thoughtfully oriented to that site; and when, if a match is not working, there is an easy opportunity for re-assignment. Stories told throughout this inquiry draw our attention to particularity.

Delores adds a very personal and powerful way of seeing staff transfer policies through the telling of her son's story of losing a teacher in the middle of the year – a teacher with whom he was strongly connected. We return to DePree's words that state "what we believe precedes policy and practice." Delores and her son help us to think about how central trust and relationship are to policies regarding staff transfers. In one of our research conversations, Laureen talked about a specific parent with whom she has spent eight years building a relationship. Again, because of life's disruption the parent has come into and out of Princess,

Cec: So many of our kids at Princess have had people come and go in their lives and that, for me, is still a thing because I felt that I left them too. ... I am sure that some of them must have thought that I ditched and for the most part, my kids at the Inn, that's exactly how they perceived it. I was there for two and a half years and it is just really important that when we move on we need to prepare people. I don't think I did that properly because I didn't have the opportunity to. (March 11, 2005)

more strongly connected to the school at some points than others. Laureen's story helps us to think about transfer policies which direct the movement of staff out of a school after a certain number of years and into a new location. Is a number such as five years a magic number? In the case of a teacher not matched to the school's philosophy and practices, should it be one year? Less than one year? In the case of teachers "made for the school," to use Delores's words, should it be seven years? Ten? How can attending to trust and relationship help us as educators to make these policy and practice decisions?

Cec, too, thinks about transfer policies from a very personal perspective. Concerned that her students will think she "ditched" them, Cec causes us to reflect on the timing of transfers and the need for them to be made early enough before the move that staff and students can prepare themselves for the changes. How do we help children to understand our movement out of their lives as a shift in our relationship but not a break away from it? How do we help them prepare to build trust and relationship with the new individual who will take our place? How do we prepare ourselves for closure in one setting, when we are deeply rooted in relationships, so that we can begin to build new relationships in September in a new setting? Cec's words highlight how, currently, this need for time for goodbyes between staff and students in not acknowledged as a part of the transfer process.

In a research conversation with Ann and Debbie, Vera Robertson spoke about how, when community schools were a new concept, staff from several schools spent time together in retreats building a sense of team amongst them and becoming more grounded in a philosophy of community-based education (May 13, 2005). While community schools are no longer a new phenomenon in the province, there continues to be staff assigned to community schools who are new to working within a community education framework. How are they inducted into the concept of community education? Currently, we are moving to a School^{PLUS} philosophy in the province, where there is a greater sense of interdisciplinarity and broader attention to the life conditions of children and their families which influence learning and well-being. Vera causes us to

Martina: [At Princess], it's not only the administrators with vision; it's shared vision. What I hope is that all staff here have a sense of that big picture and see where they can fit in and where they want to help set the course. ... A school retreat, the whole school going out and camping, we used to do that years back. A staff retreat, first of all, so we all got to know [each other]. Then having parents come out or having the tents set up in the back yard of the school ... We're just always going to get new people so what if we picked one activity a month and just rolled with it ... (May 9, 2005)

consider the importance of spending time together, in intense and intimate settings, to build relationships with others in and across disciplines and to learn to teach and work in new ways. While part of this purpose is achieved through community schools conferences, the emphasis within them appears not to be as strongly centered on building trust and relationship as Vera's description of former retreats infers.

Martina expresses a sense of the importance of spending time together to develop, to maintain, and to revisit shared beliefs and their lived meanings, both as a school team and as a school community. Covey (1989) indicates that leaders too often concern themselves with what is urgent rather than with what is important. We know from the stories of our co-researchers and participants that challenging and affirming beliefs and assumptions as individuals, as a staff, and as a school community, is truly the important work in regard to parent engagement. We also know this work takes time and contact with one another in deep conversation. Martina causes us to think about the use of non-instructional days at the beginning of the school year and the use of professional development time throughout the year. Is using this time for building shared beliefs and a sense of cohesiveness an important way to use this time? Where else might such time come from? We know of situations in which teachers have been paid for summer vacation days used for professional development in literacy. In a parallel structure, could retreat time at the end of summer or on weekend days at intervals throughout the year become a possibility for spending important time together initiating and sustaining team building as a staff and as a school community? When staff are living their lives along a fault line on the school landscape, when can they find time to step away, and to do the important structural work that sustains them and their work through the urgency of the continuous disruptions they face?

As you did when you first 'toured' Princess, we ask you once again to consider the contrasts. Within the well-known structures of teacher education programs, staffing policies and practices, staff induction, and non-instructional and professional development allocations, consider what might be possible. Instead of

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structures
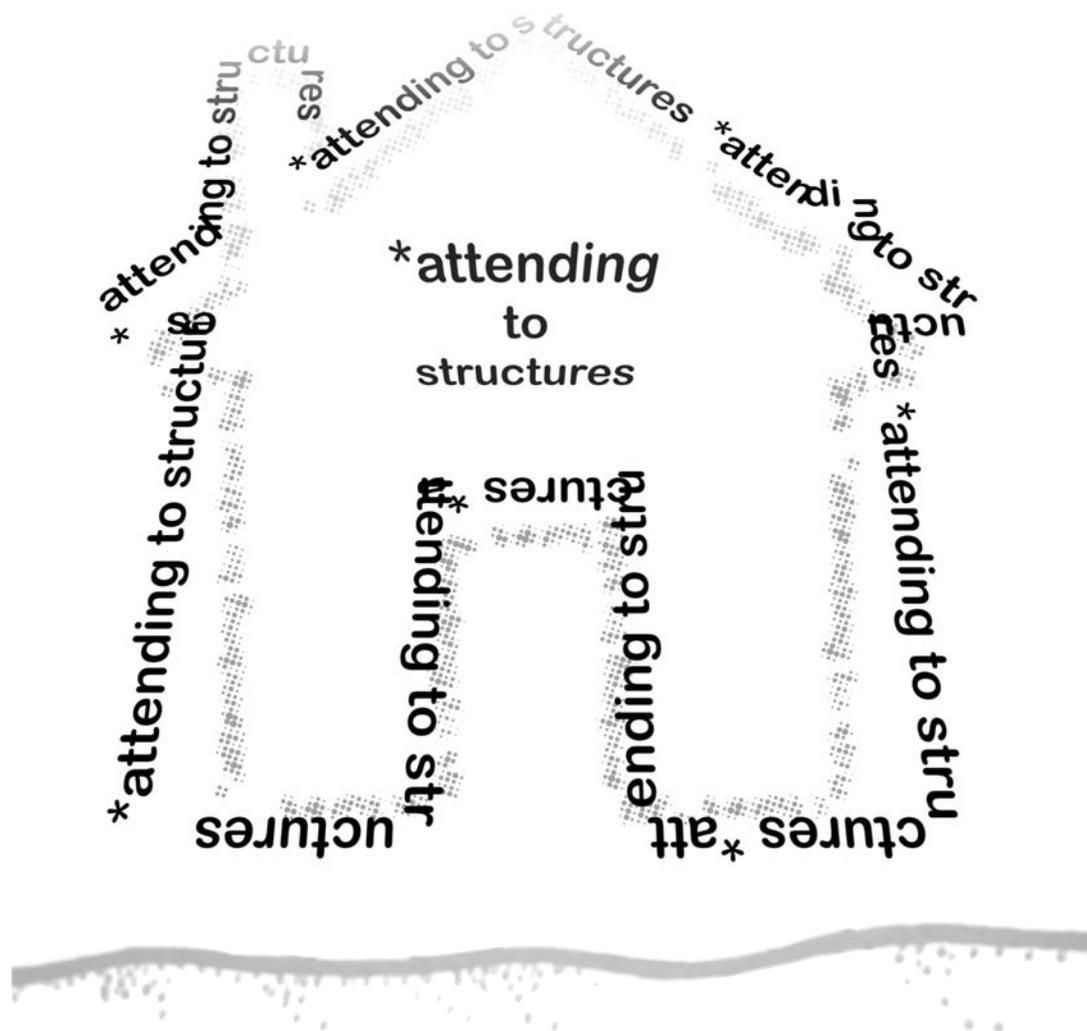
teacher education which positions teachers as the central figures in teaching and learning, imagine a positioning of teacher and parent knowledge alongside one another in the schooling of children. Instead of staffing practices built on district-wide staffing patterns, imagine a particular process of matching individual teachers with schools. Instead of viewing the role of the teacher as consistent from school to school, imagine attention being given to the redefinition of the teacher's role within community schools. Instead of standard policies regarding teacher movement within school divisions, imagine contextualized transfer policies centered around trust and relationship with parents and community. Instead of schools continuing to attend to student achievement within the boundaries of curriculum, imagine schools attending to the academic success and well-being of children within the broader boundaries of their families and neighbourhoods. Instead of schools using non-instructional and professional development time solely for agenda items of immediacy, imagine their use of available time for establishing and sustaining shared beliefs in relation with parents and students. We see within this rethinking of structures an inclusiveness – a shift in attention which moves parents from the margins of the school landscape to the centre, positioned alongside educators; a shift which stabilizes the ground on which parent engagement practices are situated.

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTION: ATTENDING TO PARENT LEADERSHIP
When we began this inquiry, we were thinking of leadership as roving, as in DePree's (1989) conceptualization, with leadership falling to the person best able to assume the lead role in a situation at any point in time. Following this thinking, we cited an example, the parent planning and facilitation of a professional development day in which staff participated in a sweat, as an example of parent leadership. While we continue to believe this is a powerful example of parent leadership, we now see a much subtler sense of parent leadership at play on the school landscape as well. As Kokum Ina greets visitors in the building and welcomes them with a smile, a handshake, and "Tansi," she is providing leadership. As Delores teaches Tammy about the significance in Aboriginal practices of caring for hair, she is providing

Tammy: I was talking to my students about my son's hair, about how long his hair was because he keeps his hair in a braid, and about how he really needs a haircut. James said, "Well, Mrs. Chief, you know you're only supposed to cut his hair when there is a new moon." I actually didn't know that and that really sparked something inside of me and I thought I should probably explore that. So I talked to Delores, James' mom. I got some tobacco first and I asked her if I could talk to her about this. I asked her if she would share that teaching with me, and so we just sat and talked and talked. She basically taught me what she had been taught about how to keep your hair the proper way if you're going to grow it because your hair is a gift to you. (December 13, 2004)

leadership. As Delores challenges the school when she disagrees with something or provides them with feedback on their practices, she is providing leadership. When one parent invites another to a school event or onto the landscape, s/he is providing leadership. Leadership is not only the large, the noted, the public acts of leading; it is not only the act of leading a large group of people at one time. Leadership is also the subtle work that many parents do – sometimes with only one or two other people, possibly known only to that person or persons, done in the privacy of a quiet exchange – which strengthens and enriches the school landscape for others.

Lambert (1998) helps us to re-imagine school leadership.

> School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviours. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of community. (p. 5)

When we view leadership as embedded in the landscape rather than in "a discrete set of individual behaviours," we see leadership in the side by side relationships of staff and parents, and in what is taught and learned together. We see leadership in their shared beliefs and in the way in which they work, sometimes as individuals and sometimes as a collective, to have those beliefs lived in practice on the school landscape. Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, & Richert (1997) call this conception of leadership "constructivist leadership."

> Constructivist leadership is reciprocal and happens in community. The role of the leader in this context is to create and sustain the occasion for other people to learn. Given its reciprocal nature, constructivist leadership is non-hierarchical. Depending on the problem

Martina: We used to say a lot that our staff meetings are open to everybody, and they are. But we don't have parents that come on a regular basis … . It's a standing invitation, but if I were to go out and actually ask my parents, "Did you know that you can come to staff meetings; it's an open invitation?" One or two would know, and I don't think the rest would. So, okay, what we need to do, let's invite, right? (May 9, 2005)

Sandi: Even when we talk about beliefs right now, we're not on the same page anymore. And I personally think that we have to do this every year: at the beginning of the year, in the middle of the year, at the end of the year. And it's got to be a constant. We're not being consistent because we have new staff, we have new people coming in who don't know how we came to be, and why we decided that we'd be a belief-based school and there's probably some people who don't want to be. But, that's where the discussion comes in. (May 16, 2005)

at hand, the [staff or parent] leader assumes leadership responsibility based on his or her knowledge or expertise – rather than by assigned role [or lack of it] in the school organization. Leadership, therefore, is contextual. Each context is different from the next, and the requirements for leadership – who should lead, how leadership should unfold, toward what end the process should be directed – depend on those differences. (p. 148)

When we view leadership as embedded in the school landscape, we see leadership as broad-based. Everyone, staff member and parent, has the potential to be a leader. Throughout our year-long inquiry at Princess, we saw parent leadership at play in cultural feasts, in the lunch program, in extracurricular activities, in the running of other programs. We especially saw parent leadership in the day to day exchanges between parents, and between parents and staff.

It is interesting to note that within our research conversations and within the density of our field text, parent leadership did not figure as centrally as we expected. Given the particular year of our inquiry, with significant changes in staff, and with greater unrest in the community as well, it was a year in which disruption was foregrounded. Rather than standing solidly on the ground of parent engagement, looking to see how that engagement could be extended into leadership, this past year was a year of trying to maintain ground rather than to gain it. As was mentioned earlier, it was a year in which the line forming the continuum of practices was broken in places, where the line turned back on itself for a distance before continuing forward again, where the line became faint or blurred for awhile before becoming solid once more. As a result, we continue to see future research into parent leadership as being an important expansion of this research project. We wonder what we might learn about parent leadership if we look at such practices as being broad-based and embedded in the landscape. We wonder what we might learn about parent leadership if structures such as those we imagined above are put in place to stabilize the ground on which current parent engagement practices rest.

Cindy: [Being engaged as a parent] empowered me to change. It enabled me to believe in myself so that I could grow.

Claudette: [The school staff] helped me to grow. I would have never considered taking the TA course without being a volunteer first. (October 17, 2005)

PARENT ENGAGEMENT: "WHAT YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO" At a research team meeting at Princess in October 2005, when we were discussing what we had learned from our narrative inquiry and how we would represent our research findings, Cindy and Claudette expressed how significant being engaged in the school as parents/guardians was to their own growth and development as individuals. If you look back to Claudette's introduction in "About the Research," she speaks of how her connection with Princess began as a volunteer, then moved to a paid position within the nutrition room, and then led to her enrolment in the teacher associate course. Having completed the course and her practicum, Claudette is now working as a substitute teacher associate within the Saskatoon Public School Division. Cindy's story of becoming a teacher associate as a result of being a parent volunteer is similar. The two of them told stories of other teacher associates who work at Princess who also began as parent volunteers. As we listened to their words of being empowered to change, of coming to believe in themselves, of seeing their own growth as a possibility, we were awakened to how powerfully being engaged as a parent/guardian in the school has shaped their lives.

While there has been a great deal of research in this field to determine the effect of parent involvement on student achievement and success, there has not been a similar emphasis on the benefits of parent involvement/engagement to parents. In our conceptualization of the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes, we see it as a relational positioning *with* teachers, where there is a sense of reciprocity in their engagement with one another. Cindy and Claudette help us to see the reciprocity they have been extended in their engagement with staff through support and encouragement to believe in themselves and through empowerment to extend their education. They help us to imagine the potential for reciprocity inherent within all forms of successful and fulfilling parent/staff engagements.

Vera: As one principal said, "It's not what you have to do, it's what you get to do – what you have the chance to do" (May 13, 2005).

In reflecting with Ann on their work at Princess, Vera Robertson recalled words which speak beautifully to the school's landscape. We believe those words speak to parent engagement as well. Parent engagement is not about what you have to do – about taking part in typical and taken-for-granted practices such as parent/teacher conferences and Meet the Teacher nights. Parent engagement is about what you get to do – about moving inward to look closely at your assumptions and beliefs, both individually and collectively with others; to be both a host and a guest on a school landscape; to build trust and relationships with parents. It is about what you have the chance to do – to make a difference in the lives of children and their parents as you work alongside them in the important work of teaching and learning.

POSTSCRIPT

RESEARCH TEAM

Claudette Bear	engaged aunt of students at Princess and teacher associate on-call
Cindy Bell	teacher associate, Friendship Inn
Martina Cain	vice-principal
Tammy Chief	teacher
Delores Dumais	parent
Ann Fofonoff	teacher
Sandi Harper	teacher, White Buffalo Youth Lodge
Aleta Hillier	teacher associate
Sheila Kennedy	Cree teacher
Carmen McCrae	adult education coordinator
Debbie Pushor	university-based researcher and teacher educator
Marge Roszell	teacher-librarian
Claudia Ruitenberg	research assistant
Laureen Sawatsky	community school coordinator
Shane Skjerven	principal
Michelle Timm	pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teacher

The information provided in the overview of team members above, as well as in the team members' introductions in their own words (in the chapter "About the Research") was valid during the research process. At the time of publication of this report (November 2005), four of the co-researchers are in different positions: Michelle Timm and Tammy Chief are on maternity leave; Sandi Harper is teaching at Pleasant Hill Community School; Aleta Hillier is a student in the teacher education program at the University of Saskatchewan.

WHO WE ARE

My name is Debbie Pushor. I am the mother of three sons: Cohen, Teague and Quinn. I was an educator for many years before I had children of my own and before my children began school. Having worked as a teacher, a consultant, a principal, and a central services supervisor, I thought I knew schools well. Taking my children to school, positioned as parent rather than educator, I was surprised by how different my experience of school was and how much I didn't know about schools when I looked at them through the lens of a parent. I was awakened to how marginalized parents often are in regard to their children's schooling. These experiences prompted my doctoral research into the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes and both my positioning as a parent and as an educator continue to inform my current program of research around parent engagement and parent knowledge. How much I am learning from the parents and staff at Princess!

I am Claudia Ruitenberg and I've been working with Debbie as a research assistant. My own field of research is philosophy of education, and prior to our work at Princess, I had never done any research or writing in the area of parent engagement. In my doctoral dissertation I theorized and made extensive use of the concepts of hospitality and invitation; at Princess I have seen hospitality and invitation lived in so many ways. Working with the people at Princess and learning from their stories, insight, and dedication has been a wonderful experience.

FIELD TRIPS

A series of field trips was organized for co-researchers to visit other community schools in Saskatchewan. Debbie Pushor consulted with Ted Amendt and Pat Erhardt of Saskatchewan Learning, and the following trips were made:

- On March 7th, 2005 Michelle Timm, Laureen Sawatsky, Carmen McCrae, and Claudette Bear visited Riverside Community School and Westview Community School in Prince Albert.

- On March 11th, 2005 Claudette Bear, Laureen Sawatsky, Marge Roszell, Claudia Ruitenberg, and Martina Cain visited Gordon Denny Community School in Air Ronge and Pre-Cam Elementary Community School in La Ronge.

- On March 21st and 22nd, 2005 Aleta Hillier and Martina Cain visited Ken Jenkins Community School and Rosemont Community School in Regina (Debbie Pushor and Sheila Kennedy were unable to join this trip because of road conditions).

- On April 5th, 2005 Tammy Chief, Carmen McCrae, and Claudette Bear visited Stobart Elementary Community School and Stobart High School in Duck Lake.

- On April 18th, 2005 Tammy Chief, Sheila Kennedy, Sandi Harper, and Shane Skjerven visited Phoenix School and St. Mary Community School in North Battleford.

- On June 2nd, 2005 Sandi Harper, Laureen Sawatsky, Aleta Hillier, Debbie Pushor, and Claudia Ruitenberg visited Prince Arthur Community School in Moose Jaw.

DISSEMINATION

Conferences

On November 5th, 2004, the following co-researchers (in alphabetical order) presented the research in its early stages at the School^PLUS Congress in Regina: Martina Cain, Sandi Harper, Sheila Kennedy, Debbie Pushor, Laureen Sawatsky, Michelle Timm.

On November 20th, 2004, the following co-researchers (in alphabetical order) presented the research in its early stages at McDowell's Learning for Practice conference in Saskatoon: Claudette Bear, Martina Cain, Sheila Kennedy, Carmen McCrae, Debbie Pushor, Shane Skjerven.

Debbie Pushor and Claudia Ruitenberg presented a paper at the conference "Provoking Curriculum: Trans/forming Narrative(s)" in Victoria, B.C. (February 24-26, 2005). In this paper, "Place, interrupted: The visual counter-narrative of Princess Alexandra School," we addressed how the engagement of parents and other community members is visible in the physical school landscape of Princess Alexandra School, and how the physical school landscape facilitates the engagement of parents and other community members. The places offered by elementary schools often tell similar visual narratives to one another. The visual narrative told by Princess Alexandra, however, differs from the standard and, in some ways, runs counter to it. We juxtaposed the standard narrative to Princess Alexandra's counter-narrative, and we examined what caused the standard story of school to be interrupted and changed. We paid particular attention to the presence and absence of signs, murals and other art work, family photos, and the "Honouring our People" posters.

Debbie Pushor presented a paper at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Montreal, Quebec (April 11-15, 2005). In this paper, "Parent Engagement and Leadership," Debbie spoke to the mind shift required to work in true relationship with parents, focussing on elements which have arisen in the data around trust, relationships, time and contact, and challenging personal and professional stereotypes and biases. Just recently, Debbie received an email from a researcher in Australia working with Indigenous Communities who has invited us to participate in an international conversation around our research into parent engagement and leadership.

Teacher Education

Children's literature courses, "Canadian Children's Literature: K-8" and "Children's Literature for the Primary Grades," are elective courses for teacher candidates in the final term of their teacher education program at the University of Saskatchewan. Drawing on our research at Princess Alexandra, Debbie explored with teacher candidates (January-April 2005) differences between parent involvement and parent engagement, and asked them to consider ways in which they could meaningfully engage parents in curriculum. Imagining ways to invite parents to have a voice in literature selection and programming decisions and to communicate more relationally with parents about teaching and learning enabled teacher candidates to see possibilities for re-positioning parents as collaborators within their classrooms.

Within the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), Debbie, with colleagues Ann Chinnery and Randy Wimmer, developed and taught a course entitled "Issues and Trends in Early Childhood Education" (January – April 2005). This course, too, is an elective for teacher candidates who have completed their internship in schools and who are in the final term of their teacher education program. An important strand within this course explored working with parents and other professionals. Parent involvement, engagement, and leadership were considered within the context of the classroom and the broader landscape of the school. Power Point materials generated from the work at Princess Alexandra enabled students to see concrete examples of interrupting the taken-for-granted positioning of parents within schools.

Debbie presented a guest session within the course "Teaching and Learning in Community Education" on January 31, 2005 and facilitated two sessions at the College of Education Post Internship Conference on January 21, 2005. In these sessions she challenged teacher candidates to explore the assumptions which underlie current parent involvement practices in schools and to examine their own beliefs about working with parents.

When Claudia taught the course "Educational Thought and Values: Critical Perspectives," a required course in the last semester of the teacher education program at the University of Saskatchewan (January-April 2005), she asked teacher candidates to examine their assumptions about parents, and about how they might work with parents. It was not uncommon for teacher candidates to be quite apprehensive about interacting with parents, especially when they believed their interactions would revolve mostly around discipline issues, parent complaints, and formally scheduled parent teacher conferences. Examples from the research at Princess helped teacher candidates see other possibilities for relations with students' families.

Publications

Earlier versions of the chapters "Assumptions and Beliefs" and "Invitation and Hospitality" in this report were published in the electronic journal *Principals Online* under the titles "'Maybe it's time I changed...': Challenging assumptions: A starting place for engaging parents" (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005) and "'It's not about colour-coordinating the napkins with the table cloth': Hospitality and invitation in parent engagement" (Ruitenberg & Pushor, 2005).

We intend to write an article based on the conference presentation "Place, interrupted: The visual counter-narrative of Princess Alexandra School," for submission to an academic journal.

We also intend to write an article on disruption in the research process, for submission to an academic journal.

ENDNOTES

[1] Clandinin & Connelly (1995) use the term "professional knowledge landscape" in an expansive way to capture a sense of all the diverse people, things, and events interacting in different relationships within schools. It is a term meant to capture much more than the physical nature of the building and the grounds. It is this expansiveness to which we refer when we use the term "school landscape."

[2] "Beautiful People" was written by Melanie Safka (1967).

[3] Debbie Pushor is the principal investigator in a three year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded narrative inquiry into parent knowledge which asks the questions, What is parent knowledge? How is parent knowledge held and used?

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