

**EMANCIPATION, EMPOWERMENT & EMBODIMENT:**  
**EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS**  
**ON ONE SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TO PROMOTE**  
**POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Over the course of an eighteen-month period, the staff and students at a K-7 elementary school were engaged in a district-sponsored pilot project that examined new and existing approaches to promoting positive behaviour within their school community. This research, conducted by a member of the school's staff, retraces this investigative journey to explore various dynamics related to the approaches used by him, his teaching colleagues, and the school's administration to increase social responsibility within the student population. Situated within an emergent methodological design, this study employed a variety of investigative approaches in a manner informed by Joe Kincheloe's (2004) conceptualization of the bricolage. Data collected included researcher field notes that reflect everyday observations of project-related events, as well as informal discussions with staff and administration about their ongoing impressions of the school's approach to behaviour, digital audio recordings of project meetings, and interviews with teachers and administrators during the final weeks of the pilot. The researcher's ongoing process of self-conscious reflexivity, specifically in relation to his dual role as the researcher and a member of the school's staff, is also included in the data and is used to examine some of the ethical and methodological dilemmas that emerged at various stages of this undertaking.

Analysis of this data was purposefully conducted to examine how perceptions of authority and accountability are organizationally situated within a school community in ways that both support and resist efforts to promote positive student behaviour through proactive and reactive approaches. This research explores some of the organizational dynamics related to introducing and sustaining a new initiative in a school community, including communication patterns commonly employed by staff and administration when tensions emerge as a result of efforts to affect change in professional practice. The study identifies divisive and unifying features of various behaviour approaches employed by a school to encourage social responsibility, and how these underscore the importance of staff and student empowerment in establishing a safe and caring learning community. The implications of this research for educational leadership and professional development with respect to promoting positive behaviour in schools are discussed. Areas for further investigation are highlighted.

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Finally, to Hartej and Chandran I extend the deepest gratitude for enduring the impact this undertaking has had on our personal lives. I can only hope that the outcome of this journey will prove meaningful enough to somehow justify the extraordinary sacrifice both of them have made in order to help me see this project through to its completion. Words cannot express how much I look forward to spending the months ahead at the beach with both of them mucking about in the sand, chasing after waves, as hours and days drift slowly by. The ever-emerging passion and curiosity Chandran brings to each waking moment makes exploring the world around us seem so much more worthwhile.

## DEDICATION

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty that were good to be done than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree (William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 1.2.12-19)

### A dedication awakened by Portia's wisdom

To varying extents, those of us working in public education hold certain convictions about how schools ought to go about promoting a child's growth. For most, this extends well beyond the academic to include aspects of development that range from the physical to the social-emotional. I would certainly count myself among those who have some opinions on these matters, especially with respect to the whole subject of behaviour and how I strongly believe it is intricately related to all aspects of human development. I suspect there are occasions when I share these convictions with others in a manner that comes across as an attempt to convey certain wisdom.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Nerissa responds to the compliment Portia pays to her "good words" by insisting that "they would be better, if well followed." It is here that Portia imparts her own compelling wisdom about how much easier it is to teach others what to do, than it is to follow one's own teaching. These are words that ring resoundingly true for me when I consider the part of my job that involves helping adults to deal successfully with children's problem behaviour. If there is anything I've learned from working in this area, it's that the wisdom I pass along to others about how best to respond to a particular child's behaviour seems readily more available the farther away I am from actually working with that student. Not often enough do I take pause from giving advice to others in order to recall the half dozen or so children who, at different stages in my own teaching career, have humbled the best of efforts I've made to bring



about change in their behaviour. No doubt many of my colleagues have witnessed firsthand my successes and failures in such matters. Therefore, I would be well advised to start out this endeavour with some acknowledgement and humility of the limits of my own capacity to deal with the behavioural challenges that any particular child is capable of presenting, at any time, in any given situation.

Portia so eloquently identifies a key source of these limitations when she notes that “the brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o’er a cold decree.” My point here is not to merely draw attention to the fact that dealing firsthand with a child’s problem behaviour can often bring about anger and frustration in ways that interfere with one’s ability to respond rationally and effectively. More importantly, it’s to extend a very genuine ‘tip of the hat’ as an acknowledgement that intervening in real-life situations with children has dynamics that go well beyond whatever may have been thought out in advance as the appropriate response to a given situation. We come to learn very quickly from working with children that “blood” and body are not governed exclusively by brain. Were it so, children and adults alike would need only concern themselves with how to cognitively navigate their way through life.

I want therefore to begin this investigative journey by acknowledging that the distance afforded to me by virtue of sharing my opinions here in writing brings with it a convenience that is rarely extended to the adult who in the heat of the moment is actually there to support a child when he or she is experiencing very real difficulties. It is to all the ‘first responders,’ those who know only too well the limits that the laws of the brain have over body and blood, that I most humbly dedicate this endeavour.

## PREFACE

Before beginning the daunting task of describing this investigative undertaking, it is important that I establish from the outset that this is a story of inquiry about my school. By this, I mean my place of employment. I am informed by those whose responsibility it is to ensure that proper ethical protocols are followed that I must not include in this report the actual name of the school that serves as the central focus for this study. This seems particularly odd to me. The moment that I begin contemplating an appropriate pseudonym, an undeniable sense of distance or fabrication curiously emerges. The name of the school seems somewhat sacred to me. It conjures up an entire culture. The faces of so many adults and children immediately emerge into my consciousness when I hear the school's name. I connect to it countless memories that trigger such a wide range of emotions. It stirs in my mind vivid images of the actual physical space, the building itself (which will soon mark its 100th anniversary), and its surrounding playgrounds. There are the endearing memories of late sunny afternoons spent on the roof of this school drinking beer with colleagues and taking in the spectacular view of the inlet below where ships from around the world arrive to load and unload their cargo. Other somewhat less pleasant images endure as I am reminded of my connection to the perimeter that surrounds this building, one that I grew intimately familiar with during many hours spent walking around it carrying a picket sign in cold, drizzling rain.

Perhaps, I should also mention that the school's music teacher and I lived together as roommates for more than five years following his divorce. Or that my wife's aunt has been a special education assistant here for almost three decades. Both of her children (now my cousins) attended this school. Consequently, my wedding several years ago brought together a curious

mixture of family and colleagues, many of whom share a close connection from being former teachers or students to one another at this school.

I could easily write a book about my relationship with Crestview Elementary.<sup>1</sup> It would begin with stories that date back to when I first came here just over twelve years ago to fill in for an intermediate classroom teacher who went off on extended sick leave. I would probably go into considerable depth about my experiences that first year, the challenges I faced and the relationships I forged, and how disappointed I was to learn at the end of June that I would be declared surplus and have to move on to another school. How I left with the unwavering conviction that I would somehow get back on staff at Crestview regardless of what it took. The story would then pick-up again several years later when I received news that my request to replace the school's retiring counsellor had been approved. Yet another twist in this tale would occur when two years later the school was selected to pilot a behaviour project, a development that would considerably impact the community and my relationship with it. That would bring us up to the point in time that I took on the formal role of researching this particular initiative in the hope of learning something about the way in which we deal with student behaviour at the school, and how organizational complexities impact the various approaches we employ. It is here that the story would suddenly transform into a tale of inquiry, one that would eventually teach me as much about myself and my personal and professional worldviews, as it would about the unique and dynamic culture that is Crestview Elementary.

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym replaces the actual name of the school throughout this thesis.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### EXCAVATING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL POINTS OF INVESTIGATIVE ENTRY

INT: *Ivory tower. Vincent, a doctoral student, is seated at a table in a cramped, dimly lit office. Piles of books and papers on his desk partially obscure him from sight. He taps away furiously at his computer. He stops and re-reads the Shakespeare quote that he's just inserted into his dissertation. He pauses in a moment of anguished contemplation wondering if the reader will be able to make sense of the quote in relation to his research, and understand how it captures the very essence of his journey. He momentarily considers explaining it in a brief summary, but then quickly decides against it out of fear that it will interfere with the opening scene he has written to introduce the first chapter. This unexpected dilemma suddenly resurfaces all of the insecurities Vincent has about beginning his dissertation with the opening scene of a play. He imagines the faceless figure of the external examiner reviewing his work in a faraway office at some distant point in the future. The shadowy head shakes ominously from side to side in disapproval. Vincent holds down the backspace key and deletes the Shakespeare quote. He then repositions the cursor at the opening scene and is about to cut it out as well when...*

*There is a knock at the door. It is Johnny, one of several multiple selves that dwell within the larger entity responsible for this work. He represents Vincent's academic career ambitions. He is a motivator who constantly tries to prop up Vincent's fragile self-esteem as a researcher and new scholar.*

Vincent: *(looks up from his computer, and immediately feels a sharp pain shoot across his neck and upper back. He grimaces)* Yeah. C'mon in.

*Johnny bursts into the room with an air of confidence.*

Johnny: Vincent, my man! *(rushes over and shakes Vincent's hand with vigour and enthusiasm.)*

Vincent: *(stands up)* Good to see you, Johnny. What brings you by?

Johnny: *(ignoring the question)* Look at you working away at the computer. That's what I'm talking about. Now, here's a man with career aspirations...making things happen. The future is bright, brother!

Vincent: *(grimacing as he rubs his neck)* Well, it's certainly taking its toll. Everyday this pain in my neck seems to get worse.

Johnny: Don't you worry about that. Pretty soon, you'll have this dissertation wrapped up and then you'll be on the gravy train to an illustrious career.

Vincent: *(defensively with a tone of admonishment)* Johnny, that's not at all what this is about. I'm on a journey of discovery here. I'm hoping that all this effort will shed some new light on how organizational dynamics can impact the various ways in which a school's staff and administration go about dealing with student behaviour. It's about one school community's

journey to explore reactive and proactive approaches to promote social responsibility retold from the perspective of someone who works within the organization.

Johnny: Lovin' it, baby! It's got a sexy ring to it AND it sounds important...almost sophisticated. Wondering if you might posh it up a bit though. Why not use a few terms that will distance you from the unwashed masses? Toss in a reference to 'pedagogy' or 'epistemology' somewhere. You got any room in there for some of that?

Vincent: Johnny, I'm striving for accessibility here. I don't want to devote all this time and energy to something that my colleagues will just dismiss as an academic hoop I jumped through. It's got to be compelling for them as much as it is for me. I want us to be able to recognize ourselves in this work, our individual and collective journey, and consider how complex and ever evolving forces continuously shape the culture that exists within our school in ways that both promote and resist our efforts to deal successfully with behaviour.

*Knock at the door. Johnny rushes over and opens it. In walk three officials dressed in business suits. They are unfriendly in their manner of engagement.*

Official #1: Are you Vincent White?

Vincent: *(rubbing the back of his neck)* I am.

Official #2: We are representatives of the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board...

Official #3: BREB for short.

Official #1: It has come to our attention that you are hoping that people recognize themselves in your research.

Vincent: Well...I a...

Official #2: We also understand that you've been conducting research in your own place of employment.

Official #2: Have you considered the ethical implications of this?

Official #3: You do know that you have certain responsibilities, don't you?

Vincent: Of course...but..

Johnny: *(interrupting, he walks over and puts his arms around the shoulders of two officials. People...people...Vincent has all of this under control. He should be teaching courses in research ethics for UBC... (gradually he starts leading them toward the door) By the time he's done with this dissertation, no one will have any idea who or what any of this is about. (His tone becomes subtly patronizing) Tell you what. I'm going to see to it that all three of you receive signed copies of his first book. (He looks back over his shoulder and winks at Vincent.)*

*All three officials look bewildered as they are gently ushered out the door. Johnny waves goodbye with a friendly smile. They exit. Johnny closes the door. His friendly smile disappears.*

Johnny: (turning back to Vincent annoyed) Dude, you told me that you had that ethics thing all sorted out!

Vincent: It's not that simple, Johnny. These people are not necessarily asking the right questions.

Johnny: Listen, Man... Am I not here to watch out for your back, brother?

Vincent: Well, actually...

Johnny: You do not want to be messing with these people, Vincent! They can make our lives very difficult.

Vincent: I'm not messing with them, Johnny. I submitted the application. But there are some things in this work that are not so easily reconciled by this process.

Johnny: (frustrated) such as...

Vincent: A couple of things... like the scripts I wrote about the principal's office and the staff meeting in the library. I want to incorporate these as investigative frameworks for this research. But they're universal stories... myths... they are what Joseph Campbell describes as something "that never was, but always is."<sup>2</sup>

Johnny: Yeah...so?

Vincent: I'm realizing that fact and fiction are not so easily discernable. I find myself asking the question: "Whose story is this anyway?" There are ethical implications here, but they go well beyond what BREB is concerned with.

Johnny: Okay, now you lost me.

Vincent: A critical aspect of ethics in behavioural research focuses on ensuring that the dignity and well-being of participants is protected throughout the investigative process. Because researchers are expected to take every precaution to minimize risk of harm to participants, there are significant implications for incorporating lived experiences into an investigative context.

Johnny: Naturally.

Vincent: This research retells a story in ways that incorporates fictionalized events and dialogue into the recounting of what took place at my school as seen from my perspective. I'm hoping that this elicits a certain familiarity and resonance not only with individuals who may have had similar experiences within their own professional settings, but also with the people who were actually part of this journey. This raises certain ethical considerations. How might these people

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<sup>2</sup> (Campbell, 1991, as cited in Harpur, 2004, p. 17).

feel if they read this work and recognize themselves in it? What responsibility do I have in this regard when retelling my/their/our story?

Johnny: *(pauses ...then in exasperation)* ...that is exactly why I told you to stick to conventional research! Do you remember that conversation?

Vincent: *(in a deflated tone)* Johnny, I'm really busy. Was there something in particular you dropped by for?

Johnny: Yes. You promised to let me have a peek at your work. *(Johnny makes a move toward Vincent's desk)*

Vincent: *(hesitantly)* ...I don't think today is a good time to...

*Before Vincent can stop him, Johnny sneaks over to take a look at the computer screen.*

Vincent: *(pleading)* No. Wait...I'm going to need to explain first...

*Brief pause while Johnny scans the text. His eyebrows furl. Then, his eyes open wide in disbelief.*

Johnny: A script?!?! You're writing your dissertation in the form of a script? Oh for heaven's sake, brother...

Vincent: Well, not the whole thing...

Johnny: Listen, baby... do you not want to become part of the club?

Vincent: What's that supposed to mean? ... No. Not exactly...well, I don't know.

Johnny: Are you purposefully trying to give people a reason to not treat your work seriously?

Vincent: *(defensively)* Hey. Wait just a minute! You have no idea what you're talking about.

Johnny: Oh. I don't, do I? Vincent, just how many academic journals have research published in the form of a script?

Vincent: Well...I'm not...

Johnny: Not too many, Vincent. And the last time I checked, publications in scholarly journals had a wee bit to do with one's career in the academy. Did you not get that memo?

Vincent: That's not the most important thing here.

Johnny: Oh, Vincent, please spare me the accessibility lecture. If I hear you prattle on one more time about the fact that this work has to be meaningful beyond the university community, I swear I'll throw up.

Vincent: *(defeated)* Would it be too much to ask you to let me get back to work?

Johnny: *(resuming his chipper tone)*: I'm out of here, Vincent. But we need to have a serious chat about this. You've worked too hard to simply throw it all away now. I understand your whole thing about the importance of knowledge being embodied and accessible. So, write academically about it. Explicate a theoretical foundation to support it. But, for goodness sake, do not forget that we need to actually publish this stuff!

*Johnny gives Vincent a 'homey' handshake and hug, before spinning around and heading toward the door. He pauses before exiting and turns back toward Vincent.*

*With a reassuring smile, he points his finger at Vincent as if to shoot a gun.*

Johnny: You're gonna be great, baby!

*Johnny exits.*

*Vincent sighs deeply and returns to his desk behind his pile of books. Despite the nagging compulsion to restructure his dissertation into a more conventional format, he encourages himself to forge ahead.*

*He then remembers the Shakespeare quote. Returning the cursor to the top of the page, he begins re-typing it into the beginning of a new section.*

*Lights dim plunging the stage into darkness.*

### Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) in schools

Since its inception almost a decade ago, my school district's PBS Committee has provided support and leadership to elementary and secondary schools in implementing and sustaining school-wide behaviour support systems consistent with a popular and extensively researched program known as *Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)*. The origins of PBS can be traced back to the early 1980s when core principles of applied behaviour analysis were used to develop effective alternatives to aversive interventions that were more commonly employed with children who had severe developmental disabilities (Carr et al., 1999; Durand & Carr, 1985). Building on these successes, researchers expanded this approach to develop a systems-based



model intended to support all students in schools (Carr et al., 2002; Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Freeman et al., 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Within this framework, PBS became more school-wide in structure, focusing on replacing coercive and reactive responses to problem behaviour using a system in which positive, pro-social behaviour is taught, practiced, and extrinsically reinforced.

The widely documented success of PBS can be largely attributed to the fact that it is school-wide in focus, data-driven, strongly emphasizes positive student-staff interactions, and focuses on providing children with clear examples of how to behave accordingly in the various settings they routinely experience at school (Lewis & Daniels, 2000; Sailor, Dunlop, Sugai, & Horner, 2009). In order to do this, staff members consistently collect and review data that usually takes the form of office referrals to identify specific areas in which problem behaviour is occurring. An ABA-styled intervention is then employed in which children are explicitly taught what desirable behaviour looks like in these settings. They are then positively reinforced on occasions when they exhibit the desirable behaviour and consistently and predictably redirected when they do not. Specialized, individual and small group training is provided for students with chronic and intense problem behaviour.

As such, the program is structured around three levels of intervention. At the *primary level*, universal, classroom-based training is directed at the entire student body. Through this intervention, it is assumed that approximately 85% of students will learn how to behave accordingly in the various designated settings. For the 5-15% of students who are generally at-risk of problem behaviour, this training is supplemented by a *secondary level* of intervention that involves teaching and practicing these skills in a small-group setting. At the *tertiary level*, intensive, individual support is provided for the 1-7% of students who are identified as having chronic problem behaviour. The PBS program also requires that the staff and administration

adopt a uniform process for supporting students who continue to exhibit aversive behaviour after these social skills have been taught and reinforced (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2000; Lewis & Daniels, 2000).

### Conceptualizing PBS as a landscape for this investigative journey

I thought it important to begin this story by providing a brief overview of Positive Behaviour Support because it features prominently on a number of different levels throughout this study. The behaviour pilot project that represents the central focus for this research was piloted in my elementary school where a number of staff members were, at least initially, quite reluctant to embrace PBS as an approach to promoting positive behaviour. In some respects this research is as much about the organizational dynamics that can create this kind of resistance, and the forces behind them, as it is about one school community's journey to explore existing and new approaches to dealing with problem behaviour. This involves considering how authority and accountability are situated and exerted within and between the school, school district, and the Ministry of Education in ways that have the potential to both help and hinder attempts to establish and maintain safe and caring learning environments. In this regard, part of this investigation will explore how efforts by district proponents of PBS to encourage its implementation in my school provoked varying responses from the staff that significantly impacted their approach to promoting social responsibility within the student population.

However, despite the prominence that PBS played with respect to these dynamics, the program itself is not a key focus for this research, in part because PBS was not implemented by the pilot project to an extent that its proponents would consider an acceptable level of fidelity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'fidelity' is commonly employed throughout the PBS literature. It refers to the notion that a school-wide program must include a number of core features in order for it to be considered authentic in its implementation.

Consequently, it would not be appropriate to use data collected in this research to draw conclusions about Positive Behaviour Support and its effectiveness in schools. Instead PBS in this study would be best understood to represent an integral part of the landscape against which this investigative journey unfolded. For this reason, our story will begin by recounting in considerable detail some of PBS-related dynamics at the school district level that influenced the decision to initiate the behaviour pilot project at my school, and how this ultimately led me to research this investigative journey.

### Origins of the behaviour pilot project

In the fall of 2007, I was approached by a member of our school district's PBS Committee and asked to attend one of its meetings. The reason behind this invitation was a bit vague. I was informed that the committee was having some concerns regarding the sustainability of PBS as a viable approach to promoting positive behaviour in schools throughout our district. As a result, the group had begun considering a new project, and thought it might be helpful to have my input.

At the time this invitation was extended to me, the committee consisted of seven members who represented a wide array of positions and authority. This included the committee chair who was a district secondary counsellor, two elementary school principals, the District Administrator of Safe & Caring Schools, a school trustee, the Department Head of Elementary Counsellors and a district learning support teacher. When I joined this group, I had a part-time assignment as the school counsellor at Crestview Elementary, a position I had just returned to after working at another school as a Grade 7 teacher and interim vice principal. I was also beginning the fourth year of doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia.

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Quantitative data-collection for the purposes of decision-making and tracking progress is one example of a core feature that is considered essential when determining a particular program's fidelity.

At the first meeting I attended, it was immediately apparent to me that the group had reached a crossroads, and was now determining if and how it should revitalize its mandate in a manner that would best meet the behaviour-related needs of schools throughout the district. Particular attention was drawn to the fact that the local chapter of the BCTF<sup>4</sup> had recently requested that the school district devote increased resources to the issue of problem behaviour in schools because of ongoing concerns being expressed by its membership. Consequently, the PBS Committee was considering various ways in which to effectively respond. One proposed approach that had apparently prompted my involvement was the committee's decision to initiate a behaviour pilot project in one elementary school that would involve introducing PBS-related approaches to promoting positive behaviour at the individual, classroom-based, and school-wide levels. Included in this vision was a recommendation that the identified school be allocated temporary additional resources in the form of FTE.<sup>5</sup> This supplemental staffing would be used to provide a project coordinator who would support the school in this endeavour.

#### Self-conscious reflection<sup>6</sup> on my professional bias against 'imposing' PBS on a school

My initial reaction to the plan was mixed. I very much liked the fact that the committee was considering resources in the form of an actual person rather than passing along to schools a manual that would merely outline the idea or proposal without any tangible supports to help

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<sup>4</sup> Established in 1917, The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) is the union of professionals representing 41,000 public school teachers throughout the province. All public school teachers belong to the BCTF and their local teachers' association (BC Teachers' Federation, 2009b).

<sup>5</sup> Full Time Employment (FTE) refers to point time assigned to a school for teaching-related duties. FTE is commonly measured in decimal allotments, of which '.2' is the equivalent of one full day in a school. Accordingly '1.0 FTE' constitutes a full time teaching position.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the retelling of this study, various sections are devoted to self conscious reflexivity. This autoethnographic tool is used primarily to investigate my dual roles as researcher and school/district employee, and the methodological and ethical challenges this presented. How this is incorporated into the larger investigative design employed for this research is outlined in greater detail in Chapter Three.

implement it into everyday practice. At the time, I was clearly sensing a growing cynicism among teachers and school-based administrators caused by what I can best describe as ‘binder fatigue.’ The impression I was getting from some of my colleagues was that they were feeling inundated by new policies, practices and/or initiatives, curricular or otherwise, that ministry and district level officials were frequently handing-down to schools in shiny new binders or manuals. The most apparent sign that this was fostering some resentment came when teachers at one of my schools unofficially adopted a policy of ‘nothing added unless something is taken away,’ which has now become a frequently referenced response at staff meetings whenever someone suggests a new focus of any sort for the school.

In the case of the PBS Committee’s initiative, it was clear from the outset that the group wanted to move decidedly away from this approach in order to invest in resources that would take the form of an actual person who could serve as a facilitator. The committee envisioned that this individual would, at least initially, focus his or her attention exclusively on one school community. I very much liked this idea because it seemed to offer the perfect opportunity to provide a staff with the resources it would need to take a close look at the different ways in which problem behaviour was commonly being dealt with at various levels throughout the school. This I believed would likely motivate a staff to make changes wherever it was deemed necessary, including exploring some new approaches.

My only reservation was that committee members seemed intent on situating this project within an overall framework of PBS. I had some concerns with this fuelled in part by my past experiences with the committee. Several years back, I had attended a few of the group’s meetings and decided to limit my involvement primarily because some of the committee members seemed almost dogmatic in their belief about the need for schools to get on board with school-wide interventions that were based on the core philosophies of Positive Behaviour

Support. I noted at the time (as was still the case in late 2007) that the committee had no representation from classroom teachers and instead comprised entirely of administrators, a school trustee, and several support service personnel (mostly counsellors.)<sup>7</sup> What bothered me then, and was initially a concern for me once again, was the subtle but distinct mindset within the committee that teachers and other school staff merely needed to be converted to the gospel of PBS in order to experience success with behaviour. My immediate concern was that the committee was heading in the direction of using the additional FTE to hire a coordinator who would then be parachuted into a school to introduce interventions consistent with PBS, and that any other successful measure or approach already in place at that school would be set aside unless it fit within the program's core philosophies and framework.

#### The project at a crossroads: Implement PBS with fidelity or allow for a 'grass-roots' approach

Early on in discussions about the proposed initiative, I stated my firm belief that the committee would be wise to approach this undertaking in a manner that acknowledged and embraced a school's existing expertise in dealing with behaviour, and that any new initiative should aim first to support and enhance, rather than replace, effective approaches already being employed by a staff. This sparked considerable debate within the committee, one that would resurface on numerous occasions over the next two years. My position was countered by the argument that the committee's clear mandate was to support and expand PBS throughout the school district, and that its focus on this should remain preeminent by ensuring that the FTE be assigned to someone who had previous experience and training in its philosophies and implementation. Accordingly, a school staff should be understandably expected to utilize any

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the Committee held its meetings during school time when teachers were unavailable.

additional resources it was being provided in ways that were consistent with the principles of PBS.

With the support of one other committee member, I stubbornly held the position that a school should not be restricted to using the resources in ways that might not represent a best fit for its unique culture. I based this argument on a bottom-up leadership philosophy that envisioned the pilot project as a grass-roots initiative, one that would empower a staff to build on its existing strengths rather than requiring that successful approaches already in place be entirely discarded in order to fit a new philosophy imposed by an authority ‘from above.’ I expressed serious misgivings that assigning a new person to a staff to coordinate a project of this nature might easily be perceived as sending in an outside expert to teach a school staff the ‘right way’ to deal with problem behaviour. Doing this I feared had the potential to provoke within a staff significant resistance from the outset.

When the dust eventually settled from this debate, it appeared as though a compromise of some degree had been reached. The committee arrived at a fragile consensus that the initiative would be designed to allow for a more flexible and responsive approach, one that would place primary emphasis on successfully integrating the project into a school’s existing culture, while also leaving open the possibility that PBS-related approaches might be explored by the staff as part of this process. To this end, the committee loosely defined the coordinator’s responsibilities as:

- Collaborating with staff to assess the effectiveness of, and revise where necessary, existing individual, classroom-based, and school-wide approaches to problem behaviour at the school.
- Collaborating with staff and students to initiate and assess the effectiveness of new approaches aimed at promoting positive behaviour at the individual, classroom and school-wide levels. This might include, but would not be limited to, PBS-related approaches.

- Promoting sustainability of these existing and new initiatives beyond the end of the pilot project.

Once the somewhat contentious decision was made by committee members to go in this direction, it became clear to me that my own interest in the project had been significantly enhanced. Unfortunately, this was not the case for everyone else involved. In fact, this marked a decisive fork in the road, at which point the support and involvement of several committee members noticeably diminished, including one who discontinued attending meetings altogether for the duration of the pilot, insisting that this new approach would essentially “bastardize” PBS within the school district. Despite assurances by myself and others that the selected school would be fully supported to implement any aspect of Positive Behaviour Support that it might be inclined to pursue, it was clear that some individuals held the strong conviction that PBS was designed to be an ‘all or nothing’ undertaking.

Having established a framework for the pilot project’s design, the PBS committee then turned its collective attention to the daunting task of determining where the initiative would be located and who would take on the responsibility of serving as its coordinator. This led to some discussion about establishing an application process that would compel schools to give some thought in advance as to how they would use the extra staffing, and to also determine to what extent staff members at the school were in support of hosting the project. Various committee members were assigned tasks to attend to over the winter break. Two individuals volunteered to create draft applications to bring back to the committee for approval in January. In the meantime, the District Administrator for Safe and Caring Schools would present the proposed framework for the project to Executive Administration and confirm their commitment to provide the required funding. Another member agreed to contact the teacher’s union and get its perspective



on the job posting for the coordinator position. The committee agreed to reconvene in early January with the hope that the project would soon after be underway.

Self-conscious reflection: Justifying a research agenda informed by my own worldview

The winter break afforded me the opportunity to take a much needed step back and reflect on the developments that had brought the committee to design the pilot project in a manner that integrated a grass-roots approach. This helped me to reconcile some of the tumultuous thoughts and feelings I had regarding the fact that I was beginning to realize that I was interested in focusing my doctoral research on the behaviour pilot. The obvious concern I had was the fact that I had pushed considerably hard to encourage committee members to design the project in a certain fashion that now conveniently coincided with my own research interests. Additionally, I began wondering about some of the ethical and methodological challenges that I would face by researching a project that was located at a school in my district. How would it impact my relationship with colleagues who I could quite possibly end up working with on a staff at some point in the future?

The more that I reflected on these developments, the greater the importance I attached to the fact that I had not joined the PBS Committee with the explicit intention of reframing its mandate to fit my own research purposes. In fact, when I was initially invited to the meeting, I had only the vaguest idea about what the group was working on. This realization compelled me to further explore what had motivated the invitation for me to participate in the first place. I ended up discovering through a discussion with one of the committee members that what had initially prompted the decision to ask me to attend the meetings was the suggestion by someone

that I might be open to the idea of taking on the role of project coordinator.<sup>8</sup> This caught me considerably off guard because not even the slightest mention of this had been made to this point in time despite the fact that I had already attended three meetings, the last of which involved a lengthy discussion about finding a location for the project and designing a posting for the coordinator position.

Uncovering this new information left me feeling considerably more justified about taking a strong position on the project's design given the fact that it was entirely possible that it could be me who got stuck with the daunting task of getting a staff to 'buy-in' to this whole idea. I took considerable solace in the realization that my colleagues in advance of extending me this invitation, would have known (or at least should have) that along with my involvement would come a philosophical opinion or two on how I thought the initiative should be configured.

Although this reflexive process enabled me to put to rest the internal struggle over the role I had played in re-conceptualizing the behaviour pilot project in a manner that resulted in it becoming a potential research focus, I still found myself somewhat perplexed as to why I had taken such a strong philosophical stance about the need for it to be situated within a grass-roots approach. This marked the beginning of my preoccupation with determining why it was that I felt this way, and where exactly this was coming from. What was it about how I perceived the system around me that was compelling me to take this stance? Had my personal and professional lived experiences led me to be more inclined toward this mindset? Were there certain theorists I had encountered along my academic journey that had influenced this particular worldview? If so, could I now turn back to them in order to gain an even deeper understanding of this perspective in order to develop a theoretical framework for this research?

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<sup>8</sup> Part of the motivation behind considering me as a potential coordinator was the fact that I was currently working part-time in the school district. Because of this, I would have been able to take on the position without there being a need to back-fill any portion of my existing assignment.

These nagging questions ultimately served as a springboard for me to begin exploring the literature on how stratified power structures may be organizationally situated in ways that can impact the manner in which the staff and administration of a school approach the complex issue of student behaviour. Although this represented the beginning of establishing a theoretical lens of inquiry for this research, at this stage of the journey I was still very much in the initial process of contemplating different research questions that might guide an investigation of the behaviour pilot project. I was however, becoming increasingly aware of the fact that consistently reflecting on emerging developments related to this initiative was revealing a great deal about certain personal and professional convictions I held. Not only did this help me to begin discovering my own particular worldview about organizational dynamics within the public education system, it also brought to my attention the fact that I seemed inherently inclined to want to investigate this in a manner that was emergent and responsive to the everyday developments that occur within school settings.

The following three chapters represent a further exploration of these evolving worldviews in a manner that is primarily intended to outline the investigative framework used to research the behaviour pilot project. In Chapter Two, an examination of the literature related to organizational dynamics, power, and behaviour support in schools is conducted in order to formulate a theoretical lens of inquiry for this research. The third and fourth chapters are devoted to conceptualizing a methodological design that is epistemologically grounded within an emergent and reflexive framework. Following this, the fifth chapter will return us to our story where we left off in the in winter of 2007.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### FEAR, POWER AND ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

#### Sociocultural influences and the dialogical process of conceptualizing a theoretical framework

As I noted at the end of the previous chapter, the process of being engaged in self-conscious reflexivity compelled an awareness of how I was naturally inclined to perceive things within a certain mindset. This invites further consideration of the influential forces that give shape to how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, and how this might inform the one or more theoretical frameworks in which our research is situated. In terms of this particular undertaking, one can safely assume that there are ideas about public education that have been knocking around in my head for years, some of which can be traced back to the days of my youth during the countless hours I spent as a student in the classrooms of Holy Cross Elementary and East York Collegiate. In fact, I remember back then having some fairly strong opinions about what I thought school should be like, taking note of certain things that seemed worthwhile and fun, while regarding others as being rather meaningless, patronizing and even hypocritical.

Today, at the age of forty-one, I continue to formulate opinions about public education that are largely influenced by the fourteen years I've spent in schools working as a classroom teacher, vice principal and counsellor. No doubt, these adult experiences have changed many of the opinions I held about school as a child. How and why changes occur in one's perspective or worldview are sometimes overlooked in the process of establishing a theoretical framework, especially when the researcher's attention is exclusively focused on prevailing theories that exist within the literature. This can result in little or no attention being given to the researcher's active and responsive role in making meaning of these theories in ways that inform his or her

conceptual lens of inquiry, a process that is substantively influenced by both sociocultural forces and lived experiences.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) informs our understanding of this by drawing our attention to the fact that language is inherently and dynamically dialogic, whether it occurs between speaker and listener, or the author of a text and its reader. Consequently, it is important when establishing a theoretical framework to remain mindful that this process does not simply involve passively acquiring an understanding of relevant theories in the sense that the ideas of others can somehow be “duplicate[d]... in someone else’s mind” (p. 69). Bakhtin asserts that complex sociocultural forces profoundly shape a dialogic process in ways that significantly influence meaning making. Failure to explicitly take this into account runs the risk of subtly implying that my approach to this inquiry was somehow situated outside of the subjective impressions and interpretations that I made of the various theories that inform my understanding of this research context. It is important to realize that my understanding of these theories is in no way static, but instead continues to evolve and change in response to the everyday events that unfold as part of my personal, professional, and academic lived experiences.

#### Forces that sustain public education’s ‘pecking order’

In this respect, the meaning I make of the various theories I encounter is awakened by what is occurring all around me. When I became aware of the strong conviction I held about taking a grass-roots approach with the behaviour pilot project, it compelled me to pay greater attention to the fact that I believe that few institutions are as stratified in terms of power structures than public education. In our system, at the top is a provincial ministry that directs school districts to implement the programs and policies it creates. School Boards, for their part, pass along these directives to the administrators of the schools within their jurisdiction, adding to

them policies and programs created at the board level by the executive leadership in consultation with school trustees. In turn, school-based administrators direct classroom teachers and support staff to implement that which has been handed down to them by both the School Board and Ministry, along with whatever initiatives they have in mind to realize their own personal vision for the school. Teachers are expected to take all of this and integrate it into the classroom programs they are designing and implementing. At the bottom of this pile are the students who inherit four tiers of policies and programs that are intended to best facilitate their learning while also ensuring their safety and well being. At best, students play a minimal role in formulating any of this, and are rarely afforded the opportunity to create new initiatives or programs for themselves, let alone ones that could be similarly handed over for someone else to implement and follow.

#### Research on the bureaucratization of school administration

How and why power is stratified within public education systems in this manner has been a source of investigation for a number of educational theorists and researchers over the past few decades. Charles Bidwell's (2001) examination of trends within the American educational system identifies a number of historical developments that significantly contributed to what he describes as the "bureaucratization of school administration" (p. 100). According to Bidwell, this process, defined primarily by the gradual establishment of a hierarchy of specialized offices for overseeing the operation of schools and school boards, is closely linked to the dramatic expansion of enrollment that began in the late 1900s and increased sharply and steadily over the course of the twentieth century. Bidwell identifies a number of outcomes that have occurred as a result of this trend. Of particular note is what he describes as an exceptional stability within the system that has encumbered its capacity to make significant change to the organization of

instruction. This is particularly problematic for a system that experienced exponential growth in enrollment over the course of the twentieth century.

Bidwell cites a number of studies to support his assertion that the impact this bureaucratization has had on public education is the failed implementation of curricular and instructional innovation. Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) researched the transfer of educational policy into practice specifically in relation to attempts to reform schools in the United States during the 1950s and 60s. The identified gap highlighted the need for a fundamental shift in educational leadership policy toward “charging practitioners with the development of solutions rather than mandating requirements that have little or no basis in practice.” The authors go on to argue that “policy can set the conditions for effective administration and practice, but it can’t predetermine how these decisions will be made...It can’t control how teachers will act in the classroom at a given point” (p. 6).

Using the U.K.’s education system as a case study, Patrick Walsh (2006) identifies what he describes as the rise of a “new managerialism” within the public service. In addition to describing a dizzying array of governmental agencies and regulatory bodies that now represent the new bureaucracy of public education in the United Kingdom, Walsh also highlights the significant increase in curriculum oversight as well as the implementation of internal and external forms of standardized student assessment. Walsh’s expansive review of research on the impact that this transformation in school administration is having on teachers led him to discover that “a critical mass of discontent has been building up amongst teachers within schools as they cope with the flood of Government inspired change to their working practices” (p. 101). To better understand the dynamics behind this “pervasive, supervisory performance management culture,” Walsh compels us to look beyond sociological and political forces and consider the influence that origination theory has had on perpetuating this mindset.

Both Walsh and Henry Mintzberg (1994) identify Frederick Taylor's *Scientific Management* (1911) as having far-reaching impact on the way in which organizational administration was conceptualized throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. They argue that Taylor's 'machine model' mindset had significant implications in most sectors including the public service, resulting in leadership being primarily conceptualized in terms of a top-down configuration. In public education as well as other social organizations this has produced a resiliently stable administrative structure that has proven resistant to most attempts to affect systemic change.

#### Reinforcing sovereignty through fear and power

Although these arguments are helpful in terms of identifying the origins of hierarchical power structures in education, what remains a compelling question is what forces are at play in sustaining them. For a possible explanation of this we turn our attention to the work of Michel Foucault (2007). He convincingly argues that control over the circulation of ideas is instrumental in establishing and maintaining the sovereignty on which stratified power structures are based. In essence, he argues that "the political effectiveness of sovereignty is linked to an intensity of circulations: circulation of ideas, of wills, and of orders" (p. 51). Foucault (1993) believes that this mindset is historically situated within a paradigm of truth and persuasion, a two stage process, the first of which involves demonstrating forms of evidence to substantiate a given 'truth.' The second step involves the means by which people are persuaded to become invested in this truth.

When I consider the various ways in which truth and persuasion are employed to sustain sovereignty within public education today, what immediately comes to mind is the concerted effort that has gone into supporting a mindset that authority and accountability are essential



features of a healthy and productive learning environment. It seems to me that it has somehow become an accepted fact that the absence of either of these not only results in academic underachievement, but may also risk the emotional and physical well being of children. Later in this chapter, when we take a closer look at the BC Ministry of Education's (2008) policy on safe, caring and orderly schools, it will become apparent that a great deal has been invested in foregrounding the viewpoint that children must be protected from harming one another if they are to achieve their fullest potential. I believe that this so-called truth has been persuasively employed to support a system that places considerable value on stratified power structures that consistently reinforce certain ideals about authority and accountability in ways that have the potential to impact the various approaches that a school takes toward student behaviour.

#### Differentiating between reactive and proactive approaches to behaviour

Before exploring some of the different ways in which certain truths about authority and accountability are perpetuated within the public education system, we should first establish a framework for conceptualizing behaviour support in schools. In some respects this will serve as a counterbalance to the argument that authority and accountability exist only in schools to sustain the sovereignty of the stratified power structures on which the public education system is based. Doing so involves exploring the possibility that authority and accountability are in fact essential instruments for establishing a safe and caring school as indicated by some of the core principles of behaviour theory.

The various interventions that are employed within a school to promote positive behaviour may be best understood within a framework that distinguishes between proactive and reactive approaches. The former includes any and all efforts that are intended to encourage students to make good choices rather than engage in problem behaviour. Proactive strategies can

take widely varying forms that range from overtly teaching and extrinsically reinforcing desirable behaviour to providing young people opportunities for genuine leadership in ways that may encourage their support in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school community.

Reactive approaches refer exclusively to what happens to a student after he or she engages in problem behaviour, something more commonly referred to as ‘consequences.’ In some schools, consequences for various forms of problem behaviour are explicitly outlined as part of a formal discipline cycle. A clear example of this was in place at a school I previously worked in where a distinction was drawn between major and minor behaviour infractions. On a case-by-case basis, school administration determined into which of these two categories a particular behaviour fell. However, throughout the school community there was a general understanding and agreement about how behaviours were classified. For example, it was expected that any form of physical aggression or extreme disrespect toward an adult constituted a major, whereas lower level disruptive behaviour in the classroom was more likely to be regarded as a minor offense.

Within this particular discipline cycle, a student’s first major automatically resulted in a one-day, in-school suspension. For a second major, the in-school suspension was extended to three-days. If a third major occurred, the student would receive an out-of-school suspension for one-day. A fourth major would see a student suspended from school for three days. Within this system, three minor offenses counted as a major. All majors and minors were wiped clean at the end of each academic term in order to provide students with the opportunity to make a fresh start.

It is worth noting that clearly structured discipline cycles like the one I’ve just described are more the exception than the norm these days in elementary schools throughout my district.

There are several reasons for this. District policy now expressly encourages school administrators to seek alternatives to suspensions based on the rationale that they are primarily punitive in nature, and are commonly regarded as not being particularly effective at bringing about an overall change in student behaviour. Additionally, school officials are growing increasingly wary of sending students home because there is no certainty as to what will occur in that setting as a result. For various reasons, including employment obligations, parents are not always able (or willing) to ensure that appropriate follow through occurs for a child when he or she is suspended from school. Consequently, there is often concern that a child may inadvertently receive positive reinforcement for misbehaviour by being granted additional access to preferred activities, most notably video games, as a result of being sent home from school. Experts in the field of school violence also point out the very unsettling reality that the majority of school shootings have been carried out by youths who were not in school at the time as a result of suspension or expulsion (O'Toole, n.d.).

An even more significant factor that has influenced a decided shift away from rigidly outlined discipline cycles is the fact that schools are compelled by ministry policy to regard chronic problem behaviour within the context of 'special needs.' This results in an expectation that environmental and/or curricular adaptations will be made by school staff to support a student who is frequently engaging in problem behaviour in much the same fashion as would be the case for a student who has a physical or cognitive-related disability. Within this mindset, problem behaviour is conceptualized more in terms of a child's social-emotional capacity, which, for various reasons, may be underdeveloped or compromised in ways that oblige school staff to develop strategies to help that student succeed.

Within a special education paradigm consequences are less commonly employed as the primary means to promote student success. Far less likely is there to be an underlying

assumption that a child needs only to experience something unpleasant as a result of a particular action in order to deter him or her from doing it again. The reason for this is largely based on the fact that one cannot simply presume that a child has the capacity to self-regulate his or her problem behaviour, a common oversight people make when attempting to affect change in a child's behaviour through consequences. This is not to say that consequences should not be taken into consideration when creating interventions for children who have behaviour-related special needs. In fact, they serve as an integral piece of the puzzle in terms of determining what is motivating a particular behaviour. By examining patterns of what generally happens before and after a child engages in a problem behaviour, a clearer understanding of its function can be attained, and then concerted efforts made to replace it with more desirable and socially acceptable alternatives (McIntosh & Av-Gay, 2007; Scott et al., 2005).

A core fundamental of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), a system of interventions designed to support children with moderate to profound developmental delay, is that proactive approaches represent the most effective aspect of a program that is intending to promote desirable behaviour. An ABA-styled program will employ various techniques to encourage a child to exhibit desirable behaviour in order to experience positive reinforcement (Foxy, 2008; Kimball, 2002). A wide variety of behaviour-based interventions have been designed based on these principles. Among them is discrete-trial training (DTT), which involves manipulating antecedents in order to guide the child to make the right choice and thereby ensure that a pattern of desirable behaviour and positive reinforcement occurs with such frequency that it gains resiliency over the problem behaviour it is replacing (Nelson & Huefner, 2003; Smith, 2001). As noted in the introductory chapter, Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) has extended variations of these applications beyond special needs populations to create programs that are school wide in focus.

However, most of these programs also insist that an integral part of a successful intervention involves establishing a response system to problem behaviour that ensures that consequences are predictable and consistent. The primary intention behind this is to eliminate, or at least diminish, coercive reactive engagements between adults and students. These responses are generally marked by a reckless move to power by the adult, which in turn provokes a negative reaction from the student. A common result is that the situation escalates with one or both parties raising the stakes. In these situations, the adult's response to the student's behaviour is more likely to be unpredictable and inconsistent since it is driven in large part by emotion. Instead of resulting in improved behaviour, research has shown that these exchanges tend to only further erode the relationship between student and teacher (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).

Another significant disadvantage associated with employing unpredictable and inconsistent responses to problem behaviour is that it significantly hinders a school's ability to determine with any certainty which approach works best with a particular child. A general rule of thumb in behaviour modification is that the greater the degree of variability in response to a particular problem behaviour, the less certainty one has in terms of understanding what is and what isn't successful in dealing with it.

Programs like PBS also encourage schools to adopt a school-wide, universal approach to problem behaviour because it helps to determine which children require alternative and more specialized approaches. In schools where such a system is not in place, there is greater uncertainty as to which students represent the recognized percentage of a school's population that has behaviour-related special needs. Unfortunately, in these situations, it is more likely that attention and resources are primarily allocated to staff members who exhibit the greatest degree of frustration, and not necessarily the children who are most in need of additional specialized resources. When a school-wide system is in place that consistently and predictably responds to

problem behaviour, the staff is then able to examine data that reveals which students have a frequency and intensity of problem behaviour that is not diminishing over a prescribed period of time. This then allows for resources to be appropriately allocated to those students who have been identified as having behaviour-related special needs. Schools that are not operating in this fashion tend to respond more to the special needs of its teachers rather than its students.

### Questioning the motives of authority and accountability in public education

Having established a framework for understanding behaviour support in schools, it is important to now return our focus to the role that authority and accountability play within the public education system, and determine whether or not it serves any valuable purpose other than to simply reinforce a highly stratified power structure. A number of important questions will help us to effectively explore this: Do adults need a certain degree of authority and accountability to predictably and consistently respond to students' problem behaviour? Doesn't this need to be organizationally structured in ways that pertain to both adults and children alike? Should educators be held accountable in terms of their professional practice with respect to how they deal with behaviour? If so, how? And by whom?

Some of these questions directly relate to the thorny issue of professional autonomy. One might expect that at each level of a stratified power structure there would be equal insistence on one's autonomy being respected. However, in public education, it is primarily teachers who guard this closely from any perceived intrusions by authority. School-based administrators appear far less inclined to insist that district-level authority respect their professional independence, and district level administration rarely makes explicit any insistence that theirs be respected by the ministry. Some would argue that it is fear of real or perceived consequences that discourages either of these latter two groups from taking this stand. Whether true or not, what is

important to consider is how the professional autonomy of teachers might factor into the organizational dynamics of how a school deals with problem behaviour.

Teachers working within the public education system in BC are well aware that professional standards exist.<sup>9</sup> However, because these are expressed in such general terms, they don't represent a concrete instrument by which teachers can be held accountable by authority figures. Short of engaging in some form of professional misconduct or abuse of power, teachers can expect to generally practice their profession free from the interference of authority whether it is school-based, district, or ministry level. Some noted exceptions occur, such as the requirement of all teachers to administer yearly standardized tests known as Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA), but even this directive has resulted in an ongoing and hard-fought battle between the BCTF and the Ministry of Education (BC Teachers' Federation, 2009a).

It is worth noting that teachers receive very little if any specific directives from authority in terms of how they should deal with problem behaviour or promote social responsibility in their classrooms. The *Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in BC* (BC College of Teachers, 2008) asks teachers to “value and care for all students and act in their best interest,” and to “implement effective practices in [the] area of classroom management,” but this hardly provides anything concrete in terms of setting out a policy to which authority figures can hold teachers accountable. There is also the Ministry of Education's *Social Responsibility Performance Standards* (2009a) that teachers are expected to include in their classroom program, but this does not provide any specific direction with respect to how teachers should respond to problem behaviour. *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (BC

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<sup>9</sup> In 2003, the provincial government in BC passed Bill 51 amending the Teacher Profession Act to make a number of significant changes to how the composition and mandate of the BC College of Teachers. These changes led to the introduction of the *Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in BC*. The implementation of these standards has sparked some debate as to whether they actually serve as a benefit or detriment to the teaching profession (Phelan, Erickson, & Kind, 2007).

Ministry of Education, 2008) is the only policy document that relates directly to behaviour response, but virtually all of its specific guidelines, the ones that are explicit enough to allow for some form of accountability, are school-wide in nature and as such are mostly the responsibility of the administrator. Later on in this chapter, a closer look at this policy will examine its origins, and consider its implications for behaviour support in schools

Whenever educators take issue with the role that authority and accountability play in public education it is generally related to the whole question of motives. In the previous section, I highlighted the fact that reactive responses to problem behaviour in schools must subscribe to a process that is both predictable and consistent in nature if it is to have any impact on affecting positive change. Some would agree that this represents a healthy role for authority and accountability to serve within the public education system. Teachers, administrators, and parents all have an important role to play in directing and re-directing children's behaviour in a manner that encourages social responsibility. Arguably, this involves adults assuming a position of authority from which they can judiciously and respectfully hold children accountable for their behaviour.

Aside from this, what other purposes are there for authority and accountability within public education? Is there any evidence to suggest that it helps to establish and sustain the stratified power structures that exist within public education in a way that reinforces the kind of sovereignty that Foucault describes? If so, how is this possible within an environment where professional autonomy is so highly prized? Would this not provoke tensions or resistance in a manner that is unhealthy for a school community? Could it possibly undermine efforts to establish and maintain a safe and caring learning environment?



### Using fear and power to counter fiscal mismanagement and academic underachievement

It could be argued that there are certain ‘truths’ that have been promoted at different times through various means within the public education system that do appear to serve the purpose of reinforcing power structures. For example, over the past two decades a succession of provincial governments in BC have passed legislation related to how school boards manage their budgets, the cumulative effect of which has considerably constrained how districts receive and allocate their fiscal resources (Carson, 1997). To substantiate this, the Ministry of Education has on occasion used some rather heavy-handed tactics, often resorting to fear-based rationales as a means of persuading the public to support the establishment of their authority to control spending on education. A notable example of this occurred in January 1996, when the Education Minister of the time fired the North Vancouver Board of School Trustees, replacing them with a government appointed official. He rationalized the move by saying that the “board's unwillingness or incapacity to address its fiscal responsibilities to this extent [had] placed the district in serious financial danger” (North Shore News, January 25, 1996; as cited in Carson, 1997, p. 67).

Another more recent truth that has been enforced through fear with considerable persuasion is the need for accountability at all levels of the public education system for achievement purposes. Following a North American-wide trend, the BC Ministry of Education has introduced an accountability framework that consists of school growth plans, school district contracts, triennial reviews, and aboriginal enhancement agreements. These policies require school boards, individual schools, and to a lesser extent, classroom teachers to identify measurable goals that target specific areas for improvement.<sup>10</sup> Again not surprisingly, many of

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<sup>10</sup> To date, classroom teachers have only been required to stringently follow this model when designing individual education plans (IEPs) for students with identified special needs. However, at the school and district level

these steps were introduced within an underlying context that implies that without stringent regulation, authority and accountability, our schools will at best fall short of performing to their optimal potential, and at worst, endanger the future employment prospects of the next generation, and along with it the economic well-being of the province.<sup>11</sup>

### Using fear and power to counter labour resistance and problem behaviour

As one might anticipate, at every level of the power structure that exists within public education various forms of resistance occur, whether it is classroom teachers who may individually or collectively oppose (oftentimes at the behest of the BCTF) the directives they receive from above, or school boards that strategically modify provincial mandates to best suit the particular needs of their jurisdiction. In response to this resistance, fear is often perpetuated. In the case of the job action initiated by the BCTF in October 2005, the government went to great lengths to describe this resistance in the context of lawlessness that threatened the very principles on which democracy is based. In a broadly televised news conference on October 17, 2005, BC Premier Gordon Campbell announced, “We can disagree on the laws that are passed, and we often do. But the foundation of our society is that once a law is passed we agree to obey it” (CBC News Online, 2005b).

It is interesting to note that whenever children engage in either passive or active forms of resistance, our immediate inclination is to refer to this in terms of ‘problem behaviour.’ Most of

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accountability frameworks have come to represent one of the primary vehicles through which policy is designed and implemented.

<sup>11</sup> The Fraser Institute, an independent Canadian policy institute, publishes its *Annual Report Card on BC Schools* (Cowley & Easton, 2009) that provides much of the persuasion behind the ‘truth’ that accountability makes for better schools. This province-wide assessment is used to rank BC schools based on an economic formula that uses quantifiable data to measure school performance contextualized within the notion that education’s first priority is to prepare young people to make a meaningful contribution to the workforce. Consequently, the assessment is skewed to place greater emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy skills than it is to take into account other meaningful aspects of a child’s educational experience.

us living in the western world will acknowledge the resilient job the media has done keeping us informed of how big a problem young people's behaviour is today (Barwick, 2009; CBC News Online, 2005a; Joong & Ridler, 2005). Rarely are any meaningful efforts made to put this into perspective, particularly since promoting a context of fear seems to draw greater public interest. As Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 2003 /2005) asserts, "propaganda is our Achilles heel. It's our weak point. We will buy anything if it's got a good hard sell to it" (p. 270/271).

This climate of fear that has been propagated in the media, arguably with the support of school officials compels the question of whether the use of authority and accountability in public education is driven by reasons that go beyond implementing effective approaches to dealing with problem behaviour. To what extent is the sovereignty of stratified power structures in public education invested in the so-called truth that student behaviour is a big problem in our schools? Are these power structures dependent upon a certain degree of authority and accountability within the system to such an extent that makes it advantageous to distort the reality of this problem? If this is the case, what cost comes along with perpetuating this truth?

The biggest concern would be that this has the potential to actualize within schools the kind of panoptical realities that Foucault describes in his book, *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (1979). Within this mindset, the complex issue of student behaviour would be first and foremost shaped by an understanding of the need to exercise power and authority over students in ways that include promoting in their minds a constant awareness that they are under surveillance and will be punished for misbehaviour. This clearly has the potential to significantly impact the daily operation and atmosphere within our schools. If forces of power and authority are essentially instituted within a culture of fear, one wonders whether this would create formidable barriers that obstruct, or at least discourage, staffs and students from collaboratively establishing and maintaining safe and caring school communities. At the very least, some impact

would be felt within a school community that was bombarded with messages that learning environments must be safe, children must be protected, achievement must be measurable, and, with respect to all of this, everyone, adults and children alike, must be held accountable. Among other things, one might expect it to essentially transform the role of the educator from one who inspires, facilitates and empowers meaningful learning, to one who protects, supervises, and evaluates the acquisition of knowledge and is ever responsible for the safety of the child.

If the public education system in BC has made such a paradigm shift, the forces behind it are sure to be complex. Foucault (1993) notes that there are a number of techniques of power used in human societies “which permit one to produce, to transform, to manipulate things...to determine the conduct of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives” (p. 203). Within organizational systems, the formulation of policy at any level within its stratified power structure represents one of the most visible examples of these techniques. Consequently, it would be worthwhile to consider whether or not any indication of directing a shift in perspective exists within the policies or procedures recently introduced by the BC Ministry of Education.

#### Fear, authority and accountability in policy: *Safe, Caring, and Orderly Schools: A Guide*

The question being asked here is whether the public education system in BC, and the stratified power structures that are set-up within it, subscribe to, and perhaps even perpetuate, a climate of fear that substantiates the need for authority and accountability within its schools. Such a bold indictment clearly necessitates some evidence to support it. To this end, we turn our attention to the policy set out by the BC Ministry of Education that is specifically intended to guide schools in their approach to dealing with problem behaviour.

In March 2004, the ministry first introduced its guidelines for establishing and maintaining safe schools throughout the K-12 public education system in British Columbia. As outlined in its introduction, *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: a Guide* (2008) is an attempt to deal “head-on” with “issues of bullying, harassment, intimidation, and youth violence” in BC schools (p. 4). The authors of this document conceptualize the solution to these problems in terms of “attitudes, commitment, action and accountability” (p. 5). The guide is designed to assist educators by identifying attributes of a safe, caring and orderly school, outlining provincial standards for school-wide codes of conduct, and providing strategies for informing a community of safety concerns.

It is important to note from the outset that *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: a Guide* was implemented in response to recommendations made by the Safe Schools Task Force in its 2003 report: *Facing our Fears - Accepting Responsibility* (BC Ministry of Education, 2003). The task force, created by then-minister, Christy Clark, was asked to examine the issue of violence in schools through a process of consultation with educators, parents, and students. The resulting report called on the ministry to take action, particularly in terms of implementing new policies and procedures for dealing effectively with bullying, harassment and intimidation in schools.

In terms of language, the report’s title, “Facing our Fears” strikes an ominous tone, suggestive of the need to overcome both an individual and collective state of anxiety and helplessness with regards to issues of school safety. This is of considerable significance since the importance of attitudes is highlighted in the *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools* policy, specifically referenced as the need to acknowledge that a problem exists that can and should be addressed (p. 5). An important question then arises around the context in which these policies are formulated. In order to empower a school community to face its fears as suggested by the Safe

Schools Task Force, one would assume that concerted effort would be made to understand the origins of those fears, and to put them into perspective.

### The impact of language and sociocultural forces on interpreting policy

It is necessary to briefly turn our attention to further exploring how language is an influential factor on a number of critical levels that need to be taken into consideration. At the beginning of this chapter, I highlighted Bakhtin's notion that language in both its written and spoken forms is inherently and dynamically dialogic. This also has particular relevance when we consider how the safe, caring, and orderly schools policy may be differently interpreted by those responsible for its actual implementation. In Bakhtin's, *The Problem of Speech Genres* (1986), he theorizes that language is always socially embedded within the context of the human activity to which it is related, and that these reflect specific linguistic styles and content. From this standpoint, we can assume that there is a particular genre that reflects the language one typically encounters in government policy documents. This alone impacts the dialogic relationship between author and reader in ways that are worth considering, particularly since it is likely to affect the transfer of this policy into actual practice.

For our purposes here, Bakhtin's theories compel us to pay careful attention to the impact of sociocultural forces on the complex dialogic process of making meaning of the safe, caring and orderly schools policy and the calls for systemic change that it advocates. This primarily involves considering how individuals and schools differently interpret these guidelines in ways that effect their implementation. Although the policy document frequently makes reference to all members of the school community, it is important to consider the substantial degree of variation in meaning that different members will take away from its provisions. For instance, school-based administrators are likely to interpret a very different message from this document than would a

Grade 12 student if, in the unlikely event, he or she was purposefully invited to provide feedback. Whereas the former may simply understand it in terms of expanding his or her responsibilities for the safety and well being of students, the latter may regard it as an unfair and unwarranted intrusion into personal liberties.

Even within a group of people who share the same occupational status, considerable variation in interpretation is likely to occur as a result of individual locations and lived experiences. For example, a classroom teacher who was raised in an inner city setting where socioeconomic pressures brought with them realities that frequently disrupted learning, may make different sense of a policy that recommends strategies for establishing orderly conduct in the school than would her colleague across the hall who was educated in a private school where an excessively strict code of conduct was consistently enforced to maintain a high degree of academic performance. From yet another perspective, a teacher on staff may focus on certain aspects of the policy that deal specifically with bullying, influenced by the fact that he has endured a life time of marginalization and oppression as a result of his sexual orientation. His opinion on new measures aimed at countering bullying in the school may differ markedly from those held by another colleague who as a youth frequently singled out and antagonized students in her high school who looked or acted differently.

In this respect, a strong case can be made for taking into consideration how sociocultural forces significantly impact the way in which policy-related language is interpreted, and how this may influence how members of a school community approach the task of creating a safe and caring learning environment. Clearly, the dialogical process of language plays a significant role in determining the way in which community members individually and collectively locate themselves in relation to a particular policy or initiative.

### Establishing accountability for ensuring the safety of the ‘inmate’

With this understanding firmly in mind, I return to the *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* with the intention of making personal meaning of its various guidelines within the context of such notions as fear, authority and accountability. This interpretation will give further shape to the theoretical lens that will be used to research one school community’s journey to explore the various approaches it takes to promote personal and social responsibility among its student population. This in turn will inform the research questions that will guide this inquiry.

In *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (1979), Michel Foucault conceptualizes panoptical realities that emerge out of human fear. Whether it is dealing with an epidemic or the psychologically unfit, Foucault contemplates a society that responds to such fear through power and authority as envisioned by Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon*. Among Bentham’s controversial assertions is the notion that power must be both ‘visible’ and ‘unverifiable,’ suggesting that the ‘inmate’ be ever aware that he or she is always subject to surveillance, without ever being entirely sure as to when this is the case (Bentham, 1787, as cited in Foucault, 1977).

It is worth considering to what extent the Safe Schools Task Force intentionally contextualized the issue of behaviour in schools in terms of fear in order to establish a mindset and rationale that would best validate the kind of recommendations put forward in its report. A comparison could be made to the manner in which fear was propagated by the US Government in its lead up to the war in Iraq, using the threat of weapons of mass destruction to elicit public support for measures that were not far removed from those advocated by Bentham more than two hundred years ago.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> It could be argued that expressions of ‘visible’ and ‘unverifiable’ power were seen in the months leading up to the Iraqi War with the build-up of the US military in the Gulf region, and President Bush’s memorable declaration that a strike would occur at “a time of our choosing” (CNN News Online, 2003).



In fairness to the Safe Schools Task Force, it should at least be noted that among its key recommendations, was the suggestion that ministry policies be revised or designed in a manner “consistent with the British Columbia Human Rights Code and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (BC Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 3). Based on this, one would assume that all measures endorsed by the safe, caring and orderly schools policy would first and foremost recognize and respect the rights of the individual.

It is well worth noting that Canadians in general have grown somewhat accustomed to the overt use of fear as a validation for significantly impinging on various civil liberties.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, throughout the ministry’s policy on safe, caring and orderly schools fear features prominently in terms of highlighting the need to address any threat posed to the learner. The policy states that “safe schools are ones in which members of the school community are free of the fear of harm, including potential threats from inside or outside the school” (p. 11). The policy goes on to qualify that the main purpose behind such an environment is to support learning and enable a constant and uninterrupted focus on student achievement. As such, all members of the community are called upon to foster an environment “resistant to disruption and intrusion” that may adversely impact learning (p. 11).

It is important to note that the primary reason stated by the policy for ensuring that students are free from fear of harm is to protect the learning environment and individual student achievement, rather than the inherent right of the child to live in his or her world free of fear. The argument could be made that this is implied, especially since the safe, caring and orderly schools document makes specific reference to provincial and federal human rights charters.

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<sup>13</sup> Since 1978, Canada has had in place a policy whereby Security Certificates are issued, the official and explicit purpose of which “is the removal from Canada of non-Canadians who have no legal right to be here and who pose a serious threat to Canada and Canadians.” The issuing of a security certificate is carried out in closed proceedings, and often involves the presentation of evidence that is not publicly released “due to interests of national security” (Government of Canada - Ministry of Public Safety, 2009).

However, the problem here is that learning is privileged in a manner that prioritizes it over the rights of the individual. Philosophically, it may be true that learning and human rights are rarely considered to be potentially in conflict with one another. In reality however, there are countless instances in classrooms each day in which children either actively or passively resist learning. Adults respond to these challenges in various ways including the use of fear as a tool to enforce compliance. Threat of verbal retribution, embarrassment in front of peers, referral to the office, punishment by means of detention, retention or removal of privileges, contacting parents, and so forth, all represent fear-based methods commonly employed in schools to engage the reluctant child in learning. In this regard, there exists a potential contradiction in a policy that prioritizes a child's right to attend school free of fear for the primary purpose of his or her individual academic achievement, but does not explicitly prohibit the use of fear by adults to promote that achievement.

By not directly addressing the issue of using fear to make schools free of fear in order to promote optimal learning environments a lot is left to interpretation when this policy is translated into practice within a school community. In considering this, we must first acknowledge that there is a distinct likelihood that some educators may pay very little or no attention to this policy whatsoever, preferring instead to defer to their professional experience and particular style of discipline, one that they have customized over time. However, the ability to handle situations based exclusively on one's personal style or professional philosophy can be undermined in instances where a behaviour issue is elevated to a point that involves other adults. Along with this, come additional and potentially conflicting perspectives that are at least partially influenced by the power and authority that each individual holds over the child and the other adults involved.

Here, organizational dynamics are far more likely to come into play, as the individuals involved interpret ministry, district or school policy as it relates to a given situation. As previously noted, each individual's perspective is significantly shaped by his or her location, professional philosophy and personal style. For instance, a teacher may be wary of any approach that restricts his or her ability to enforce compliance in the classroom through fear-based measures like referring a child to the office or holding a student back for detention after school. This position may run counter to that of the school-based administrator who does not believe that a change in behaviour is likely to occur merely by making a child afraid of such consequences. Additional dynamics generally emerge when one or more parents become involved. One father may want to know what is being done by school staff to protect the academic, social and emotional well being of his child in a classroom where another student is frequently engaging in disruptive or unsafe behaviour. Another parent may take issue with the fact that adults at the school are repeatedly singling out her child by sending him to the office when they should be better addressing his behaviour-related special needs. A final piece of the organizational puzzle involves the students themselves who may actively or passively resist measures that are intended to promote learning and/or safety in the classroom if they involve increasing surveillance and/or implementing harsher forms of punishment for perceived infractions.

All of these conflicting perspectives could be justified through a selective interpretation of the safe, caring and orderly schools policy. Juxtaposing these perspectives against one another highlights some of the complex dynamics that can emerge within a school community as it tries to deal with problem behaviour guided by a policy that in part perpetuates fear to justify the need for authority and accountability, and in doing so provokes resistance that can take different forms and occur at different levels.

### A missed opportunity to engage adults and students in a shared pursuit of social responsibility

Because much of the safe, caring and orderly schools policy encourages educators to “overcome their fear” through measures that reinforce the establishment of authority and accountability within a school community, it conjures up images of a panoptical reality in which power is both visible and unverifiable. Such a mindset substantiates approaches that essentially render the student an inmate to be constantly under surveillance and subject to redirection at all times. To what extent does doing so undermine a child’s intrinsic motivation to actively and meaningfully contribute to a safe and caring school?

It seems shortsighted to suggest, as the policy does, that this approach could somehow contribute to positive youth development by promoting a sense of “personal responsibility and self-discipline” (BC Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 16) through measures that depend heavily on the use of authority and accountability. By failing to recognize the important link between student empowerment and pro-social behaviour, policymakers have in fact reinforced a system in which social responsibility is incumbent upon the presence of power and surveillance and a prevailing fear of both. The problem, from a Foucauldian standpoint, is that instead of situating power where it is intended, a mindset of this nature systemically situates it elsewhere in ways that are resistant to authority. By regarding students as little more than passive recipients of new policies that are aimed at shaping or controlling their behaviour, *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* establishes and reinforces a power differential that potentially leaves no other role for the student other than to conform or resist the authority. In doing so, students could be potentially empowered to undermine adult efforts to create a positive learning environment rather than support them. More importantly, an opportunity to engage children and adults in a

reciprocal and genuine shared pursuit of solutions is lost. The policy instead essentially delegates the role of the student to one of victim, offender or bystander.

### Exploring the influence of language and power on organizational dynamics

A final important consideration to take into account when exploring the various forces that impact organizational dynamics is how power is exerted within and between the various groups that comprise a school community. This relates directly to the ever important question of who has the authority to speak for whom in ways that impact decision making within an organization. Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) conceptualization of language as being primarily understood in terms of perception and practice has important implications for understanding these dynamics.

Bourdieu challenges the notion that language can be conceptualized in formal, symbolic or universal terms in ways that overlook or 'bracket out' the complex forces that inherently shape its power in practice. A fundamental component of Bourdieu's worldview is that language is never free of the influence of power. Profound social, cultural and historical forces are always at play in all dialogues, and there is no process by which this can somehow be neutralized so that language can be objectively regarded or assessed. Even in the written form, language carries with it the authority of its author which is inextricably linked to the authority of the reader.

In terms of its influence on the behaviour pilot project, this substantiates the need to give consideration to the multitude of ways in which language perpetuates dynamics of power within a school community. At ministry, district, and school levels, there are individuals who, by virtue of possessing what Bourdieu describes as social capital, are recognized as having some authority within whatever particular organizational context they are situated. These individuals have come to be regarded as authorized representatives of the group to which they belong. Such dynamics

are found within every organizational context, whether it is teachers assembled together at a union meeting, school administrators coming together for district level discussions, parents attending their monthly P.A.C. meeting, or a group of students clustered together in the hallways or on the playground. In all of these situations, power dynamics are at play in ways that are established and exerted through various means, not the least of which is language.

From this, one can safely assume that the manner in which a community engages in a process of exploring its approach to behaviour is likely to be significantly influenced by the power that is exerted by certain individuals who are authorized representatives of the various groups that comprise that community. This is likely to have considerable impact on which approaches to behaviour are collectively supported and which ones are resisted. In this regard, Bourdieu's theory strongly compels the researcher to get underneath surface level understanding of policy implementation to explore the dialogic and power-laden essence of language as it unfolds in social contexts in order to better understand how it dynamically influences human interactions within an organization. An integral part of this involves giving careful consideration to who has the social capital within the school community to act as the authorized representatives for a particular initiative or behavioural approach, and who has the social capital within that school community to speak and/or act as a force of resistance against it. In what way are these authorized representatives situated within the stratified power structures that guide the governance of one school community's approach to student behaviour?

According to Bourdieu, part of understanding these dynamics of language and symbolic power involves taking into consideration what he refers to as habitus. This notion asserts that there are various sociocultural forces at play during an individual's early lived experiences that profoundly shape his or her familiarity and comfort level engaging with the language of power in certain contexts. In terms of how this may impact on an initiative that is being introduced into a

school community, Bourdieu would draw attention to the fact that among the members of that community there would be some individuals who are more inclined to speak and/or act with authority in support of, or against, a particular initiative or approach, and that these dynamics largely shape how power is situated within the organization. Invariably, these dynamics would have the potential to impact teachers' individual and collective motivation to actively participate in any particular aspect of a project being initiated in their school. The implications of this are significant to this research because one school community's investigative journey into the way in which it deals with problem behaviour is bound to uncover certain dynamics about the communication patterns that exist within and between staff, students and administration, and how this influences individual and collective approaches to student behaviour.

### Identifying the research questions

In this chapter, we have developed a theoretical lens of inquiry that substantiates the need to examine the way in which a school explores how it deals with behaviour through a framework that carefully considers the influence of organizational dynamics. These are dynamics that are situated within a stratified power structure that has the potential to use fear to substantiate the need to ensure that authority and accountability are at all times maintained within a school community. Such a power structure is likely to impact the degree to which staff and students become invested and empowered in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring learning environment.

Policies and procedures established at every level of an organizational structure are interpreted and put into practice by individual members of its staff and administration in various ways that are influenced by such sociocultural forces as lived experiences, personal style, and professional philosophies. Discrepancies in these approaches are likely to play out within the

organizational dynamics of a school community particularly with respect to how power is situated, including the way it is exerted by those who are regarded as authorized representatives of the different groups that comprise a school community. These individuals are likely to base their positions on certain truths that justify particular approaches to dealing with behaviour at the school. Again, the manner through which community members are persuaded to become invested in some truths while resisting or rejecting others is likely to be influenced by organizational dynamics including the communication patterns that exist within the school community.

Within the context of this investigative framework, three research questions will guide the direction of this inquiry. The first of these is purposefully formulated to be broadly exploratory in nature. The behaviour pilot project, as conceptualized by the District PBS Committee, provided an ideal opportunity for a school staff to individually and collectively explore various new and existing approaches to promoting positive behaviour and social responsibility within its student population. Because the project was not unduly weighed down by expectations that certain interventions prescribed by PBS or other behavioural philosophies be adopted, it afforded the school an opportunity to genuinely explore itself, and in doing so open up possibilities for unexpected discoveries to occur as part of this journey. The first research question corresponds with this exploration: What happens when the members of one school community are engaged in an initiative that compels them to examine its various approaches to student behaviour?

The second research question purposefully frames this investigation within the theoretical framework discussed throughout this chapter: How do organizational dynamics and the way in which power is situated within a school community impact the approaches it employs to promote positive behaviour and social responsibility within its student population, and what influence do



these dynamics have on how staff and administration undertake an initiative that is designed to explore this?

The final of the three research questions is exclusively focused on the investigative process itself with the intention of surfacing and hopefully uncovering new insight about the challenges of conducting qualitative research within one's own place of employment. This particular question gradually emerged over time, eventually taking shape as the unfolding investigative journey brought about an increased awareness of the need to interweave into this research endeavour an autoethnographic component that formalized a process of self-conscious reflexivity. In relation to this, a third and final research question was formulated: What are the ethical and methodological challenges that a researcher/practitioner confronts when formally investigating some aspect of his or her professional surroundings?

Our investigative journey has now been given the framework it requires in terms of making explicit the researcher's worldview, understanding how it is meaningfully informed by various theorists and lived experiences, and conceptualizing it in a manner that provides an investigative lens of inquiry for this research. Critical attention must now be focused on framing a methodological design that will facilitate the process of exploring the research questions we have identified. Chapter Three begins this process by outlining the investigative methods that were designed for exploring 'self' in relation to the research context. An important aspect of this involves giving careful consideration to how the researcher theorizes knowing and the various ways in which knowledge is uncovered and/or awakened. This will provide the framework for the autoethnographic component of this study that focused on exploring the ethical and methodological dilemmas associated with conducting research in one's own place of employment.

The fourth chapter will continue the process of outlining a methodological design for this research by presenting the various investigative methods that were employed to carry out what I describe as the social inquiry component of this investigation. An important aspect of this involves examining a number of research traditions that significantly informed the methods employed in this study, particularly those that were used to investigate the behaviour pilot project and the organizational dynamics related to it. Specific details on participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and how new paths of inquiry were uncovered through this process will also be discussed throughout Chapter Four. This will set the stage for a return to the story of Crestview's investigative journey.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### RATIONALE AND DESIGN FOR AN EMERGENT PROCESS OF INQUIRY – PART I

##### Theorizing a systematic and meaningful approach to examining self in relation to other

“It’s not all about you,” is a phrase that my wife, Hartej, occasionally employs whenever she feels that I have become excessively self-indulgent or egocentric. It’s not a comment that I find particularly endearing (however gently she tries to convey it), but I’ve come to embrace it as an important reminder of the need to maintain an orientation to the world that balances self with other. I mention this here because I anticipate that a clearer understanding of the methodology employed in this research may be achieved by framing it to some extent within the context of self and other.<sup>14</sup> I strongly suspect that it will become apparent to the reader in the pages ahead that this research, at least in part, is very much about me. Arguably, all research endeavours are to some degree about the one or more individuals who decide at some point to take the bold step of formally investigating a particular curiosity. Yet, from the numerous research reports I’ve read, I get a general sense that there is a tendency toward downplaying the role of the researcher in order to foreground the investigation, its methods, and the findings that emerged from it.

Initially, I began this research undertaking with a similar intention. Of course, I knew I would have to make explicit the fact that the school where the research was being conducted was my place of employment, and acknowledge that I had some form of relationship either personal or professional with every participant prior to his or her involvement in this study, and hoped that these would remain intact long after this process was completed. Additionally, I assumed

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<sup>14</sup> Post-structuralist sensibilities caution us from becoming trapped in binaries that impose the sort of false dichotomy that distinctly separates the notion of self from other as though these two realities exist as distinct entities. The reader should feel reassured that my approach to this work is passionately committed to disrupting this through a constant mindfulness of how realities of self and other are not exclusively distinct but in fact overlap, integrate and are at times simultaneous in perspective and orientation.

there would be some expectation that I make known whatever biases I might have in relation to the questions being explored in the investigation. After that, however, I envisioned myself disappearing from focus (Hartej finds this rather hard to believe,) so that the research context itself could stand alone and be meaningfully explored using a methodology that was well established and universally accepted within the academic community. When it came time to analyze the data, I intended to employ a particular theoretical framework that would guide me through this process, and enable me to come away from the whole experience having contributed something to our understanding of how organizational dynamics can influence one school community's exploration of how it deals with student behaviour.

#### Making preeminent a systematic and emergent approach to qualitative inquiry

As I began to contemplate how best to go about this, I found myself preoccupied with one key methodological question: What system of inquiry would best enable me to explore my research questions in a manner that would bring a new understanding to them in relation to the everyday realities that unfold in an elementary school setting? There were a number of reasons that compelled me to situate my inquiry within this particular mindset. First and foremost, I wanted this investigative undertaking to somehow be embedded within the moment-to-moment events that emerge both expectedly and unexpectedly within the dynamic and complex social milieu that is found in an elementary school setting. It seemed obvious to me that I couldn't possibly uncover anything of any value on the various methods employed by an elementary school to deal with problem behaviour, if the approach I took to investigating it ultimately failed to capture the realities of everyday life in that setting.

It is worth noting that this methodological commitment I made at the outset of this undertaking would end up causing me considerable grief. As I would discover on numerous

occasions over the course of this investigative journey maintaining an approach to inquiry that is flexible and responsive to everyday developments can place considerable strain on one's efforts to remain true to a clear and concise system for exploring a particular research context. Achieving this balance compels the researcher to pay critical attention to how the investigative methods are situated within a prescribed logic of inquiry that is ever-evolving, and it is here that certain ethical and methodical challenges inevitably surface.

My studies in the academy have led me to come to the understanding that a process of inquiry must be foundationally situated within a clear framework that explains how and why certain data is being collected, and how it will be analyzed in an effort to uncover new or affirm existing knowledge in relation to the research questions. When this process is purposefully designed to be responsive and emergent rather than preconceived and static, the researcher is suddenly forced to confront a number of thorny methodological and ethical issues that are not so easily resolved. The researcher must interrogate his or her location in relation to an ever-evolving research context, including a constant awareness of how relationships with and between participants are changing as the investigative process unfolds, and what impact this is having on the data collection and analysis.

It is also important for the researcher to address what, if any, parameters can be meaningfully established to clearly delineate a beginning and end to the inquiry, and whether this somehow enables him or her to effectively hold still or take a snapshot of the research context in a manner that best serves the investigative purpose. Careful consideration must also be given to what, if any, measures of rigour, validity, and/or reliability should be applied as a means of establishing whether the research has integrity. Some of these questions are answered in part by the researcher's assertions as to whether or not the findings are to be regarded as representing an objective reality in any sense of the term. Assertions that must ultimately guide him or her in

making the critically important determination of if, and how, the findings can be generalized beyond the immediate research context.

### Drawing a distinction between positivism and a logic of inquiry

Almost all of the research I have been involved in to this point in my academic career has been of a qualitative nature, and there are a number of methodological irritations that seem to be constantly reappearing on my horizon. Primary among these is the tendency to diminish or disregard the need for a system or logic of inquiry based on the misperception that clearly establishing this somehow ascribes positivist principles to qualitative research. It is critically important to state from the outset that this particular research undertaking was purposefully situated outside of an experimental design. As such, it would be neither appropriate nor logical to approach an understanding of this investigation through empiricist principles that inform positivism. However, this does not eliminate nor even diminish the need for the method of inquiry to be situated within a system that brings to it a certain sense of logic. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the integrity of the research must essentially be measured by the logic on which the entire investigative undertaking is grounded.

I purposefully begin this chapter by highlighting the importance of establishing a logic of inquiry because it represented one of the fundamental challenges I confronted both at the beginning and at various key stages of this investigation. In many respects, I have come to embrace this research undertaking as representing a journey that comprised of a number of significant awakenings, many of which compelled me to carefully reexamine the process of inquiry to ensure that the system of logic on which it was based was still in tact. It would be misleading to conceal from the reader the truth that there were points in time when I felt that I had somehow lost my way. However, I strongly believe that it was this commitment to

maintaining a reflexive and responsive orientation that guided me in some of the most important decision-making that meaningfully shaped this study, including the decision to include a research question that examined the ethical and methodological challenges that go along with conducting research in this fashion.

### The journey ahead

In addition to outlining both the rationale and method for incorporating an autoethnographic component into this study, this chapter will also devote considerable energy to explicating a logic of inquiry that is firmly situated within the notion of ‘emergence,’ a concept that I believe corresponds closely to how individuals are naturally inclined to respond to the everyday curiosities that surface in their personal and professional lives. I will turn first to the task of clarifying the methodological meaning and intention that I ascribe to this notion of emergent inquiry. Included in this discussion will be a theoretical justification for purposefully incorporating autoethnography in a manner that promoted a disciplined self-awareness of the complex forces that were being consistently exerted on the decision-making that critically shaped the process of inquiry employed in this study.

This chapter will also outline in considerable detail both the epistemology and ontology that not only inform this approach to inquiry, but also represents my understanding of knowledge and the various ways in which it reveals itself or is awakened in accordance to how one chooses to be in the world. Following this I will explore the use of ethnotheatre as a tool for autoethnographic analysis, one that proved to be particularly effective in surfacing some of the ethical and methodological dilemmas I confronted at various stages of this research. This will set the stage for outlining in Chapter Four the social inquiry aspect of this research, including important details related to how participants were recruited for this study, the various ways in

which data was collected, the methods of analysis employed, and how the insights and recommendations that emerged from this process are explored throughout the fifth chapter as part of an unfolding narrative inquiry. All of this must be understood within a larger methodological design that is grounded on the notion of emergence. To this end, we now turn our attention to an exploration of what this actually means, and its implications for this particular investigative undertaking.

### Methodology as an everyday process of meaning making

As I reflect on the everyday occasions in which I seek to better understand myself and the world around me, I immediately note that there appears to be no prescribed process or logic that I consistently apply to the endless inquiries that naturally emerge out of my daily experiences. Instead, it would seem that I am generally inclined to respond quite impulsively to these curiosities without giving much, if any, thought to the methods I employ to investigate them. If this is indeed the case, I wonder what tendencies or approaches unconsciously shape the manner in which I engage in making sense of everything that goes on within and outside of me. Do I over-generalize new information to other contexts? Am I naturally inclined to leap to assumptions? Do I privilege or foreground interpretations that better serve my own personal interests, and disregard others that may undermine certain convictions I hold? Is there any rhyme or reason to the way in which I seek to uncover new knowledge about whatever it is that piques my interest?

Paying particular attention to how I am naturally inclined to informally investigate myself and the world around me represented a fundamental step in a process that eventually led me to employ an emergent methodology to research the behaviour pilot project at Crestview Elementary. What this process revealed to me was the conviction that reflexivity is a cornerstone



of qualitative inquiry, and that the integrity of a particular research undertaking can and should be measured in part by the degree to which the researcher makes explicit an ongoing self-awareness of how the system or logic of inquiry being employed is constantly under influence by ever changing forces.

In this respect, an emergent methodological design, among other things, commits the researcher to the onerous task of employing a process of inquiry that meaningfully incorporates these forces in ways that inform, but not wholly interrupt, our ability to uncover new knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. Doing this involves wrestling with a number of issues that have important philosophical, practical and ethical implications. An immense body of literature in each of these areas has accumulated a seemingly endless number of considerations to take into account when engaging in qualitative inquiry. In the pages ahead, I will examine a number of these with the intention of clearly outlining the investigative framework in which my research into one school community's journey to explore the way in which it deals with behaviour was purposefully situated.

#### The need for an autoethnographic component reveals itself along the investigate journey

I find it interesting to note that at the earliest stages of contemplating this research, the notion of including an autoethnographic component did not even enter into mind. After all, the obvious intention was to focus an investigation on the unfolding events that would occur within a social organization as a result of a specific circumstance, in this case a school's engagement in a behaviour pilot project. The fact that this was my own place of employment, and that it consisted of countless and diverse populations and perspectives clearly presented an additional challenge. As a qualitative researcher, my own relationship to this context and to the participants involved was certainly something I knew needed to be given consideration, but I had not

previously considered it to be an ongoing point of investigation in and of itself until I began to wrestle with some of the complexities that emerged along this investigative journey.

In this respect, my awareness of the need to incorporate into this research endeavour an autoethnographic component was hardly preconceived in the sense that I had not mapped it out in advance as a predetermined step in the process of conducting my research. Instead, it represented a signpost that I encountered along the way, one that spontaneously emerged, compelled me to stop and reconsider my orientation, and ultimately resulted in me approaching this inquiry from an additional perspective. Once I had finally responded to the nagging compulsion to include autoethnography in this research, a decision that effectively forced me to consistently examine my various locations and their influence on the process, I felt a distinct sense of being more in synch with a research context that was complex, dynamic and in a constant state of change.

This led me to the realization that all research essentially begins on a level that is somewhat autoethnographic in nature, since whatever curiosity is compelling the researcher to undertake an investigation is as much about him or her as it is about the actual subject itself. I strongly believe that how we arrive at places of inquiry about the world around us is quite significant, and careful consideration of this can only enhance the likelihood of us engaging in our research in a manner that is most meaningful to us and others.

Ellis and Bochner (1996) describe the autoethnographic process as providing (among other things) an opportunity for “self-conscious reflexivity” (p. 28). In the first chapter, I began retelling the story of the behaviour project’s origins, and incorporated into this a number of self-conscious reflections about the unfolding events that led me to research this initiative. It must be noted that these particular insights emerged from an analysis that was carried out at a considerably later date. From a chronological perspective, I had not by this point in time made a

formal commitment to integrate an autoethnographic component into the research. This should come as no surprise since much of the story retold in the first chapter predates the formal decision to conduct this study.

However, I have purposefully chosen to begin my narrative of these events at the earliest stage of the project's inception, in part to draw attention to how this research endeavour naturally emerged out of one of the everyday events that occur within my place of employment. Within the framework of an emergent methodological design, careful consideration of the origins of the research is as essential to the process of inquiry as are other stages of the investigation. As highlighted in the first chapter, exploring these early developments helped me to uncover certain aspects of my worldview in ways that further informed the theoretical framework used for this research. In this respect, the integrity of emergent inquiry largely depends on the willingness of the researcher to commit to an ongoing investigation of him or herself in relation to the research focus, one that begins at the earliest stages of contemplating the inquiry and carries through to its ultimate conclusion.

Doing so acknowledges that throughout the entire process the researcher is “dynamically involved in the creation of culture itself” (Lionnet, 1989, p. 102). This is particularly true of research that involves a member of a school community studying the way in which he, his teaching colleagues, and the administration engage in an initiative that explores how they individually and collectively deal with student behaviour. As an active part of that system, the researcher represents a potential agent for both change and resistance to it, as much as any other participant in the study.

### Deconstructing the notion of 'holding still' the research context

There are other tangible benefits of incorporating autoethnography into an emergent investigative framework. It encourages careful consideration of how a temporal beginning and ending to the research can be authentically defined. Ethical protocols encourage researchers to be precise and transparent with respect to the point at which a particular process of inquiry commences. Theoretically, this makes perfect sense since it provides everyone involved with the opportunity to grant or decline informed consent well in advance of any participation in the investigative undertaking.

With the behaviour pilot project, this transition turned out to be somewhat murkier, subtle, and more gradual than I had anticipated would be the case with my doctoral research. Of course, I could have chosen to conveniently mark the beginning of the research endeavor at the point in time that the pilot project was formally introduced into Crestview, one that would represent a much clearer and more concise point of investigative entry. But doing so would conceal a key aspect of the journey, one that would become integral to gaining valuable insight into the challenges of conducting research as an insider. Identifying the point in time that events crossed over a threshold that marked the beginning of the investigation involves wrestling with the complex question of when my role in the behaviour pilot project expanded beyond one of a district employee invited by committee members to provide input on a new initiative to that of a researcher intent on investigating some aspect of its design and implementation.

In reality, this may simply reflect the point in time at which I began to regard the notes I recorded at the PBS Meetings as research artifacts. This would loosely mark a point in time when I began to pay attention to what was going on within and around me from an investigative perspective. The earliest indication of a personal reflection that suggests this can be found in the

notes that I took at the PBS committee meetings that were held in late November and early December of 2007. Seemingly, it was not until the decision was made that the project would embrace a grass-roots approach that these notes reflect anything other than a record of who would be responsible for whatever tasks needed to be done. There is no indication of anything beyond this other than the occasional question or remark written into the margins of these notes. Comments such as: “need to overcome internal resistance,” “too top-down – some staff won’t buy-in,” and “Why PBS exclusively?” These seem to represent the mere beginnings of critical reflection on my part.

However, as the committee moved closer to accepting the notion of taking a more grass-roots approach, these comments begin to dominate my notes pushing more pragmatic details to the margins in order to make room for my personal thoughts and feelings about the project. In this respect, the investigative point of entry from an autoethnographic standpoint arguably begins on an unconscious level marked by a gradual and subtle increase of critical reflection on my part until I reach a point of realization that the project has very real investigative potential. In this respect an integral part of this emergent inquiry involved excavating my own personal thoughts and feelings, a process that Ellis (1999) identifies as fundamentally autoethnographic in nature. Not only should this pertain to ongoing developments throughout the project, but also include those that predated the point in time that I began this formal investigation.<sup>15</sup>

I highlight this because it effectively deconstructs the notion that this research represents a snapshot of a place in time at a given location when certain circumstances were in place. It is true that the project itself occurred within one school community for a specific duration of time.

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<sup>15</sup> My conceptualization of this process is outlined in Table I on p. 59.

-TABLE 1-

THEORIZING EMERGENT AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

**STAGE I - Informal personal inquiry: Pre-research ‘point of entry’**

- Individual may be compelled by a personal or professional curiosity emerging out of everyday lived experiences. Curiosity is likely awakened holistically, typically involving some degree of emotional engagement.
- Curiosity may provoke informal personal reflection in the form of pondering, daydreaming, or self talk. Initial reflections about the curiosity are informed by existing knowledge and personal biases, but the individual feels compelled to seek out additional information that may uncover new insight or understanding.
- The individual may begin informally engaging others about the subject to test its meaningfulness beyond personal relevance. Included in this may be a reciprocal sharing of perspectives that further develop key questions related to the context.
- Individual may develop a heightened attention to related information in his or her surrounding world, and begin seeing new information through an informal investigative lens. Further consideration may be given to specific research questions that would lead to uncovering new insight or understanding. Individual may begin to take note of artifacts related to the topic that could be collected and analyzed. Both informal and formal investigative approaches may be contemplated.
- Curiosity dissipates over time and/or is displaced by other interests.

Or

- Individual decides to formally engage in a process of inquiry related to the curiosity

**STAGE II - Formal Engagement in process of ‘self-conscious reflexivity’<sup>16</sup>**

- Individual as ‘researcher’ commits to a formal process of inquiry, and begins an autoethnographic examination of self in relation to research context. Included in this is an investigation into why the individual feels compelled by the topic.
- Researcher develops a heightened self awareness of how he or she is inclined or predisposed to make sense of information related to the subject based on his or her various locations and the sociocultural, historical and political forces that shape them. Careful consideration is given to where power is situated within the research context, and how the researcher may be consciously or unconsciously inclined to use research as a vehicle to reinforce, resist, or transform the existing system. Part of this self-exploration includes asking critical sociocultural and ethical questions such as: Who am I in relation to this research context? Am I the right person to be conducting this inquiry?
- If appropriate to continue, researcher begins formal process of excavating personal artifacts related to the research context. This may also involve exploring public domain documents or the creating of one’s own narrative in relation to the research context. Researcher refrains from collecting artifacts from others without full and informed consent.
- Researcher makes the informed decision as to whether the inquiry should remain exclusively autoethnographic in nature or extend into a shared pursuit of knowledge that entails the formal involvement of others as co-researchers and/or participants.
- Researcher develops one or more research questions to explore within a system of emergent inquiry that is reflexive and responsive to ongoing developments. This system allows for the researchers to cycle back and forth between autoethnographic and social forms of inquiry as compelled by self-conscious reflexivity.

<sup>16</sup> Ellis’ (1996) notion of self-conscious reflexivity represents a key orientation for the researcher throughout this process.

It is also true that research participants were given clear parameters as to when their involvement in this research formally began and ended. However, it would be shortsighted and somewhat misleading for the reader to be given the impression that the recounting of events, and reporting on recommendations and insights that emerged from this study, were not extensively impacted by forces that existed beyond these clearly marked boundaries of chronology and scope.

In this respect, this research must ultimately be understood as a ‘stitching together’ of what the data analysis revealed to be as most essential and meaningful. The reader will note that the various contexts in which some of these ‘findings’ emerged are located outside of the timeline and scope of Crestview’s behaviour pilot project. This should make perfect sense since any attempt to present this research as though it was somehow bracketed out from lived experiences that unfolded outside of the immediate research context would inevitably come across as artificially contrived.

In fact, to regard this as such would fundamentally contradict what we know to be true of sociocultural, historical and political forces in that their influences are not neatly separated into various contexts but instead spill over into one another from the countless personal and professional experiences that unfold as part of our everyday lives. An investigative process that implies that the researcher and participants can, on arriving each day at the site of research, somehow sanitize themselves in a manner that washes clean all of these other influential forces actually betrays core fundamentals of qualitative research.

Having said this, I need to acknowledge the resiliency that positivist legacies from my own educational experiences initially had on my ability to deconstruct these artificially contrived notions of time and scope as they related to this research context. It is somewhat embarrassing to note that in the first few weeks of this study, I found myself purposefully pushing aside or

disregarding both historical and current events at Crestview, based on the rationale that at first glance they appeared to exist outside of the prescribed timeline and/or focus for this research.

For example, the fact that the staff at Crestview had emphatically rejected a proposal to pilot a similar program several years earlier, and had instead invested in a behaviour system that they felt was working effectively until resources at the school were cut, did not initially appear to me to represent data that should be incorporated into this research. After all, that was several years ago, and the philosophy and structure on which it was based differed considerably from the approaches that were being encouraged as part of the current pilot. Fortunately, there came a point early on in the study when I overcame this compulsion to push aside or disregard very meaningful events that were occurring on a day-to-day basis both within and outside of the school in a vain effort to strictly contain the focus of the study to preconceived parameters, as though all of these other happenings were no more than extraneous variables that needed to be somehow controlled or marginalized.

An integral part of the methodological restructuring that enabled me to let go of these positivist trappings involved revitalizing the autoethnographic process that I had initially intended to neatly set aside after interrogating my various locations at the outset of the research. I became aware that the investigative undertaking was more about me than I had been originally conceptualized, and that I had a distinct responsibility as the researcher to consistently step back and be made accountable for my own biases and predispositions, while at the same time looking beyond the immediate context of time and location in order to gain greater insight into how power and authority were organizationally situated and acting as a force that consistently exerted an extraordinary amount of influence on the project. I would eventually come to regard this within a system of inquiry that compelled me as the researcher to continuously cycle back and forth between autoethnographic and social investigative orientations in a systematic method, one



that was primarily guided by a critical responsiveness to emergent events essentially informed by Ellis and Buchner's (1996) notion of self-conscious reflexivity.

### Theorizing knowing and how it relates to ways of being in the world

Before describing further other essential features of this emergent investigative framework, it will be necessary to establish a clear understanding of my location, specifically as it relates to theories of knowing. The following section is extensively devoted to this task as it explores the literature that informs a number of distinct but interrelated theories of how we come to know about ourselves and the world around us. These fundamentally inform the epistemology in which this research is theoretically situated. This is intended to help the reader better understand some of the core philosophies that guided me from the earliest stages of conceptualizing this inquiry to the final stages of retelling the story as part of a narrative. Hopefully this will provide considerable insight into the theoretical underpinnings that consistently informed investigative decision-making throughout this research endeavour, including, but not limited to, critical choices about how various forms of data were collected and analyzed, the manner in which the research 'findings' and recommendations are represented, the arguments presented for how research of this nature should have its integrity measured, and the purposeful use of certain literary devices as a vehicle to evoke other forms of meaning-making for both the researcher and the reader. Some attention will also be given to how these theories inform the use of narrative both as a form of dissemination, and a process of analysis that facilitates writing oneself into a place of 'knowing.'

### The role of embodied knowledge within emergent inquiry

The responsiveness and reflexivity that lies at the heart of an emergent inquiry is intricately related to how one theorizes the ways in which we come to know about ourselves and the world around us. Exploring one's core philosophies with respect to this is essential because the researcher must make explicit the various ways in which he or she believes that knowledge is acquired (or awakened) so that there can be a sense of confidence in, and commitment to, the process that guides investigative decision-making as it relates to all aspects of the research endeavour. Doing so essentially answers such fundamental questions as: How will I know when something significant has occurred during the moment-to-moment events that unfold within the research context? From where does this sense of knowing originate? Does intuition or 'gut instinct' play any role in this, and if so, is this something the researcher should embrace or guard against, or both, and how?

Were it not for the resiliency of positivist legacies in research, it might even be taken for granted that an unfolding and context-embedded investigative journey is inevitably guided by the multitude of thoughts, senses, emotions and intuitions that both researchers and participants bring to each and every moment of the experience. In fact, a methodology of this nature establishes much of its integrity on recognizing and embracing the fact that investigations are meaningfully and holistically shaped by "researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies and spirits" (Ellis, 1999, p. 169). Recognizing this from the outset stakes an important claim that challenges rationalist and empiricist conceptualizations of knowledge and inquiry that have the potential to dominate academic spaces. Even within our public education system, from the primary grades clear through to senior secondary, knowledge is primarily regarded as something that is acquired from external sources, and that it can be measured for its accuracy and retention

and how it is further transferred or applied to new contexts. The philosophies on which these understandings are based privilege rationalist epistemologies in ways that encourage us to perceive learning as a process that exclusively takes place in the mind.

Ted Aoki (1990), in his call to “inspirit the curriculum,” critically calls into question a BC Ministry of Education document that describes “the educated person [as] one who is a thinking individual, capable of making independent decisions based on analysis and reason” (p. 364). Aoki points out that from this perspective the human capacity to awaken knowledge is exclusively defined as a mental process committed to empirically investigating the world around us. This modernist mindset compels us to regard our senses and the feelings that arise from them with guarded suspicion since they are so easily susceptible to subjective distortion (Descartes, 1637 / 1998).

My lived experiences as a counsellor, former school administrator, classroom teacher, and life-long learner in both formal and informal settings have, over time, led me to reject the empiricist notion that the mind is somehow superior and distinct from all other aspects of the self in terms of knowledge acquisition. I have a hard time accepting Descartes’ assertion that “body, shape, extension, movement, and place are all chimeras” from which one can somehow consciously separate in order to strip away senses or feelings that may somehow distort or betray reality (p. 63). Instead, I prefer to envision meaningful learning and inquiry to be much more of an embodied and holistic endeavour, one that acknowledges that we come to know through means that extend well beyond any narrowly constructed definition of the mind.

In assuming this position, I consider it particularly important to remain mindful of John Searle’s (1984) caution to not allow an orientation of this nature to “downgrade the status of mental entities” (p.15). Instead, we must understand and appreciate the mind on a level that acknowledges the full extent of its features, including those that illustrate that body and mind are

essentially one in the same. Within this perspective, senses and feelings are not to be merely regarded as separate entities from the mind. In essence ‘self’ as a whole cannot be distinguished into separate parts. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1992) asserts, “my body does not appear to me as an object, a set of qualities and characteristics to link up with one another and thus understood” (p. 102).

Clearly the embodied self must be appreciated for the complex and multidimensional role that it plays in terms of our neurodevelopment and the evolution of our consciousness. In a 2006 keynote address, Merlin Donald noted that we humans “are extraordinarily good at mapping things that we see in the world, events, on to our bodies and producing reenactments of those events.” Donald makes a convincing case for the fundamental role this plays in our human development, including the way in which we relate to one another and make sense of our surrounding world. Lee Brown (2004) highlights how this notion is a hallmark of Indigenous epistemologies when he notes that “recent developments in cognitive science uphold the Aboriginal worldview that thinking and feeling are not only connected but that emotion plays the major role in the functioning of mind and memory” (p.1).

I strongly believe that this highlights the fact that we cannot afford to depend exclusively on reason or empirical methods as the sole means by which new knowledge is uncovered, since aspects of these holistic ‘reenactments’ seemingly defy such measures. Because emotions, senses, and intuition are all intricately a part of the way in which we come to know, it is essential that they be recognized as active agents that can meaningfully inform the direction in which an investigation should evolve. In fact, it is exactly this meaningfulness felt toward a particular curiosity or circumstance that is generally indicated by a heightening of these features of the embodied self, and in this regard, may help guide the researcher and participants to better focus on that which is of greatest relevance within a particular research context.

### The role of metaphysical knowledge within emergent inquiry

From a research standpoint, this understanding that knowledge is embodied commits the researcher to seek out and embrace the various intangible channels through which an individual comes to a place of knowing. By compelling us to move beyond drawing rigid distinctions between thoughts and feelings, or privileging one over the other, we are able to open ourselves up to consider knowledge in the various forms it may take and the potential sources from which it may originate.

It has been my experience that things I come to know through events or activities that provoke a more holistic understanding, one in which thoughts, feelings and senses are all interactively ‘awakened,’ tend to have greater meaningfulness and resiliency than that which stimulates my thoughts alone. In this respect, I believe that most people can identify various moments in their lives when they were conscious of the fact that the event or experience they were engaged in would have a transformative impact on them. I would argue that these essentially represent moments of inquiry, ones that are characteristically holistic in nature, providing us with a distinct sense that the entirety of self has become illuminated. I purposefully choose to reference these learning experiences as ‘awakenings’ or ‘illuminations,’ with the intention of situating certain types of knowledge and inquiry within a metaphysical framework.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to clarify my own interpretation of metaphysical knowledge. Brent Davis (2004), in describing the genealogy of the term, acknowledges that its modern day usage can vary considerably in terms of meaning. Platonic traditions situate the term in relation to the realm of ideal and universal constants to which humans, as imperfect beings, cannot directly interact with, but strive to access through various mythical and metaphorical channels. In this respect, metaphysical is understood to mean that

which exists beyond the physical self. Although my use of the term is meant to reflect this notion that certain forms of knowledge exist beyond rationalist accessibility, I wish to break from an emphasis on the metaphysical paradigm being “deeply suspicious of, or otherwise ignoring, our bodies” (p.195).

This is of utmost importance in terms of establishing a rationale for employing embodied forms of inquiry since it highlights from the outset my conviction that some forms of knowledge possess archetypal qualities that are universal in nature, and manifested in embodied ways that transcend empirical verification. As Davis notes, these forms (which he further categorizes as *gnosis*<sup>17</sup>) “exceed human capacity to understand in explicit and direct terms,” and instead require “such figurative devices as myth, parable, fable, allegory, personification and metaphor...to peer back at the sources of the universe, life, humanity and civilization” (p. 27). Davis argues that these forms of knowledge are not to be taken literally or analyzed through an empirical lens. Their essence exists in their endlessly interpretative nature, and as such, must be accessed through other means.

It is on this argument that the rationale for embodied and emergent forms of inquiry is foundationally based. Therefore, my commitment methodologically is that we come to know in ways that extend beyond the natural world, and that I believe these are contemplations best expressed through an ongoing inquiry that is at peace with the reality of never reaching absolute certainty. In this respect, I feel a need to extend my own sense of inquiry beyond Platonic (380E

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<sup>17</sup>Davis bifurcates this term *gnosis* with *episteme*, the latter of which he describes as related to more practical “everyday, know- how...focused on the immediate and conscious aspects of experience” (p. 30). Other interpretations conceptualize *episteme* somewhat differently suggesting that it represents “eternal truths beyond their materialization in concrete situations” (Greenwood & Levin, 2005, p. 50). This latter definition is more apt to be contrasted with *techne*, a form of knowledge that is more “concrete, variable and context dependent” (p. 50). For the purpose of this paper, I will use Davis’ interpretation of *episteme* to represent knowledge that is practical in nature and generally learned through concrete and explicit instruction. However, my argument here will focus on the fact that emergent approaches to inquiry are equally well suited to ‘uncover’ forms of knowledge classified by Davis as *gnosis* and *metaphysical*.

/1981) traditions that place considerable emphasis on employing reason as a means of verifying the metaphysical nature of knowledge, choosing instead to embrace and be at peace with that which is unknowable and informs an ‘inquiry of infinite possibilities.’ It is a position that is largely inspired by Ted Aoki (1990):

A truly educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude and mortality, acknowledging the grace by which educator and educated are allowed to dwell in the present that embraces past experiences but is open to possibilities yet to come (p. 365).

A similar sentiment is expressed by Albert Einstein (1930, as cited in Sagan, 1982):

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, maintaining itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive forms-this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong to the ranks of the devoutly religious (p. 140).

When considering certain forms of knowledge within a metaphysical context, it is important that I clarify the way in which I understand these things to be universal in nature. A potential contradiction exists when we consider the cross cultural implications of suggesting that certain forms of knowledge are in some way experienced by everyone across the passages of time. Increasingly, I find myself drawn to theorists who help me to better appreciate the extent to which there are different ways of knowing ourselves and the world around us, and that these are profoundly shaped by complex, sociocultural and metaphysical forces.

Wade Davis (2001) in his book, *Light at the Edge of the World*, describes the earth as being surrounded by an “ethnosphere” that comprises of multiple languages and cultures, each of which represents a distinct understanding of such notions as self, universe and knowledge. He argues that it is these multiple realities that give form to the world around us. In this respect, Davis encourages us to recognize that the disappearance of over half of the world’s languages in

recent history represents more than just a cultural-linguistic depletion. It marks the gradual disintegration of human capacity to understand ourselves and the universe. He writes:

Every view of the world that fades away, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life and reduces the human repertoire of adaptive responses to the common problems that confront us all. Knowledge is lost, not only of the natural world but of realms of the spirit, intuitions about the meaning of the cosmos, insights into the very nature of existence (p. 15).

In terms of theorizing knowing, Wade Davis' argument highlights the complexity of the sociocultural and metaphysical fabric within which knowledge is embedded. Advances in science and technology cannot compensate for that which is lost with the disappearance of a particular way of knowing. Davis provides countless examples of this throughout the world. Indigenous tribes of the Amazon Delta conceptualize knowing in a manner that is profoundly distinct from that which is found in a North American classroom. Despite years spent living among these people, Davis highlights certain seemingly unbridgeable gaps he encountered in terms of knowledge sharing, many of which, he argues, go well beyond linguistic limitations. Davis discovered that in many cases knowing is embodied on levels that others cannot simply acquire through communication, exposure or experience.

This should compel us to acknowledge that certain forms of knowledge both originate from, and are awakened within, complex and profound metaphysical and sociocultural contexts. Indigenous epistemologies highlight diverse ways of knowing that are in direct contrast to Eurocentric frameworks (Ball, 2004; Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Ramstad et al., 2007; Smith, 2001), while at the same time, challenging certain conceptualizations of metaphysical knowledge as universal. Rather, from a metaphysical standpoint, an important aspect of Indigenous knowledge is situated more in terms of that which is passed on by the generations of elders who have gone on before. On a profound and perhaps inexplicable level, certain forms of



knowledge are communicated seemingly exclusively to the children of its people and do not extend beyond this context in a manner that one might regard as universal. Distinct from modernist notions of knowledge being passed along from one to another through overt and objectively measurable methods, this epistemology suggests that knowing is shared from the other world to this one, by elders who continue to influence generations that come after them.

Acknowledging metaphysical knowledge encourages researchers and participants to consider the possibility that new directions of inquiry may in fact unfold within a given research context through the influence of the elders both past and present in ways that may only be accessible through culturally embedded channels. Although this may seem somewhat of an unconventional approach to studying one school community's journey to explore how it deals with student behaviour, I choose to locate it within the realm of possibilities that may influence and inform the diverse and often mystical ways through which people uncover insights that lead to new understanding. This informs emergent inquiry by conceptualizing it as a process that is less concerned with empirically validating the means through which the path of discovery is shaped, and instead pays greater attention to embodied indicators of meaningfulness, both individual and collective, and a willingness by researchers and participants to reflexively respond to these in ways that enable the inquiry to evolve and transform.

#### Ethnotheatre as a means of autoethnographic exploration

On several occasions throughout the recounting of this research endeavour, the story takes on the form of a play. A number of purposes are served by employing this literary device. In recent years, a growing number of researchers from various disciplines have turned to theatre as a means of investigating, representing, and disseminating aspects of their research (Belliveau, 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Mienczakowski, 1995; Saldana, 1999). Using approaches that have been

variously described as performance ethnography, ethnotheatre, ethnodrama, and arts-based inquiry, researchers have demonstrated that new knowledge can be uncovered, presented, and disseminated powerfully and effectively through embodied forms of engagement. Experiencing ‘theatricalized’ data that has been collected from the research context invites the reader (or audience member, if the work is actually performed) to engage holistically and dialogically in the process of making meaning of that which has emerged from the investigative undertaking.

To a certain extent, I have purposefully employed ethnotheatre here as a vehicle for mythologizing certain aspects of this investigative journey. In this sense, it recounts the story of what took place during this research in terms of what Joseph Campbell (1991) describes as “what never was, but always is” (as cited in Harpur, 2004, p. 17). If the reader is not epistemologically primed for this, he or she may understandably become trapped in the question: “Well, did it really happen or not?” The answer of course is both “yes” and “no.” The use of ethnotheatre is intended to awaken in the reader a resonance with certain dynamics related to the research context without it committing to a literal or factual recounting of a particular event. There are a number of reasons behind this. The first is to explicitly deconstruct the notion that fact and fiction are easily discernible. Post structural sensibilities remind us that even if I attempted to retell the story staying ‘true’ to every detail as I remembered it, the result would still only produce something that at best represents a highly subjective and interpretive representation of ‘reality.’

Consequently, purposefully situating mythologized scenes at various points in this thesis is partly intended to heighten the reader’s self awareness of this. Not often enough do we make explicit the fact that when research is disseminated, regardless of what form it takes, the understandings that the reader takes away are profoundly and dynamically influenced by a dialogic process of meaning making. Ethnotheatre has the potential to make this dialogical

process more explicit. It invites awakenings or illuminations in the reader by replacing the question of “did this really happen or not?” with other questions such as: “Are the dynamics (re)presented here familiar to me?” “Which of the (re)presented perspectives am I most inclined to align myself with and why?” “Does this story bring a new awareness to me about the dynamics involved in these kinds of situations?”

In this sense, ethnotheatre has true reflexive potential which highlights another key purpose for its use at various stages of this research as a tool of analysis for autoethnographic exploration. The actual process of theatricalizing autoethnographic data represents in and of itself a form of analysis similar to that which is found in narrative inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Both provide the researcher the opportunity to write him or herself into a place of knowing and meaning-making. For the purposes of this research, the autoethnographic exploration is intentionally focused on surfacing the various ethical and methodological challenges I confronted while conducting research in my own place of employment. In some instances, I include this within sections of text that are identified as ‘self-conscious reflections.’ On other occasions, this process seems insufficient as the dilemmas involved require a vehicle for giving voice to various personal and professional loyalties that are in conflict with one another. Ethnotheatre provides the mechanism for carrying out this dialogue in ways that enable me to actually include the reader in an analytical process of making meaning of autoethnographic data.

In this sense, both the researcher and reader may experience certain awakenings related to various happenings that occurred at different stages along the investigative journey. The so-called accuracy of how these events are retold is completely irrelevant, and in this sense, this approach extends considerably beyond conventional forms of inquiry. In order to embrace the purpose and intention behind this, both the author and reader must place certain faith and value

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<sup>18</sup> Narrative Inquiry is discussed in great detail at the end of Chapter Four.

in a metaphysical process that is not empirically verifiable. Of far greater priority is the opportunity for each person to make-meaning in ways that are deeply embedded in our own individual, sociocultural locations and in a manner that may or may not resonate with our own personal and professional lived experiences.

### Whose story is this anyway?

In the fifth chapter of this work the findings of this research are embedded in the retelling of an investigative journey that one school community undertook to explore new and existing approaches to promoting positive behaviour. Partly for reasons discussed in the previous section, I have chosen to employ a narrative framework to present this research in a manner that is simultaneously autoethnographic and action-research oriented. The reader would do well to regard it first and foremost as a story, a tale of inquiry if you will. The compelling question of whose story this is has significant ethical and methodological implications that are periodically explored throughout the retelling of the tale.

However, I begin by inviting the reader to initially regard this as my story. Previously in this chapter, I presented the argument for why I believe that all research endeavours can be regarded as initially originating on an individual level, one that is distinctly marked by a person's point of entry into a particular investigative context. Regardless of whether someone is involved at the inception of a research project or joins the study when it is well underway, the decision to take part is made on an individual level, and is well worth considering as a potentially valuable piece of the investigative puzzle.

The parts of this story that are recounted as part of its autoethnographic component are designed first and foremost to address the research question related to the ethical and methodological dilemmas that occur when an individual attempts to conduct research in his or

her own place of employment. The self conscious reflections that address this question throughout the report surface fundamental questions about the research and my relationship to it: Who am I? What is my real purpose for embarking on this investigative journey? What do I hope to achieve by telling this story? How does my worldview bias my approach to this investigation? How do my various locations (personal, professional, academic, sociocultural, historical, political) consciously or unconsciously shape the way in which I engage in this research? Should I be conducting this research in the first place? How do I want the reader to perceive me throughout this story? What questions, unknown at the outset of this undertaking, may yet emerge during the course of this investigative journey?

In terms of research integrity the methodological design employed for this research depends heavily on my willingness to maintain awareness of these questions throughout the entire investigative process. This entails going considerably beyond the researcher's obligation to acknowledge his or her biases at the outset. Instead it makes explicit the fact that self and other are inextricably linked in complex ways before, throughout and after an investigative undertaking of this nature. With this firmly in mind, we now turn our attention to the delicate and sacred process of involving others in this research.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### DESIGN AND RATIONALE FOR AN EMERGENT PROCESS OF INQUIRY – PART II

#### Theorizing social inquiry within a framework of existing research paradigms

We have to this point examined how an emergent process of inquiry differs from other methodologies that are characterized by prescriptive and preconceived investigative steps designed to exclusively address pre-stated research questions. We have established a philosophical framework for understanding this investigative approach that includes autoethnographic, metaphysical, and sociocultural perspectives. The initial stage of this process has been described as one that is essentially individual in focus, compelling the researcher to first reflect on the research context from his or her own personal location before determining whether or not to proceed into a co-investigative space. Perhaps most importantly, the need for an ongoing process of self-conscious reflexivity throughout the entire investigative undertaking has been highlighted. The next step involves taking a close and critical look at the second stage of this emergent inquiry, examining how it is informed by and situated within other research paradigms that share related characteristics.

In terms of identifying theorists who have contributed significantly to a methodology of this nature, it would be worthwhile to note some of the history in terms of how new forms of qualitative research evolved beyond their own conventional conceptions of rigour and objectivity. In 1985, Lincoln and Guba published their seminal piece, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, a book that effectively deconstructed many of the principles of positivism that were continuing to constrain qualitative inquiry. Most importantly, this work represented an important step in legitimizing within academic circles research that is not rigidly contrived or pre-conceived either in terms of the questions on which the inquiry is based, or the means by which these

investigations are conducted. Lincoln and Guba, in a concerted effort to counter criticism that this work did not represent disciplined inquiry, outlined how a naturalistic approach builds on other viable research paradigms to effectively address certain methodological gaps commonly found in positivist-based inquiry.

Of course, considerable debate waged on about the researcher location in terms of the inquiry and the ability to generate results that were free from subjective bias. A substantial turning point occurred when qualitative researchers themselves stopped feeling defensive about a lack of objectivity in their work, and began to embrace fully and comprehensively the immense value and integrity that is added to an investigation when participants and researchers include, as an integral part of the inquiry, an ongoing examination of their relationships to themselves and each other, and how these are intricately connected to addressing the research questions at hand.

This represented an important foundation for conceptualizing inquiry as a form of ‘social practice’ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Human relationships in research went from being regarded as a liability for potential bias that could distort findings, to an actual form of inquiry that represented a powerful vehicle for understanding the complex interpersonal and sociocultural forces at play within all research that is related to the human condition. Accordingly, this shift compelled researchers to acknowledge the complex and ever evolving nature of these human interactions, which in turn cultivated a greater appreciation for flexible and responsive methodologies that could similarly evolve and transform along with these relationships. Notions of rigour and the ability to generalize findings had to be significantly reframed in order to foreground an appreciation for multiple, non-static perspectives of reality, and a resonance with (not replication of) lived experiences that are at the same time similar and different from our own.

It should be noted that although Lincoln and Guba's (1985) efforts contributed greatly to substantiating the purpose and value of this type of inquiry, their work meaningfully supplemented that of countless others who had for decades been struggling to emancipate inquiry from rigid positivist designs. The history of this struggle is too expansive to respectfully review here, but it is well worth noting that structuralist and post structuralist theories, particularly those which highlighted the profound and complex role that language and culture play in constructing meaning provided a substantial basis on which to legitimize the value of approaching inquiry in ways that abandon rationalist and empiricist epistemologies.

The evolution of *Action Research* in its various forms represents one significant strand of qualitative research that significantly informs the logic behind the emergent investigative framework employed for this research. Robin McTaggart (1997), in his comprehensive look at this form of research, credits social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1946), as coining the term in English usage, and contributing significantly to its contemporary conceptualization. Research that Lewin and his colleagues carried out in relation to treating psychological and social disorders among soldiers returning from the battlefields and prisoner-of-war camps of the Second World War were noted for being the first to combine the role of researcher and participant into one, by allowing therapists themselves to study the ongoing process of supporting these veterans (Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1996). Clearly this represented a fundamental methodological shift from the prevailing notion that the researcher must at all times separate him or herself from actively participating in the research so as to maintain a level of objectivity necessary to ensure that the findings would be rigorously unbiased.

In their 2005 contribution to the third edition of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Kemmis and McTaggart review various configurations of action research to highlight subtle but important differences between several approaches. Among these is *Participatory*



*Action Research* which fundamentally emphasizes a community-based orientation in which the research endeavour is genuinely conceptualized as a shared pursuit. Typically, exploring social organizations and taking action to resolve problems that emerge within them represents the focus for this type of inquiry. Within this investigative framework, researchers and participants devote equal (if not more) attention to exploring paths of resolution through ‘action,’ as they do gaining an in depth analysis of the problem itself or the system or organization it is impacting.

Among the other forms of action-oriented inquiry that Kemmis and McTaggart identify is *Classroom Action Research*. Of particular importance within this approach is the emphasis given to “teacher’s self-understandings and judgments” (p. 561) and the manner in which this guides learning in the classroom. According to Kemmis and McTaggart this has fuelled criticism of this methodology as being anti-theoretical in nature. However, its value is generally measured in relation to what is gained by exploring how teacher and student perspectives shape the evolution of change both within classroom and school-wide systems.

A fundamental and underlying philosophy found in both participatory and classroom action research paradigms is that the researcher is best situated to help inform and shape the emerging inquiry along with participants from a location that exists within the research context. Of critical importance is how this location transforms the relationship between researcher and participant to promote a shared pursuit of knowledge through a form of *phronesis*. Brent Flyvbjerg (2001) cites the Aristotelian notion of this term as a process through which actions are determined by collaborative knowledge construction. The implications for research are significant, as Greenwood and Levin (2005) note:

The sources of *phronesis* are collaborative arenas for knowledge development in which the professional researcher’s knowledge is combined with the local knowledge of the stakeholders in defining the problem to be addressed. Together, they design and implement the research that needs to be done to understand the problem. They then design the actions to improve the situation together, and they evaluate the

adequacy of what was done. If they are not satisfied, they cycle through the process again until the results are satisfactory to all parties (p.51).

This process ultimately results in what Greenwood and Levin describe as the emergence of *collective knowing*, something they regard as one of the most significant features of action-related research. Through *phronesis* a mutually beneficial relationship between researcher and participant unfolds, resulting in a meaningful and emerging collaboration. The researcher is gradually able to access the perspective of the ‘insider,’ while participants over time increasingly regard themselves as researchers and activists rather than simply a source through which data is collected. The process itself has the potential to instill participants with both a desire and capacity to play an active role in directing the inquiry. It is the development of this ever important sense of agency that in the end determines the resiliency and meaningfulness of the research.

This kind of investigative approach is driven by a reflexive process that compels researchers and participants to remain ever mindful of an ultimate objective to establish and maintain an independent and emergent framework of inquiry within the social system. This is well expressed within a *participatory action research* design, where significant emphasis is placed on the “deliberate overlapping of action and reflection designed to allow changes in plans for action as people learn from their own experience. Put simply, participatory action research is the way in which groups of people can organize the conditions under which they learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others” (McTaggart, 1997, p. 27).

In addition to considering the dynamics that unfold between researcher and participant within an emergent investigative framework, it is equally important to pay careful attention to processes that naturally occur within the social system itself. As noted earlier, emergent inquiry is designed to encourage researchers to initially reflect on how and why they are compelled by a

particular curiosity before cultivating a co-investigative space. In the same vein, careful attention must also be given to the compelling forces that are at play within a social system, and how they relate to knowledge acquisition and inquiry. To better understand these dynamics we briefly turn our attention to complexity theory.

The integral role that diversity plays in terms of self-organizing systems serves as an essential foundation to the complexivist epistemology, one that fundamentally embraces the importance of emergence in the acquisition of knowledge. Brent Davis (2004) writes, “Complexivists point out that, for reasons not yet fully understood, complex unities emerge spontaneously from the co-specifying activities of agents” (p. 104). In order for this co-activity to flourish, Davis argues that there must be some degree of diversity between the agents involved. In this sense, the uncovering of new knowledge is reliant upon an adaptive, non-static, and non-homogenous system.

Such a system, Davis argues, thrives on a certain degree of decentralized control, a notion that has far reaching implications for research, particularly when it is intended to examine how organizational dynamics may impact individual and collective motivation for change. In addition to substantiating an approach that does not prescribe inquiry to a process that consists of using pre-determined methods to address pre-stated questions, complexity theory underscores the importance of understanding that knowledge acquisition can best occur in environments where careful attention is given to the constraints placed on participants. As Davis points out, this does not imply “an anything goes attitude,” but rather the establishment of conditions that “provide enough organization to orient [participants’] actions while allowing sufficient openness for the expression of the varieties of experience, ability, and interest represented in any social group” (p.169).

This should compel researchers to rethink how they situate themselves in relation to their inquiry. All attempts to actively direct the investigation must be fully acknowledged for their potential to work against decentralizing forces that naturally occur within self organizing systems. For this reason, the researcher cannot afford to presume a location that exists outside of the research context in a vain attempt to attain some sort of objective vantage point, but nor should he or she represent a centralizing force within the system that may interfere with “the co-specifying actions of agents.” Doing either would potentially place undue weight and distinction to the contributions he or she makes to the emerging investigation. Instead, the integrity of this form of research is dependent upon the researcher’s capacity to be naturally immersed within the self organizing system and contribute to the unfolding inquiry from this location in a manner that is balanced and in harmony with the diverse and complex forces within it.

Clearly this presents the researcher with a fine line to walk throughout the investigation and further underscores the importance of him or her engaging in self-conscious reflexivity prior to and throughout the research process in ways that help the researcher determine when it is best to ‘let-go’ of directing the inquiry. In fact, doing so is particularly necessary if one hopes to gain a better understanding of the organizational dynamics and how power is situated within the social system. Only within such a diverse and dynamic research setting can one hope to uncover new information that accurately reflects the multitude of realities that comprise any social system.

The emphasis placed on diversity by complexity theory also helps to somewhat reframe the purpose behind emergent inquiry. Unlike investigative undertakings that seek to uncover, through comparative analysis that which is consistent among participant perspectives or lived experiences (often resulting in errant generalizations of findings to other similar contexts,) a complexivist perspective might encourage the researcher to instead attend to the process through

which agents, diverse in nature and orientation, operate within the social system to make meaning of and respond to the everyday realities that occur within the organization. The focus of the inquiry is fundamentally centred on a process of unfolding new layers of inquiry related to these organizational dynamics, which may ultimately result in simply unearthing new questions about it rather than arriving at the conventional notion of conclusive research findings derived from it.

When considering other ways in which action research informs the methodology used in this research it is particularly important to note how these investigative approaches can be understood to operate within a cyclical format, one in which the inquiry unfolds “in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action” (McTaggart 1997, p. 27). This notion of cycling through an investigative space lies at the heart of an unfolding research methodology, and can be found in other investigative frameworks.<sup>19</sup> In his conceptualization of the *bricolage*, Joe Kincheloe (2004) encourages researchers to recognize each compelling question that naturally emerges during the research process as a potential new ‘point of entry,’ one that could completely transform the inquiry, redirecting the focus of the researchers and possibly requiring them to seek out new tools with which to further their investigation. In this respect, researcher and participant together repeatedly cycle through various contexts that are related to, but not constrained by, the initial question(s) that prompted the inquiry.

The *bricolage* is particularly useful in terms of conceptualizing approaches to inquiry that are multidisciplinary in nature and primarily responsive to the research context. Joe Kincheloe

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<sup>19</sup> In Marla Arvey-Buchanan’s (2002) conceptualization of a constructivist narrative methodology, the notion of ‘cycle’ is also readily apparent. This process invites researcher and participant to individually and collaboratively revisit their co-constructed narratives from multiple viewpoints with the explicit intention of bringing to the surface compelling points of meaningfulness, each of which has the potential to propel the inquiry in a new direction.

(2004) describes the immeasurable value of embracing a process that enables researchers to employ whatever means are necessary to explore the “unfolding context of research situations” (p. 3). However, Kincheloe makes a convincing argument that this approach goes well beyond an interdisciplinary research mindset. Citing the profound influence of social context on the manner in which we conduct research, he insists that *bricoleurs* commit to getting underneath and uncovering the “invisible artifacts of power and culture and documenting the nature of their influence on not only their own scholarship, but scholarship in general” (p. 3). In this respect, the researcher remains ever active (and reactive) in terms of orienting him or herself to the complexity of interpersonal dynamics that exist at the heart of every research endeavour related to the human condition. Kincheloe insists that prescribing to a fixed and static methodology essentially runs counter to one’s natural inclination to actively construct an ongoing process of inquiry, one that is responsive, reflexive and interactive with the ever shifting context that is being investigated.

In terms of the emergent research design conceptualized for this inquiry, the notion of an investigative cycle is expanded and re-shaped somewhat to build on the processes employed by both participatory action research and the bricolage in order to meaningfully incorporate autoethnography. In ways previously discussed, the methodology envisioned here compels the researcher to cycle back and forth between a disciplined exploration of self in relation to the participants and research context while also actively and meaningfully engaging in a shared pursuit of knowledge within the community in a manner that strives toward actualizing phronesis.

In this sense, the social inquiry component of this research exists within a methodological design that is guided by our understanding of the complex nature of social organizations. The investigative process compels the researcher to commit to an ongoing process of self-conscious

reflexivity in order to interrogate his or her evolving and ever changing relationship with both the participants and research context. It also brings greater awareness to the different locations the researcher will inevitably assume as an active member of the community that is the focus of the investigation. Along with the researcher, participants are invited to engage in the inquiry in ways that have the greatest likelihood of actualizing phronesis. Through this shared pursuit of knowledge both the researcher and participants explore one or more of the questions identified at the outset of the study leaving open the possibility that new paths of inquiry may open up requiring the incorporation of new investigative tools.

### Participant recruitment

Two distinct stages of participant recruitment occurred over the course of this investigative undertaking. The first of these closely corresponded with the district-initiated pilot project in the sense that the staff and administration at Crestview were invited to explore what happens when their school community is engaged in an initiative that examines how it deals with problem behaviour. The second stage involved inviting members of the teaching and administrative staff to be interviewed in the final weeks of the project. Questions asked during these interviews were used to gain participants' impressions of the pilot and identify which aspects of it were of greatest significance to them. The interviews also explored participant perceptions of organizational dynamics and what impact, if any, they had on either the pilot project or the various approaches used by the school to deal with student behaviour.<sup>20</sup>

Ethical protocols necessitate that a research project be first introduced to potential participants by someone other than the researcher, especially if there is a preexisting relationship that may place undue influence on individuals to participate. In the case of this particular

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<sup>20</sup> The questions used in these interviews are outlined in Appendix D.

research undertaking, this expectation was somewhat complicated by the fact that the behaviour pilot project was first and foremost a school district initiative. To this end, it was quite clear to me that the PBS Committee responsible for the idea reasonably expected that I would prioritize its effective implementation in a school community over any of my own research objectives.

Consequently, I faced somewhat of a dilemma when school administration, for reasons outlined in the next chapter, decided that it would be best if I proposed the initiative to the staff. As a result, I ended up engaging in the contrived process of first meeting with the staff to introduce the pilot project, and then subsequently enlisting the assistance of a third party to present the research aspect of it at a later date, only after the staff had made its decision to accept the invitation to host the project. It was not until the staff went through relatively lengthy deliberations in order to come to a collective decision about the initiative that a voluntary meeting was then scheduled over a lunch hour period at which time a third party addressed the staff to outline the research and obtain informed consent.

During this meeting it was explained to potential participants that the primary focus of the research was to investigate one school's journey of exploring the way in which it deals with problem behaviour. This essentially coincided with what staff and administration already knew to be true about the pilot project particularly since its grass roots design intentionally promoted an exploratory orientation over one in which a particular behaviour approach was imposed on the school. Information about the study clearly outlined the nature and extent of participant involvement. Informed consent permitted the researcher to observe and collect data in relation to the unfolding events that would take place over the span of the eighteen-month initiative, including digital audio-recordings of project meetings and researcher observations of everyday developments in relation to the project. Participants were also informed that the methodology being used was reflexive and emergent in design, and that this could result in the focus for the



research expanding at some point in time in ways that would necessitate supplemental consent at a future date. It was made clear to all potential participants that they were in no way obligated to take part in either the initial or any additional aspect of the research, and that participation in the study would not impact whether or not the initiative would take place at the school. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Staff members were given a one-week time period to decide on their participation. Because a number of people were absent on the day of the meeting, information about the research was posted in the staff mailroom along with consent forms. At the end of this time period, twenty-eight of the thirty-four members of Crestview's staff, including its administration, teaching and non-teaching personnel consented to participate. Because the study involved collecting data related to everyday events at the school, information directly connected to any of the six members who did not consent to participate was excluded from the research.

Several months into the initiative, I came to the realization that the research would have greater depth if I incorporated participant interviews at or near the end of the project. There were two motivations behind this. The first was to triangulate the data by providing participants the opportunity to identify which aspects of the project they felt were most significant, and to highlight what influence, if any, organizational dynamics had on either the initiative or the school's approach to dealing with behaviour. In this sense, the interviews served to balance the considerable amount of data I collected that reflected my own observations of everyday behaviour related events and the influence of organizational dynamics at the school.

The interviews enabled me to further explore participant perspectives on both the reactive and proactive approaches employed by teachers and administration to deal with problem behaviour and promote social responsibility both before and after the initiative was introduced to the school. To this end, the interviews were purposefully conducted in a manner that was

somewhat open-ended in structure using a number of springboard questions that were intended to invite participants to openly discuss what was of greatest significance to them.

In order to carry out this additional aspect of the research, all teaching staff, both enrolling and non-enrolling, and the school administration were invited to take part in the interviews. Sixteen participants expressed interest. Supplemental informed consent was attained from these individuals, and over the course of three days in June of 2009 interviews were conducted during instructional time with release coverage generously provided by school administration.

### Research method and data analysis

As previously mentioned, several forms of data were collected throughout the eighteen months that Crestview hosted the behaviour pilot project. By far the largest component consisted of field notes that I recorded based on my observations of everyday behaviour-related events and other developments that were directly or indirectly connected to the initiative. These notes included summaries of informal discussions I had with members of the staff and administration. In addition to this, on six different occasions I digitally audio recorded meetings in which various members of the staff and administration were gathered together to discuss the project. Four of these were pilot project steering committee meetings and two were staff meetings at which the pilot project was discussed as an agenda item. Not all of the meetings related to the initiative were recorded. The reason for this was that in some instances it seemed apparent to me that staff members were not comfortable with the meeting being recorded, particularly on occasions when we were dealing with a contentious issue. Consequently, I exercised considerable discretion in terms of using a recorder, and instead opted for field notes whenever I got the distinct sense that one or more of the individuals attending the meeting would be more

comfortable with this form of data collection. Other artifacts also included in the data were the Social Responsibility Reports filled out by teachers whenever they sent a student to the office, as well as various customized forms and charts used by individual teachers as part of positive reinforcement systems in their classrooms. Finally, the sixteen interviews conducted with teachers and administrators at the end of the project were also digitally recorded. These were subsequently transcribed along with the audio files from the six staff and steering committee meetings.

In the previous chapter, considerable emphasis was placed on the fact that the methodology used in this research was purposefully emergent and reflexive. I highlighted the fact that the cornerstone of this approach rested on an autoethnographic component which compelled me to maintain a constant mindfulness of the various roles I was playing throughout the study, and the different ways in which they came into conflict with one another on several key occasions. From a practical standpoint, this involved subjecting all of the data collected during the study to an analysis that was purposefully structured around a process of self-conscious reflexivity. This analysis occurred on an ongoing basis once I had made the decision several weeks into the study to include it as part of the theoretical framework for examining a research question that was focused on the ethical and methodological challenges of conducting research in one's own professional surroundings. Initially, this took the form of a thematic analysis based on a process first designed by Van Manen (1997) in which the reader cycles repeatedly through the text in order to identify emergent themes.

It was through this process that the theme of multiple selves and loyalties first emerged and subsequently became a theoretical lens for the autoethnographic analysis that was conducted on an ongoing basis. This entailed routinely cycling through all of the data from three different perspectives: loyalty to worldview/philosophy, loyalty to employer, loyalty to the research

agenda. These different perspectives allowed me to examine how the data being collected was influenced by my role as the counsellor, behaviour case manager, and project researcher. Once this was completed, I compared the themes that emerged from each reading and identified points in which there appeared to be either congruence or incongruence. From this, I gave careful consideration to how this informed my emerging understanding of the research process. On a number of occasions this highlighted new paths of inquiry worth considering as the research process continued to evolve. On four separate instances, the degree of incongruence that emerged from the analysis appeared significant enough to compel an additional level of examination. It was here that ethnotheatre was employed to fictionalize a dialogue between the various tensions that had been uncovered. Theatricalizing these tensions in this manner generally facilitated a new level of meaning-making. In some cases, the results of this process are shared immediately following the scene that is inserted into the narrative. In other places, I chose to allow the dialogue to speak for itself in ways that are intended to first invite the reader to attach meaning to it from his or her own individual location(s). In these instances any new awakenings that emerged for me from the process are discussed in the final chapter.

For the social inquiry component of the study, similar methods of analysis were used with certain notable differences. The first of these involves the time at which the actual analysis occurred. In an effort to delineate the autoethnographic and social inquiry components of the study, the thematic and theoretical analysis for each took place at different times. While the former was conducted on an ongoing basis, the analysis for the social inquiry component of the study occurred several weeks after the pilot project had ended. The initial stage of this involved a thematic analysis of all the data collected during the study for two distinct purposes. The initial stage of cycling through this information was exclusively intended to identify key points of investigative entry in ways that would facilitate a further examination using the theoretical lens

of organizational dynamics. This was partly motivated by the fact that so much data had been collected over a considerable period of time that it was necessary to carry out a process by which it could be categorized into more workable units.

Doing this involved identifying specific project-related events or developments that appeared to consume a high level of attention and energy from staff and administration at the school. These events were subsequently categorized into groups according to both contextual and chronological associations. Through this process three key points of investigative entry were identified around which a number of events or developments of smaller but noted significance were clustered. This helped to frame the narrative analysis of the data that would occur when it came time to ‘stitch together’ the story of Crestview’s investigative journey. The second purpose behind the thematic analysis conducted at the end of the project was to identify a series of themes that I could bring back to a randomly selected sample of research participants in order to gauge their agreement level. This step was used as an additional means of triangulating the data analysis through a ‘participant check.’<sup>21</sup>

Once the data had been organized in this fashion and relevant themes identified, I conducted an analysis that purposefully examined it from the perspective of power and organizational dynamics. This involved cycling through the data on three separate occasions using a different lens of inquiry on each instance. The first two cycles through were situated in a particular worldview that was established in my theoretical framework.<sup>22</sup> The first of these was the use of authority and accountability to promote positive behaviour and social responsibility. The second worldview was the use of authority and accountability to reinforce or resist the

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<sup>21</sup> The results of this participant check are provided in Appendix C.

<sup>22</sup> This process of cycling through the data from various perspectives is informed by Arvay (2002). This is discussed in the footnote on p. 82.

sovereignty of stratified power structures within the school and school district. The third cycle looked for evidence to counter the notion that authority and accountability played any significant role in how staff and administration approach behaviour at the school or the manner in which they engage in an initiative designed to examine this.

#### Narrative inquiry: The final stage of data analysis

At first glance, the reader might understandably assume that the recounting of Crestview's investigative journey in the form of a story simply represents a form of dissemination. Within this mindset, narrative essentially provides the medium through which the findings of this research are shared with others. However, its purpose here extends considerably beyond this. First and foremost, the narrative must be understood in terms of its contribution to the actual process of inquiry itself in its capacity to serve as the final stage of data analysis.

Attempting to explain why it is that I've chosen narrative to fulfill the role it serves in this investigative journey seems curiously elusive. It might be more appropriate to approach this question from a context of understanding that narrative in fact, chooses us. Carl Leggo (1995) re-awakens us to this realization that we are naturally inclined to "story our lives" in ways that compel us to negotiate tensions between memories that are kept and discarded, lived experiences that are simultaneously expressions of truth and fiction, and (particularly important in terms of research), artifacts that we select and interpret over others as a method of constructing meaningfulness for ourselves in the world. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cite Clifford Geertz in describing this process as one that entails pulling together various strands of that which we determine to be most significant:

What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patternings, after the fact...It calls for showing how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts

and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going, and are likely to go (1993, p. 2-3).

Throughout the first and fifth chapters of this report, I essentially share with the reader the understanding that has emerged from the analysis of a collection of artifacts. For the most part this involves stitching together pieces of meaningfulness in order to recount the story of one school community's journey to explore how it deals with behaviour and how organizational dynamics influence this. Collectively, they represent an excavation of past and present experiences of engaging self and others in the exploration of a social system. I employ narrative as a viable form of inquiry for framing these experiences, one that obliges us to maintain post structural sensibilities about the profound influence that language and culture have on the way in which meaning is shaped. It compels us to remain ever aware of the truth about 'Truth.' Reminding us, as Leggo (1998) does, that constructing our narratives, whether through poem, story, or song, serves to "inscribe" our memories, not capture them. It is a process by which we reflect on lived experiences to identify the signifiers of meaningfulness, something that is profoundly more valuable and informative than any attention we may pay to their so-called accuracy. It is important to understand that the process of stitching together what emerges as meaningful is, in and of itself, a form of data analysis because the writer becomes profoundly engaged in a process of making meaning when he or she attempts to convey meaning to others. In this respect the process itself serves as a way of writing oneself into a place of knowing as much as it is a place of sharing.

#### The dilemma of participant recruitment when studying an entire school community

Before returning to the task of recounting this investigative undertaking, it is important to give some consideration to a number of ethical issues that are related to an inquiry of this nature.

The first of these involves addressing the question of who was left out of this research. The reader will have undoubtedly taken note of the fact that in the section of this chapter that discusses participant recruitment no mention is made of either student or parent participation. Nor is any explicit reference made to staff members of the school who are neither members of the teaching staff or administration. Yet, on numerous occasions, the study is described as “one school’s community’s journey.” Inevitably, this raises the question of if and why these particular individuals were purposefully excluded.

In actual fact, these groups were not left out of the research, but nor was their active participation invited as part of the initial recruitment process. To be sure, this is a study that on countless occasions and in seemingly innumerable ways explored the complex and dynamic relationships that exist between individuals who belong to all of the various subgroups that together comprise the Crestview community. In fact, there were even occasions when the research extended beyond the immediate school community to include certain district level officials. Consequently, determining from whom written informed consent was required represented one of the more challenging responsibilities I confronted throughout the investigative process.

When a research focus includes an entire school community few would contest the impracticality of seeking at the outset consent from all of the students, parents, and staff who may at some point enter into the investigative lens of inquiry. (At Crestview, doing so would have approximated somewhere between six hundred and a thousand signatures.) Instead, a study of this nature relies on the researcher’s ability to remain at all times responsible for determining at what level of involvement any individual becomes a formal participant, and thus requires full and informed consent.



One way of determining this is to pay careful attention to who is being singled out in a manner that may distinguish him or her from the larger group. This can occur whenever an event is recounted in a manner that sets someone apart from his or her community. Throughout this study, pseudonyms are used to prevent anyone from being identified. In some cases genders have also been purposefully switched, and as previously mentioned, the school itself has been given a fictionalized name. This enables the researcher to make anonymous observations about behaviours that are generally demonstrated by a particular group in circumstances related to the research context. For example, several references are made to the students at Crestview Elementary, particularly the cohort of young people who comprise the Grade 7 contingency during the second year of the pilot project. Without a doubt, this group of several dozen young people played a key role in countless critical developments that occurred throughout the course of this project. To be sure, there were individual students who stood out for both positive and negative reasons. However, I decided at the outset of this study to err on the side of caution and not make specific reference to any individual student in a manner that could potentially single him or her out in ways that would not reflect positively on them.

There did come a point however, when I chose to seek out the informed consent from five students and their parents in relation to events that transpired at the school. Four of these students were included in the interviews at the end of the study. The fifth was involved in an ongoing struggle with her classroom teacher in ways that gave shape to a larger school intervention that was introduced as part of the behaviour pilot project. With respect to all of these individuals, careful attention was paid to present a balanced representation that did not reflect negatively on them. Additionally, there came a point in the study when two district level officials were involved in project developments to an extent that required their written informed consent.

### Ethical implications of ‘poking around’ in other people’s business

Investigating a school community on any level constitutes the most delicate of undertakings, and even more so if it is partly intended to get underneath the surface of some of its organizational dynamics. Because this involves surfacing genuine thoughts and feelings that people have about the lay-of-the-land in their social organization, which (and let’s be honest here) includes to some extent their general impressions of one another, it has the potential to be quite harmful to the overall well-being of the community.

A study of this nature can also serve as a catalyst for individual reflection with respect to participants’ personal and professional identities, and the various ways one chooses to ‘be’ within the social organization. This is pretty heady stuff for someone to start poking around in, and so before doing it the researcher must have a clear idea of how to go about it in a delicate and respectful fashion. However, even when the best of intentions are consistently employed, the researcher is sure to confront monumental ethical and methodological issues along the way.

### Exploring ethical dilemmas through ethnotheatre

As will be very much evident throughout the telling of this story, one of the greatest ethical challenges I confronted related to how the positions, opinions, and personalities of my colleagues were (re)presented. Obviously, there exists a very real possibility that any one of these individuals may disagree with a particular way in which they are portrayed in the recounting of the various stories that collectively constitute this investigative journey. This poses a particularly thorny issue for the researcher, one that has the very real potential to put methodological priorities (i.e., conveying honest and genuine, albeit subjective and interpretive, perceptions of what actually took place at a given point in time) in direct opposition with

important ethical considerations (i.e., ensuring that the research does not in any way place participants at risk of harm.)

Too often, these conflicting interests are not made explicit enough when researchers are carrying out investigations that are actually intended to reveal something about the people who live out their daily professional lives within the social system that is being researched. There is a tendency it seems to either downplay this notion that the research is in fact about studying people and their behaviours, or to simply avoid paying any serious attention to the fact that one's analysis of a social system and the various perspectives that comprise it, may reveal something that may not reflect positively about one or more individuals, and thus run the very real risk of doing harm.

One rather unconventional way of confronting these challenges has already been mentioned. Ethnotheatre provides a means for fictitiously situating the reader within one or more of the research contexts in a manner that simulates this reality without making any effort to authentically replicate it. The purpose for doing this is two-fold. When the staff at Crestview agreed to take on the behaviour pilot project, it was not just committing itself to creating lofty goals to which staff, students, and parents could aspire. Everyone was well aware that dealing with problem behaviour at the school was often very messy and emotionally-laden. Theatricalizing scenarios in which staff and administration are grappling with behaviour-related situations provided a means of presenting the wide diversity of perspectives and realities that teachers, principals and counsellors routinely bring to these common daily experiences without attaching them to any specific participant. The following scene helps illustrate this approach.

### 'The Principal's Office'

*INT: Elementary School - Principal's Office – The School Counsellor is seated waiting for the Principal to enter. Behind him, frozen in a contemplative pose, stands a character who represents the Counsellor's Inner Voice. Across the room standing frozen with back turned to the audience is the Principal's Inner Voice. Both Inner Voices only become active when speaking their lines, and at all other times remain frozen.*

Principal: *(while entering office shouting back to Secretary)* ...and can you make sure that newsletter doesn't go out this week with typos? *(She then turns to the Counsellor who is already seated in her office)*...Oh, good you're here. I've sent Mike home for the day. Carol needs a chance to calm down. I'm worried about her health.

Counsellor: Is this a formal suspension?

Counsellor Inner Voice: *(sarcastically)* I'm having a hard time imagining a suspension letter that reads: "Your child has been suspended for repeatedly forgetting his homework and cracking jokes in the classroom."

Principal: No. They just need a break from each other. I'm not writing this one up.

Counsellor: And the parents agreed?

Principal: Not exactly. Dad's pissed.

Counsellor: At us or at Mike?

Principal: Both. He's fed up. He says he has tried everything to get Mike to do his work.

Counsellor Inner Voice: *(appreciatively)* No easy task.

Principal: He says Carol is constantly calling him at work to complain about Mike's behaviour. He thinks she's got it out for him.

Counsellor Inner Voice: *(sarcastically)* Now where would he have got that idea?

Principal: He wants you to call him.

Counsellor: I've talked to him before about this, and he started complaining to me about Carol and the way she treats Mike. I told him I can't have that conversation with him because it's a breach of our union's Code of Ethics.

Principal: What'd he say to that?

Counsellor: He got angry. Says we're all just covering up for each other.

Principal Inner Voice: ...and part of you knows he's right. That Code of Ethics gives people the impression that whenever there's a problem, you guys simply close ranks.

Counsellor Inner Voice: ...and part of me knows he's right. This problem is not being properly addressed. At what point does a Principal step in and tell a teacher to take a different approach with a kid?

Principal: Sounds like something he'd say.

Counsellor Inner Voice: (*reflexively*) Or is it my job as the counselor? I'm supposed to be looking out for this child's emotional well-being. Carol is like a time-bomb.

Principal: Well, Carol says she won't accept Mike back in her classroom.

Counsellor: Okay, that's a problem.

Principal: What am I supposed to do with him? I can't baby-sit him here all day in the office.

Principal Inner Voice: Do people honestly think that's what my job is? Am I just a dumping ground around here?

Principal: I put a call in to see if the alternate school has room for him.

Principal Inner Voice: At least it will be a fresh start for this kid. I don't see his current teacher giving him a break.

Counsellor Inner Voice: She's thinking of kicking him out. She can't be serious.

Counsellor: They're going to ask us what's already been tried. We need at least to put some kind of plan in place first? I'm not sure Mike is entirely to blame here.

Counsellor Inner Voice: (*cautiously*) Okay, I better watch myself. I'm on shaky ground here. That's a colleague I'm talking about.

Principal Inner Voice: (*impressed*) Whoa, calling it like you see it for a change. I'm impressed. Better watch out though. You're on shaky ground here. That's a colleague you're talking about.

Principal: Have you tried talking to Carol?

Counsellor Inner Voice: Of course, I've tried. Have you tried? Other than: "You know Carol you have to be careful about your health."

Counsellor: Of course, I've tried. She says she doesn't feel supported.

Principal: I don't know what she expects from me.

Counsellor Inner Voice: Funny. She says the same thing about you.

Principal: Well. Put a plan in place, but I'm not having this kid knocking at my office door every five minutes because he's been kicked out of his class. *(Gets up to leave, and calls out to the secretary)*... Mary, I want to see that newsletter before it goes out!

*Lights dim plunging the stage into darkness*

### Observing the campsite rule

The preceding scene attempts to dramatically represent the multiple realities and loyalties that are often hallmarks of the behaviour-related situations that commonly surface within a school community. From both a methodological and ethical standpoint, it is of considerable importance to note that the dialogue depicted in *The Principal's Office* never actually took place. Instead, this piece may be better understood as simulating the kinds of discussions that unfold in countless forms and variations in school settings.

This distinction has important ethical implications since a critical aspect of ethics in behavioural research focuses on ensuring that the dignity and well-being of participants is protected throughout an investigative process. Because researchers are expected to take every precaution to minimize risk of harm to participants, there are significant implications for incorporating lived experiences into an investigative context. Careful consideration must be given to ensuring that participants' stories are used only when full and informed consent has been attained, and then, only in a manner in which participants have approved.

One way that I make sense of the whole behavioural ethics process at my university is to metaphorically compare it to the 'campsite rule.' In the same way that responsible campers take it upon themselves to ensure that they leave a campsite in better condition than they found it, researchers are also compelled to make every effort to leave their participants and the social system they are studying in as good or better shape than they were prior to engaging in a particular process of inquiry. In terms of my own research there are reasons for paying careful

attention to this that go well beyond employing best practices in accordance with any guidelines set out by a behavioural research ethics board. At Crestview Elementary, the staff are colleagues with whom I work very closely everyday. Many of them I regard as close friends, something I would prefer not to see change as a result of this particular undertaking. Beyond these personal interests are considerations that directly relate to the well being of the social organization itself. Can I really justify an investigative process that essentially rips open the interpersonal fabric that binds my staff together in order to take an exploratory peek inside, if doing so runs the risk of irreparably damaging one or more relationships on staff, or in some way compromises the overall collegial health and well-being of the school itself? In my mind, it is this question above all else that must guide the researcher throughout the investigative undertaking compelling him or her to tread softly in places where there can be little certainty as what toll is exacted in the interest of uncovering new knowledge.

Through the inner and external dialogues that take place in *The Principal's Office*, it's highly likely that the reader will form impressions of the principal, the counsellor, the teacher, the parent, and/or the child based on the ways in which each individual's perspective is dramatically depicted. However, doing so does not tie these impressions to an actual individual. They represent positions that reflect the realities of the social system being investigated. This is one way in which the researcher may be able to tread softly in his or her revelations about the kind of tensions and dynamics that occur within a given research setting without identifying specific individuals in a way that may potentially do harm.

Having said this it is also important to acknowledge that this research does make explicit certain perspectives that individuals on staff at Crestview will recognize as being congruent with their own professional practice. In some instances, how these worldviews or professional practices impacted the behaviour pilot project represents a key part of the findings of this

research. In recounting these developments, I took great care to do so in a manner that treaded softly in an effort to minimize any risk that colleagues would come away from reading this report with a sense that they had been ‘cast’ in a negative light.

#### Delimitations: What this is, is partly what it isn’t

Because this research is primarily about the school where I am employed, and is focused on awakening new understandings about the various approaches we take to promoting positive behaviour and how this is impacted by organizational dynamics, it is critically important that I establish some clear parameters around what can conclusively be said with respect to any knowledge that might emerge from this undertaking. In my own twisted way of making sense of certain things, I’ve come to regard the delimitations section of research reports as the place where researchers devote at least some energy to telling the reader what the research is not, rather than what it is.

I believe this to be a particularly important component of any research undertaking because it compels the researcher to make clear from the outset the limitations that must be understood when considering the scope and nature of what individuals can take away from the study’s findings. Before going any further, I had better stop and unpack what is exactly meant by this notion of ‘findings,’ as it specifically relates to this particular project. My purpose here is not, and never was, to uncover certain ‘truths’ about how schools in general deal with behaviour and how this is impacted by organizational dynamics. If this was my intention, I would have gone about it in a much different fashion in the hope that such efforts would result in me coming away from this endeavour having identified a list of factors that I could justifiably argue hold true for other elementary school settings.



Here, I am making no such claim. In fact, the reader is likely to be disappointed if he or she expects to reach a certain point in this report where a clear set of objective findings are explicitly laid out that apply to how behaviour is approached at Crestview. The recounting of events and subsequent recommendations made in this thesis are highly subjective and interpretive, and should not be mistaken to represent objective findings in any sense of the term. It is entirely likely, if not probable, that the many people who were involved in this project would recount events in a different manner, placing emphasis on observations, impressions and experiences other than the ones I have highlighted here. Despite the fact that an extensive amount of data was collected throughout this project in an effort to capture the perspectives and opinions of staff and students at Crestview Elementary, this information has been purposefully ‘stitched’ together in this report in a manner that is still fundamentally subjective and inevitably represents to a certain extent a reflection of my own personal biases and worldview.

Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to make clear that their findings are not to be generalized beyond the research context in which their inquiry is situated unless specific steps are taken to validate such a claim. In terms of this research, whatever unfolded as part of the behaviour project that took place at Crestview Elementary between January 2008 and June of 2009, and the subsequent recommendations that have emerged from it, do not automatically hold true for any other elementary school that is taking on a project of this nature. In fact, it cannot even be assumed that they would necessarily re-emerge at Crestview if the project was to be repeated again next year or at some point in the future. For this reason, the reader is urged to appreciate and understand that this thesis contains a series of recommendations that are the product of a subjective and biased interpretation of data that comprises largely of personal observations of events that occurred over an eighteen month period, as well as interviews that were conducted with members of Crestview Elementary in the final weeks of the project. These

recommendations are best understood as being inextricably linked to events that took place within one school community at a given point in time when a particular set of circumstances occurred as seen through the lens of one of the researcher-participants who is a part of that community.

Another area of limitation that should be highlighted relates to the fact that this research employs a number of investigative approaches within an overarching framework of an emergent methodological design. The reader will note that I have referenced a considerably wide range of qualitative research methodologies throughout these past two chapters. I am aware that simultaneously incorporating so many different methodologies has the potential to diminish the researcher's capacity to utilize any one of them to its fullest potential. It is my impression that within research communities there can be a tendency for some to advocate for a more 'purist' approach when using a particular research methodology. I believe that this perspective too often overlooks the extent to which each and every deployment of a particular methodology itself represents a co-construction of meaning and application. The dialogic process of sense-making is as much at play within these contexts as it is when we interpret the literature related to a given research focus in order to establish a theoretical framework for our inquiry.

Nevertheless, it would be shortsighted to not acknowledge that something may be lost by not closely focusing on the intricacies of a singular methodology. To some extent every investigative framework is purposefully multi-layered in design in ways that support the argument for not straying too far from the procedures it outlines. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the rationale behind the approach I have chosen to employ here, giving credit in large part to the work of Joe Kincheloe (2004) and his conceptualization of the bricolage. Fundamental to this methodological design is the need to maintain a necessary flexibility to employ a variety of investigative tools over the course of an emergent inquiry. Arguably, this is

given priority over any commitment to strive for a more purist approach to employing any one particular research tradition. This particular topic will be revisited in the final chapter in the section that highlights areas for further research.

Finally, the delimitations section provides an important opportunity to discuss various aspects of power that are not extensively addressed in this research. Post-structural and post-colonial understandings compel researchers to carefully consider the countless ways in which systemic forces of power and oppression exist within all social contexts. This study pays critical attention to organizational dynamics, but it does not thoroughly investigate how locations of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status factor in to how power exists and is exerted by some over others within my school community. This should not be misunderstood to imply that these forces are not present within the school. Even the fact that the researcher in this study is a white, heterosexual male raised in a lower middle class family brings with it considerable power and privilege. In this particular case, this not only profoundly influences my investigative lens of inquiry, but also acts as a force of power and privilege in the position I hold within the social organization.

In this sense, I must acknowledge that the power dynamics explored in this study take into consideration certain influential forces while leaving others to be further examined. Nevertheless, it is not enough to simply set aside these issues on the grounds that they represent a separate and distinct theoretical framework than the one set out for this research. Doing so would only further reinforce dominant colonizing discourses that for too long have drowned out these other crucial lens of inquiry. In Chapter Six, I highlight additional paths of inquiry that need to be given close attention. Areas for further research are discussed and connections drawn to how notions of emancipation, empowerment, and embodiment may serve to counter forces of systemic oppression that exist within the organizational structure of schools and school districts.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### THE JOURNEY

In January of 2008, the Executive Administration in my school district accepted the PBS Committee's proposal for a behaviour pilot project and offered .8 FTE<sup>23</sup> staffing to support the initiative for the remainder of the school year.<sup>24</sup> This news was received with great enthusiasm by committee members who immediately turned their attention to finding the appropriate person to coordinate the project in a manner that would honour the approach that had been tentatively agreed upon in our earlier deliberations. Lengthy discussions around the qualifications for this individual ensued. There seemed to be initial consensus that a counsellor would be in an ideal position to serve as the project coordinator given that the role would require someone skilled at forging trusting relationships with a school's staff, administration and students, and who would have some background knowledge of behaviour interventions. Several committee members also believed that assigning the position to a counsellor would avoid any perception that the project was top-down in design, something that was more likely to occur if a district-level or school-based administrator took on the role.

Because I had been tipped off over the winter break that my invitation to join the PBS Committee had been partly motivated by the assumption that I would accept the coordinator position, I made a point of clarifying up front that I was not interested in taking on this role. This prompted the two other counsellors on the committee to also make clear that they did not want the position. Once it became apparent that we needed to look elsewhere for a coordinator, there

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<sup>23</sup> In practical terms this would mean having someone on site to coordinate the project four days a week.

<sup>24</sup> At the completion of this time period, it was understood that the project coordinator would submit an interim report reviewing the project's progress to date and outlining specific recommendations for continuing the initiative the following year. This was done in June of 2008, and resulted in a slightly reduced funding allocation of .6 FTE for the 2008 / 2009 academic year.

emerged some disagreement over whether this individual needed to have a firm understanding and experience in Positive Behaviour Support.

With no resolution in sight, the group decided to temporarily set aside the question of who would coordinate the project in order to consider where it should be located. The hope was that once a school was chosen, the committee might be able to identify an individual on its staff who could serve in this capacity. Over the winter break, two committee members had designed draft applications that schools interested in the project would submit in order to be considered. Unfortunately, this too resurfaced differences of opinion on whether or not prescriptive criterion of any sort should be used in the application process. Some of us argued that doing so would run counter to the mindset that schools needed to be encouraged to incorporate the project in ways that would prove a best fit for their individual school. Others felt that a staff should at least be expected to commit up front to employing some PBS-related approaches. Yet again the committee faced an impasse as a result of philosophical differences around whether or not the project should be genuinely grass roots in design.

#### Selection of Crestview Elementary as the host school

In addition to grappling with these differences of opinion, the committee also faced the challenge of being given a relatively short timeline by the school district's executive for getting the initiative started. It was a combination of these factors, along with the difficulty of finding an appropriate project coordinator, that led the committee to abandon the idea of an application process altogether and instead short-list a number of schools in the district that were known to

consistently face behaviour-related challenges.<sup>25</sup> At the top of this list was Crestview Elementary, the school where I was on staff as the counsellor.

My reaction to Crestview being considered as a potential host school for the project was mixed. At an earlier stage of committee discussions before the decision was made to incorporate a grass roots approach, I had a conversation with the principal at Crestview about the initiative and we both agreed that it would not be a good idea to propose the school for the project primarily because its staff had previously rejected an offer to implement PBS two years earlier.<sup>26</sup> Because the committee was now considerably less insistent on overtly imposing PBS on a school, I had wondered whether we should reconsider this position. However, I had concerns that there was an ulterior motive behind Crestview being proposed as a potential site for the project, one that was related to the committee's inability to find a coordinator. Clearly, no one on the committee was willing to take on the role either because it did not fit into their current assignment or because they were not interested in going into a new school as an outsider to lead a particular staff in an initiative of this nature. It was certainly true that Crestview had a history of facing behaviour-related problems, but I was concerned that one of the reasons it was being placed on the short-list was to compel me to take on the coordinator position if the school was chosen to host the project.

In thinking through this, I realized that there was no doubt in my mind that my relationship with the Crestview staff as its current counsellor and a former classroom teacher would work to the advantage of the initiative. However, I strongly believed that if the school was chosen to host the project it would be better for all concerned if another staff member took on the

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<sup>25</sup> This process of short listing a small number of schools was done rather hastily based primarily on information the District Administrator of Safe and Caring Schools had in terms of how many students were referred from individual schools to alternate programs for severe behaviour.

<sup>26</sup> The dynamics around this earlier rejection of a PBS project by the Crestview staff are explored later in this chapter.

coordinator position. This would allow for someone who was working full time at the school to take the lead with the project in a manner that would further promote a grass-roots approach. Ideally, at least in my mind, this individual would have little or no previous affiliation with the District PBS Committee, since the staff at Crestview would likely regard this connection with some suspicion after having already turned down an offer to have the program at the school. However, because both the school's principal and I had some PBS background, it meant that if the staff at some point chose to consider some of these approaches we would both be available to serve as a resource. This at least would appease those committee members who felt that the opportunity to introduce PBS-related interventions needed to at least remain a possibility.

The decision to consider Crestview as a potential host school also re-surfaced some of the concerns I had regarding my role on the committee and what influence it was having over key decisions that were being made that undoubtedly supported my own research agenda. For this reason, I felt obliged to make known to committee members the unease I was feeling about Crestview being on the short list. I made them aware that I had no intention of acting as the project's coordinator even if they went ahead with this choice of location, and that this was driven in part by reasons that included my own interest in researching the project.

#### Methodological rationale for turning down the coordinator position

Based on what I had already gleaned from the literature on complexity theory and participatory action research, I had come to the conclusion that it was important that the researcher not take on a role that might unduly influence the decentralizing forces that would naturally be at play within an organization as it undertook an initiative of this nature. Put in more simple terms, I believed that studying how the project evolved within one school community would be infinitely more difficult to do as the coordinator than it would from the position of a

staff member, who as an insider would already be in an ideal location to observe developments without playing a disproportionate role in shaping them. Although it was definitely tempting to take advantage of an offer to increase my paid time at the school while also engaging in research that would help me advance my academic goals, I realized that doing so had more disadvantages than benefits for everyone involved, and I shared this openly with committee members as they wrestled with the decision of whether or not to situate the project at Crestview.

#### Emergent findings related to the ethical dilemmas of conducting research as an insider

It will be helpful to briefly interrupt the story at this point in order to make mention of an important revelation that came out of a thematic analysis conducted on the notes I recorded from the PBS meetings once all of the issues surrounding the project's implementation were resolved. Through the process of cycling through this data in order to identify relevant themes, there emerged an awareness of certain dynamics that would prove valuable for future analysis of autoethnographic data, particularly as it pertained to addressing the research question that specifically related to the ethical and methodological challenges of conducting emergent inquiry as an 'insider.'

The field notes that I had so far recorded about my experiences on the PBS Committee appeared to be best understood if categorized into three types of loyalties. The first of these was largely philosophical in nature and seemed to reflect occasions when I took a particular position based primarily on my own worldview. In this category, notes taken seemed to be largely informed by certain convictions I held about such things as organizational dynamics within schools (likely influenced by my experience working as a school administrator) and my beliefs regarding how people become motivated to meaningfully engage in a process of change (no doubt informed by my training and work experience as a counsellor).



The second loyalty was primarily connected to the employer, and represented a willingness on my part to do whatever was necessary to support what my organization wanted to see happen. An analysis of notes from the committee deliberations (and later of digital audio recordings of project meetings) revealed that there were occasions when I appeared to be primarily motivated by a desire to support the vision held by those members who, at least in my mind, were acting as representatives of the school district. An example of this relates to the insistence by the District Administrator for Safe and Caring Schools that quantitative data be used to track the progress of the project so that its value could be more easily substantiated to school board officials. Any reservations I may have had about this based on a belief that decisions such as these must be left to the school community hosting the project seemed to be set aside in the interest of meeting the expectations of the employer. The analysis revealed this to be a particularly resilient loyalty that once identified helped me to develop a better self awareness of its ongoing implications for the research. In my efforts to make sense of this I wondered how much of this loyalty was again shaped by my past experience working as an administrator for my school district, a position often described as being first and foremost an ‘agent of the board.’

The final of these three identified loyalties was to the research itself. Opinions expressed or efforts to shape decision-making oftentimes reflected a loyalty to the process of inquiry that was ever-evolving in my mind. In response to this there were occasions in which I subtly or overtly shaped the way in which the project was conceptualized because it would facilitate my ability to conduct the research in a manner that I believed would give it integrity. Examples of this have already been noted in the self-conscious reflections about my own agenda and concerns regarding how it may have consciously or unconsciously impacted decisions made about the project. My insistence that I not take on the position of project coordinator represents a glaring instance where my loyalty to a worldview about organizational dynamics and a desire to bring

integrity to the process of inquiry ran counter to a loyalty I felt to help actualize the committee's objectives for the initiative.

Identifying these various and often conflicting loyalties through an initial analysis of autoethnographic data represented what I believe to be a key finding related to the research question that is focused on the ethical and methodological challenges that researchers face when conducting inquiry as an insider. Reconciling these loyalties involves the researcher being able to first identify them, and then to make a commitment to maintain a constant mindfulness of how he or she is primarily oriented on the countless occasions that critical decisions are being made throughout the investigative undertaking. This alone will not magically align these loyalties. However, an awareness of the way in which they act as a force on the process of inquiry is essential to establishing and maintaining the integrity of the research. As will become evident in the pages ahead, the competing loyalties that I was forced to grapple with during this investigative journey played a significant role in unearthing many of the key findings related to organizational dynamics and the influence they can have on how people engage with initiatives that may affect systemic change within their workplace. The need to identify and come to terms with multiple and often conflicting loyalties while conducting research of this nature is further discussed in Chapter Six.

#### Point of investigative entry: Introducing the behavior pilot project to the Crestview community

Both the coordinator issue and the question of where the project would be situated were finally resolved when another individual at Crestview was identified who seemed to be an ideal choice for the position. I suggested, and a number of committee members readily agreed, that a positive working relationship existed between Crestview's teaching staff and its current vice principal, Stephanie Johnson. This presented the possibility of assigning her the role of project

coordinator and then back-filling her non-administrative duties as the learning assistance teacher, a move that would cause far less disruption than introducing a new teacher into a classroom mid-year to replace someone at the school who would be taking on the coordinator role. Some concern was expressed that assigning Stephanie the position did mean that an administrator would be taking the lead in coordinating the project, a move that might be perceived by staff as top-down in orientation.

However, the committee had recently been informed by the union that it would not support the coordinator job having any special qualifications attached to it.<sup>27</sup> This meant that the school board would have to post the .8 position in a district-wide competition, resulting in it being filled based on seniority more than anything else. Even though the committee was split over whether or not the coordinator should have PBS training, there was unanimous agreement that the position required a certain skill set that included understanding behavioural approaches at the individual, classroom-based, and school-wide levels.

The union's position on this would have no relevance if the point time was given to a vice principal since it holds no jurisdiction over administrative assignments. Although Stephanie was familiar with PBS having previously been on staff at another school where it was well established, she was not, and had never been, actively involved in the program at the district level. This was viewed by some of us as an asset more than a shortcoming because of previous resistance the Crestview staff had shown toward PBS. Stephanie did however, have district-level

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<sup>27</sup> With the exception of certain “positions of special responsibility” such as school psychologists and counsellors, the BCTF generally opposes teaching positions being assigned special qualifications based on a concern that it will become common practice for the employer to use ‘designer postings’ as a means of circumventing seniority-based hiring in order to select preferred candidates. This position is often colloquially referenced by BCTF members as an understanding that “a teacher is a teacher” and should always be viewed as such for purposes of filling vacancies.

training in TRIBES,<sup>28</sup> a social development and cooperative learning program developed by Jeanne Gibbs (1987). Stephanie had recently begun using it at Crestview as a vehicle to facilitate student-led discussions on social responsibility. In this respect, it was felt that she had already established the groundwork for using proactive approaches to promote positive behaviour at both classroom and school-wide levels.

Because of Stephanie's relationship with the staff, a majority of committee members believed that there would be general acceptance at the school of her being assigned the additional FTE in coordination with her duties as vice principal, especially if she promoted the project as being first and foremost grass roots in design. As an administrator, Stephanie's assignment could easily be reconfigured to include the coordinator position without there being any need to post it as a vacancy. Back filling her non-administrative duties as the learning assistance teacher at Crestview would require a district-wide competition, but this would have no direct impact on the behaviour project.

For all of these reasons, the PBS Committee unanimously endorsed the idea of approaching Stephanie and the staff at Crestview about the project. I was asked to meet with Stephanie and the school's principal, Wendy Mitchell, as soon as possible to discuss the initiative and consider approaching the staff about it being piloted at Crestview. At a meeting held at the school the following day, Wendy, Stephanie and I discussed at length the possible implications the initiative could have for the school. After much deliberation, Stephanie agreed to accept the role of coordinator, which then led the three of us to carefully consider how best to present this initiative to the staff. In the forefront of our minds was the importance of how this would be perceived by classroom teachers. The project had considerable staffing implications,

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<sup>28</sup> TRIBES is an innovative classroom-based teaching approach that develops student capacity to work together in groups (tribes) over a long period of time by teaching a prescribed set of collaborative skills (Gibbs, 1987).

including Stephanie being allocated additional FTE that would result in changes occurring to the way ‘pull-out’ learning assistance would be provided to students who required additional support. We anticipated that staff would want some assurances that this would not cause wide scale disruption to scheduling throughout the school.

Because the project’s origins were so closely connected to the District PBS Committee, Wendy, Stephanie and I also felt that it would be important to make clear to the staff that the initiative was in no way intended to impose a PBS framework on Crestview. Instead, the staff would be encouraged to see this as an opportunity to access additional resources that we could use to examine the various ways in which problem behaviour was being dealt with throughout the school, and collectively decide what systemic changes should be made in order to achieve greater success. In this respect, the three of us agreed that the staff should understand that the pilot project was intended to affect change at the school, but not from a deficit-oriented mindset that suggested something was ‘wrong’ or ‘broken’ at Crestview that required fixing. Instead, it was felt that the notion of change needed to be presented as something that staff would engage in at a grass-roots level in a manner that would encourage everyone to individually and collectively explore professional practice at the school as it related to problem behaviour, making changes wherever it was deemed necessary.

#### Self-conscious reflection on the committee’s decision to choose Crestview

An autoethnographic analysis of field notes recorded during this stage of the project using the previously identified theme of multiple loyalties identified one of the first ethical dilemmas that resulted from conducting research as an insider. Although it seemed clear to me that I had been up front with committee members about my intent to research the pilot project and had made efforts to identify occasions in which I was taking a position that best served these

interests, a later analysis of data revealed the possibility that I may have still unconsciously used my position on the committee to manipulate developments.

This was primarily in relation to my steadfast insistence on a grass-roots approach. Later examination of this raised the question of whether this was in fact motivated by a desire to have the project situated at Crestview more so than any philosophical commitment I held about power and organizational dynamics within the public education system. From very early on in my involvement with the committee, I knew that a PBS-driven project was not an option for Crestview unless the initiative was re-designed to minimize this orientation. Through the process of self-conscious reflexivity, I began to question how my role as an insider on the committee shaped its mandate in ways that eventually led to changes that enabled the project to be located at my school.

Part of this analysis involved exploring the data in ways that countered this notion that I consciously or unconsciously manipulated developments through my role as an insider. To this end, I identified field notes that I recorded during these deliberations that appear to demonstrate my genuine expectation that the project would be hosted at an alternate location. The strongest indication of this is found in notes I made that listed various potential schools that I felt would be good choices not only from the perspective of the project's success, but also in terms of my ability to conduct research. In some cases, I had gone so far as to consider such factors as who the administrators were at the school, what I knew about its staff, and how I could reorganize my schedule in order to be on site at least two days each week. Although this appeared to counter the notion that I had consciously or unconsciously manipulated the decision to locate the project at Crestview, the analysis still seemed to indicate that an opportunity was missed to surface my conflicting loyalties with committee members in a manner that would have ensured the decision to select Crestview was not unduly tainted.

### The impact of perceived organizational dynamics on how the pilot was introduced to Crestview

Because the PBS committee gave Crestview a relatively short period of time to decide whether or not to accept the pilot project, a staff meeting had to be hastily arranged. Rather than invite outside representatives from the PBS Committee to present the proposal, Wendy and Stephanie both felt that it would be better if I introduced the initiative to the staff, explained its nature and purpose, and provided the rationale for Stephanie being assigned the role of project coordinator. The primary motivation behind this was to counter any perception by the staff that the initiative would be driven by a district agenda, or that school administration would be ultimately responsible for the project. The three of us were clearly aware that the risk of staff members having either of these impressions was considerably elevated by the fact that it would be the vice principal at the school who would serve as the project's coordinator.

These were only a few of the countless considerations that were bouncing around in my head when I walked into the school library to discuss the initiative with the Crestview staff. However, among the various thoughts I was juggling, the research itself was farthest from my mind. In fact, it is fair to say that throughout this particular experience, very little of my orientation reflected a researcher engaged in an investigative undertaking. Because I did not want my research intentions to unduly influence the staff's decision of whether or not to accept the project, I had decided that participant recruitment would occur at a subsequent meeting and be facilitated by a third party, once it was determined if the initiative was in fact going ahead.

It was not until several hours after I 'pitched' the project to the staff that I found myself compelled to make field notes in a manner that investigated my own personal impressions of what had happened before, during, and after the meeting. The considerable forethought that went into determining how to approach the Crestview staff provoked me to further consider how

organizational dynamics are at play in a situation like this when a school staff is being offered an opportunity to examine its professional practice in ways that might illuminate a need for change. Similar to what had occurred during the analysis of data recorded during PBS Committee meetings, I immediately found myself self consciously reflecting on how my own personal and professional worldviews had shaped the discussions with Wendy and Stephanie prior to meeting with the staff. How much of these conversations were driven by my own impression of how power was situated within the staff? What influence did this ultimately have on the way in which I presented the initiative to my colleagues?

To further explore these dynamics, I decided to employ ethnotheatre to extend the analysis of this autoethnographic data in ways that would enable me to examine the theme of multiple loyalties. This undertaking provided me with an opportunity to embody an inner voice that further revealed my perceptions of the organizational dynamics that I felt were at play during this experience, as well as explore the various ways in which I responded to them.

#### ‘The Pitch’: Ethnotheatre as embodied autoethnographic analysis

*INT: Crestview Library, Lunch Hour. Vincent enters hastily from stage right looking preoccupied. He walks to the front table and pauses there trying to decide whether he should address the staff from the front of the room, or be seated at a table amongst the staff. He starts pacing about until he decides to channel his nervous energy into distributing a one-page overview throughout the room.*

*Close behind him walking in lock step at his heels is “Cred,” an inner voice representing yet another one of the multiple selves that dwell within Vincent’s being. Cred is somewhat cynical in his demeanour, and can be quite sarcastic when speaking to Vincent. He is an entity that serves as a constant reminder to Vincent that he needs to always remember who it is that actually works in the trenches of public education. Cred has a thinly veiled contempt for those who do not actually teach in a classroom from 9am to 3pm on Monday to Friday from September to June. He keeps Vincent ever aware of his diminishing ‘cred’ amongst his colleagues because of the fact that he’s now a counsellor and no longer a classroom teacher, and worse yet, is heading toward academia by pursuing doctoral studies.*



*Cred does however frequently offer Vincent sage advice that generally strengthens his professional relationships with teachers at the school. He encourages Vincent to place the highest priority on this, because, as Cred often points out, “these are the people who actually work with the kids!”*

*Because Vincent is heavily focused on developments at hand, he decides not to engage Cred (as he often does) in any imaginary conversation. Instead, he makes a genuine effort to push him out of his mind and focus on the meeting and its objectives. Of course, no one else in the room is aware of Cred’s ‘presence,’ or the ongoing impact it has on Vincent’s presentation to the staff.*

Cred: *(following Vincent around the room as he paces about)* Could you not think of a better time to pitch this project? The lunch hour!? That’s gonna go over well. You think these people have nothing better to do but sit around and talk about initiatives that you dream up? Unlike you they just spent the whole morning in the classroom. By the way, did you think to check and see if there is any intramurals going on in the gym? I’m sure those teachers will really appreciate being left out of your “special” meeting?

*Sarah, an experienced Grade 2 teacher enters eating her lunch. She sits down and quickly scans over the one-page brief that Vincent has left on tables throughout the library. Michael, another primary teacher, pulls up alongside her and takes a seat.*

Michael: *(to Sarah gesturing to the sheet)* Hey, what’s this about?

Sarah: Looks like another district program. Something about behaviour.

Michael: *(in a mildly sarcastic tone)* Oh great. Been down that road before. They’ll probably throw a few extra resources our way, and then cut them back next year.

Sarah: No doubt.

Cred: *(to Vincent sarcastically)* Sounds like a receptive crowd, Vincent! But don’t let it distract you. You’re excited about this, remember? This is your passion. They’re gonna love it! *(rolling his eyes)*

*As more teachers arrive and settle in, Vincent decides to locate himself at the front of the library and calls together the staff...*

Vincent: Okay everyone, I know this is your lunch hour and I don’t want to take up too much of your time. If you can quickly grab a seat, I’ll go over the sheet that is on the table and then answer any questions. We’re going to need to make a decision on this, and unfortunately it’s a bit time-sensitive.

Cred: *(props himself up on top of a book case located right behind Vincent, conveniently within whispering distance to him)* Now be careful how you pitch this. Whatever you do, don’t imply that this project is coming here because people aren’t doing their jobs right. And don’t make this out to be the magic fix for everything. Try to keep in mind what this looks like from their point of view. That is if you have any idea what that might look like.

Vincent: *(to the staff)* Some of you may have already heard that our school's been selected to pilot a project related to behaviour. This is a great opportunity to showcase all the things we do successfully here, and give us a chance to look at areas we can improve on.

Cred: *(looking out at the staff with genuine amazement)* Nice try. But can you feel the non-verbal's in the room? I don't see a lot of love out there, Vincent. Remember to keep it short. These people need a break before they head back to their classrooms.

Sarah: If this is going to support our teaching in the classroom, then I'm all for it. But I want to know that administration is going to be there for us.

Michael: It's really only a handful of kids who ruin it for everyone else. Something needs to be done about them. They're the ones making a mockery out of the Code of Conduct. That's where admin has got to step in.

Vincent: And that's what this program can help us look at. Staff and admin will have a chance to work together and carefully examine how we deal with problem behaviour at different levels throughout the school. I think it's a perfect opportunity to look at what we're doing with those students who are consistently having difficulty, and make some changes wherever we think they are needed.

Cred: *(feigned disbelief)* You better hope the staff isn't reading this as though this project will somehow help them get misbehaving kids kicked out of class, because you can bet that neither the school admin nor your district PBS buddies are going to be too hot on that idea. Speaking of which, when are you planning to come clean about the PBS connection? I'm sure that's going to go over really well with this group!

Vincent: But I do think it should also be about finding new ways of working with the kids and focusing our energy on proactively encouraging positive behaviour.

Cred: *(mockingly)* "Proactively encouraging positive behaviour?!" Listen to you spout off with the jargon. I can't believe you just said that! I guarantee you that for some people in this room the jig is now up... They're thinking this thing has got PBS written all over it. Brace yourself, Vincent. You might be in for a butt-kicking here.

Vincent: ...And the staff should know that this project is motivated by pressure our union is putting on the district to do something about behaviour. Teachers are saying it's their number one issue.

Cred: *(chuckling with amusement)* Blatant use of the union to win over the rank and file. I must admit though, it got a few heads nodding in agreement. Their arms are still crossed, but I see some glimpses of support out there. Say, you planning to mention PBS?

Vincent: And the good thing is the district is kicking in some FTE and release time so teachers won't be given yet another thing to fit into their busy schedules.

Cred: Here you go with the old “I feel your pain” shtick. The nauseatingly familiar “I know what it’s like because I’ve been a classroom teacher” routine. Try not to overplay that card, Vincent. They know it’s been awhile since you had your own class.

Julie: *(an intermediate teacher seated at the back of the room)* Who will be assigned the FTE? How is that going to impact everyone’s schedules?

Vincent: Well, because it’s mid year, we’re a bit limited in our options at least until June, when we reapply to have the funding renewed for next year. Wendy, Stephanie and I met to discuss this and thought that if Stephanie was to take this on, it would enable us to keep the time within the school rather than have someone from outside come in. I would also try and support the project as I can through my counselling role.

*(Faint chatter is heard at the back of the room.)*

Julie: What do you mean rather than someone else come in? Is this just some backdoor way of sneaking PBS into the school? Because we already had that discussion two years ago, and turned it down.

Cred: Bingo!

Vincent: The idea of the pilot did come from the District PBS committee.

*(Loud grumbles are heard throughout the room.)*

But I want to be absolutely clear on the fact that this initiative is intended to be grass-roots in nature. The staff would ultimately be the ones to decide if it wanted to use any of the approaches or principles of PBS, and if it chose not to, and wanted to simply expand on what we’re already successfully doing here than that would be fine. I think the main idea is that we figure out what we’re already doing that works, build on it, and make changes to anything in our system that isn’t working.

Cred: You may have actually dodged that bullet, Vincent. But you better stay true to that whole grass-roots approach. I get a sense these folks will be watching this carefully. That is if they go ahead with it.

Sarah: *(looking at her watch)* So what now? How do we decide whether or not to accept it?

Michael: Are we going with a majority vote?

Cred: Careful, Vincent! You don’t want to find yourself working against a small group of people who oppose this. You could find yourself fighting resistance all year.

Vincent: I think the staff should ultimately decide this. At the bottom of the sheet on your table is a section where you can indicate whether you support the idea or not. How about in addition to marking “yes” or “no,” write down beside it what percentage you think we should have in favour before going ahead with it.

Cred: (*genuinely impressed*) Pretty slick, Vincent. But I'd love to be a fly on the staffroom wall when the rest of the group says what they really feel about this.

*Library lights dim plunging the stage into darkness.*

### Awakening, unsettling, and reconciling multiple selves and their loyalties

A number of significant revelations occurred to me through the process of fictionalizing the field notes I recorded after the actual meeting that I had with the staff about the behaviour project. From a methodological standpoint this autoethnographic endeavour was primarily intended to make meaning out of the thoughts and feelings I had in relation to this event. That is to say that the theatricalizing of what really happened in the library on that memorable afternoon in January 2008 reflects a great deal more about the inner turmoil and tensions that I wrestled with during the meeting, and in the days and weeks that followed, than it does a representation of what actually took place.

In this respect, it is certainly worth mentioning that my field notes from the meeting actually indicate that I was somewhat surprised to find that the Crestview staff was considerably more gentle and receptive to the idea of the project than what the District Committee representatives had braced me for based on their experience two years earlier when they had attempted to introduce PBS at the school. Nonetheless, there were, at least in my impression, distinct power dynamics at play in the room during the meeting. I took note of which staff members spoke and what influence this appeared to have on how the project was collectively received. These observations actually extended beyond this context as individual and collective reactions to the proposal continued in the hours and days that followed the actual meeting. One example of this was an occasion when I happened to walk into a conversation in the staff room in which one of the teachers who had not voiced an opinion at the meeting was clearly

expressing her objection to the idea, based primarily on the fact that she did not agree with the decision to assign the additional point time and coordinator position to an administrator. The noticeable shift in her tone when I entered the room led me to believe that she had some reservation about openly sharing this opposition with me present.

During the meeting itself I also thought it was significant how the two members of the school administration situated themselves both in terms of their physical location and with respect to the relatively few comments they made about the project. For the most part, both Wendy and Stephanie appeared to hold back their own opinions on whether or not the school should host the initiative. If anything, Wendy appeared to adopt a tone that seemed to communicate some reservation about it being located at Crestview. It appeared particularly important to her that she make clear to staff members that the final decision was in their hands, but that she hoped that whatever choice was made, people would respect and support it. In fictionalizing the role administration played at the meeting I purposefully chose to leave them out of the dialogue entirely to emphasize the fact that for better or worse, I had felt very much on my own throughout the entire experience.

Although I appreciated the way the staff at Crestview generally received news of the proposal, I found myself wondering in the days and weeks that followed the meeting if I had somehow allowed my relationship with teachers at the school to be used in a manner that was likely to diminish whatever forces of resistance might emerge from the staff. Clearly, I shared the opinion held by Wendy and Stephanie that there was greater likelihood of resistance occurring if the project was introduced by someone in a position of authority. Had I remained true in my loyalty to the research process, it might have made more sense to allow either of them or a PBS Committee member to propose the initiative, so that I could have been better situated to observe and participate in the various organizational dynamics that were at play during the

meeting. Instead it seemed in hindsight that I was driven more by a loyalty to a worldview that wanted the project to be fundamentally grass-roots in design. I also wondered how much influence my loyalty to the employer had played, which in this instance appeared to involve responding to the school administration's need to not have the project perceived by staff as being driven by them or ultimately their responsibility.

Among other things, the dramatized version of the meeting embodies this sense of subtle manipulation I felt following my experience of pitching the project to the staff. It makes explicit through an inner dialogue, the conscious and unconscious attempts I made to understand and provide whatever it was that teachers needed to hear in order to win over their support for the project. The scene also intentionally surfaces the important question of whether or not there exists within Crestview's organizational structure certain individuals who I perceive as being more inclined to speak as authorized representatives of the group, particularly during a meeting of this nature. Which questions were voiced by whom, how often some individuals spoke, and for what underlying purpose, all represent key questions that were delicately explored to gain a better sense of how power dynamics may have influenced teachers' receptivity to a project that had the potential to affect systemic change within our school. Equally important was the need to consider who was not heard from, why, and how this may also have impacted individual and collective motivation.

Through the dramatized dialogue that takes place in the library we hear from three teachers, two of whom appear to initially bring with them a certain degree of cynicism. One of them also suggests that there are several students at the school who are not being appropriately 'dealt with.' These characterizations represent positions that not only emerged during the meeting, but also at various times throughout the course of the project. It's important to note that these positions were not always communicated by the same staff members, but they did

represent a distinct dynamic within the organizational structure of Crestview, one that exerted significant influence over certain decisions that decisively shaped the direction of the pilot project.

Through the character of 'Cred,' I became further aware of the distinct impression I have that the classroom teachers at Crestview possess a great deal of power within the school's organizational structure, and that this can potentially act as a force of resistance to authority. As I attempted to make sense of this within the theoretical framework set out for this inquiry, I came back to my understanding of how power is situated both in terms of the official authority that the public education system confers on district and school-based administration, and the forces that exist in potential opposition to it. In this respect, it seems evident to me that power structures are organizationally situated within the public education system by a leadership hierarchy that is stratified from ministry oversight, through district governance to school-based administration. A similar stratification is organized in reaction to this authority, beginning at the provincial level with a federation of teachers, through the local chapters that are organized within every district, to school-based teacher committees. In this sense, there exists a power structure that mirrors the official authority responsible for the governance of public education, one that is equally capable of exerting influence over the way in which schools function.

In every school this results in certain power dynamics playing out in relation to the day-to-day decision-making. Despite efforts by provincial and local leadership structures, both administrative and union, to maintain a uniformity of process and position, the way in which power is organizationally situated varies considerably from one school staff to the next. This is because it is primarily shaped by the interpersonal dynamics that exist within and between the staff and the school administration. It is here that complex sociocultural, political, and historical forces are significantly at play. Individual and collective worldviews that are generated by a

diversity of personalities and lived experiences constantly evolve and change in ways that influence how power is situated within a staff and what impact it will have on how the organization functions.

By dramatizing the meeting that was held to discuss the pilot project, I developed a greater self awareness of how I was inclined to perceive these dynamics in terms of their organizational structure and influence. I felt that this was a critical step to include in the analysis of the data because it helped make explicit the way in which I perceive power as being situated within and between the staff and administration at the school. From an ethical standpoint, it was important to exercise discretion in terms of how this was dramatized so that it did not recklessly identify certain individuals in ways that might not reflect positively on them. More importantly the scene was designed to emphasize the fact that these were personal and professional impressions that I was bringing with me to the research context. This I felt was an important step that needed to take place prior to me turning my attention to how others perceived the manner in which the initiative was introduced to the staff.

#### Teacher and administrator perceptions of how the project was introduced to Crestview

“We’re a staff that doesn’t like to be told what to do.”

-Crestview Teacher

“I know that this staff does not like anybody telling them what to do...”

-Crestview Administrator

As outlined in the previous chapter, two stages of participant recruitment occurred in this research. The first of these facilitated data collection from the staff as a whole in the form of researcher field notes on everyday developments at the school and digital audio recordings of project committee meetings throughout the course of the initiative. The second involved interviewing teachers and school administration in the final weeks of the study. This additional



investigative step was intended to provide research participants an opportunity to reflect on what was most significant to them with respect to what had occurred at their school over the course of the pilot project.

However, the interviews also afforded me the opportunity to ask members of the staff and administration about their impressions of how the pilot project was introduced to the school. In addition to exploring this on an autoethnographic level through ethnotheatre, it was also important to examine the perspectives of those who were on the receiving end of the behaviour project 'pitch.' A review of the interview transcripts revealed that when asked about the way in which the project was introduced to Crestview, several teachers made specific reference to the fact that it was important to them that this was done by someone who worked at the school. As one teacher explained, "[this project] was more likely to be accepted because it came from within our own staff. Had it been someone coming from outside the school, it would have been harder to get people to buy-in...It needs to be coming from people who have experience with the kids who are here..." Another teacher highlighted the need for there to be a relationship between the staff and the person introducing the initiative: "We're always being bombarded with new ways of doing things, but the fact that you presented it. We work with you. We trust you."

Comments such as these indicate that part of this dynamic stems from an almost inherent resistance to outsiders presenting new approaches to the school. As one teacher explains, "Historically the staff has resisted the latest model or 'fix.'" When it was presented as the PBS model...the staff collectively was not very receptive to any direction coming from 'on high,' or anywhere else for that matter." A similar sentiment is expressed by another teacher: "Usually when people come to Crestview with a new model, it's rejected." Not surprisingly, the school's administration was also aware of these dynamics. One of its representatives recalled in an

interview how she had come to the realization early on in her tenure that at Crestview “anything that comes from the district...won’t fly.”

Through an analysis of interview comments specifically related to this resistance to outside authorities, two distinct themes emerged. The first of these related to the need for staff to have some ownership over an initiative of this nature both in terms of its design and implementation:

When it was introduced, there was talk that it was going to be starting right off at grassroots, I don’t know if you used the word grassroots, but it was going to be staff initiative, there was going to be no preconception. We were going to be developing something at the school. Crestview would be coming up with something very unique. It would be organic, we would let it grow and take shape and develop into something. We would have input all the way along...it would grow into something and we would take it from there.

A similar sentiment is expressed by another teacher in a manner that highlights the disengagement people feel when there is a lack of involvement in an initiative’s design, one that can interfere with taking ownership for its success:

If you had brought a packaged program to Crestview and said: “This is going to work for you. We have tried and tested it at [another school], and it worked.” I don’t think you would have even got anyone to come to the meeting, let alone buy into this. Because the culture, the community, the people who work and use it have to have some ownership over it... You can’t bring a box to me and say: “Teach this. This is the best way...” It shuts you down.

This position was articulated in different ways by many of the teachers who were interviewed. In some cases it was succinctly conveyed in statements such as “you can’t just say: “this is what you are doing,”” while others like those noted above commented at considerable length about the importance of a project being designed and implemented by the staff itself rather than having a pre-developed program simply passed along for implementation.

A deeper exploration of this particular mindset revealed that it was considerably more complex than it appeared to be on the surface. As outlined in the previous chapter, an important

step in the analytical process involved placing equal effort on uncovering evidence that might disconfirm the theoretical constructs being explored. In this case, the initial analysis of the data highlighted the importance of empowering a staff to engage in a particular initiative on a grass-roots level in a manner that essentially emancipates them from having pre-designed programs imposed on them by outside authorities. This prompted a search for evidence to counter this position. In terms of staff resistance to projects being introduced into a school by outside authorities, no instances were found in any of the data where an opinion was expressed that seemed to counter this sentiment. However, when the data was re-examined to explore the theme of the staff needing the initiative to be grass roots in design, there was evidence to suggest that certain teachers preferred that a program be at least somewhat developed and tested for effectiveness before being introduced to their school:

Teachers today are so overwhelmed by all these new things that keep being piled on top of us that if it comes in a little package that says “this worked in this school, this is the way it was set-up,” but they also felt that there were opportunities for it to change, so that it’s not laid on you, “this is what you must do.” It’s kind of a combination of the two: “this is a way that worked, why not try this, but understand that you can change it as it evolves within your own school.”

An important aspect of this perspective seems to reflect the need for a new program to at least have some structure to it that can support the staff as they implement some of their own ideas. As one staff member put it, without something to “hang things on,” the potential for failure exists because “people will just flail and look at it and go where the hell do we start? If you start with nothing, a few people will be working their pants off.”

The second theme that emerged in connection to staff resistance to initiatives introduced by outside authorities related to the commonly held conviction by teachers that schools are under-resourced. Both the analysis of teacher interviews and observations made throughout the course of the project revealed that teachers attached considerable significance to the fact that the

project brought with it additional staffing. In some instances, individuals appeared to perceive the pilot project primarily as a means of getting much-needed extra support at the school:

The carrot was that extra funding...when it was shown that we were actually going to get some funding for it...we were going to get an extra teacher to help us in the school, then I think that's when a lot of people went: "Oh yeah, that's good because we are always looking for extra staff. I think that really got people to buy in, to perk up and say, "Oh yeah, this is good!"

Some of the interviews revealed that the extra funding needed to be understood within a historical context, one that highlighted the fact that previous resources to support behaviour at the school had been cut: "We actually already had a successful behaviour model... There was a huge 'buy-in'... But due to dwindling resources...staff, etc, it eroded over time." In some instances, this impression seemed to fuel a certain degree of cynicism from staff members who perceived this as part of a perpetual cycle they had experienced over the course of many years. This sentiment seemed to suggest a certain fatigue over the fact that there always seems to be a new curricular or behaviour-related focus that is the school district's "flavour of the day," and that considerable effort, including additional resources, are typically devoted at the outset in order to get all of the schools on board. Then, with little or no warning, these supports are often discontinued, leaving behind the expectation that staff will simply continue their commitment to the new focus by adding it to their existing load.

Another factor that appeared to contribute to the cynicism some teachers felt was that the whole idea of bringing the project to Crestview seemed to imply that behaviour was not already a central focus for the school. The additional resources attached to the project appeared to somewhat diminish this sentiment. As one teacher, tersely put it when asked what she thought the reaction might have been had the offer of extra staffing not come along with the project: "I would have given my head a shake, and wondered: "What do you think we're doing now?""

There is one final point worth mentioning on the subject of allocating additional resources to the pilot project. Because it was clearly established at the district level that the additional staffing allocated to the project would be temporary, the Crestview staff were informed at the meeting that the extra point time was subject to re-approval at the end of the 2007/2008 academic year, and would under no circumstances extend beyond June 2009. By being clear about this up front, it was hoped that staff members would not become resentful about the discontinuation of support at the end of the project, as had been the case with previous initiatives. The fact that this was made explicit at the outset was significant to at least one classroom teacher who later recalled:

There was no BS in terms of resources that would be available. It was clear that we wouldn't have Room 4,<sup>29</sup> we wouldn't have this and this and this. We would have some extra staffing, and some time to get together and problem solve. But it was made clear that we were going to be on our own. If we needed someone who was going to [remain] here full time to make a behaviour program work, it wasn't going to happen. And personally, I liked the honesty.

#### Crestview accepts the project with 100% buy-in (at least 'on paper')

At the conclusion of the meeting in which the behaviour initiative was presented, the staff was given a clear message that the final decision was entirely up to them, and that they should feel in no way obliged to accept the project. They were however, informed that a minimum level of 80% commitment from the entire staff was required in order for the project to be assigned to the school.<sup>30</sup> After finishing this explanation, staff members were asked if they had any questions. Following a number of inquiries and some expressed concerns, a vote by secret ballot was held to determine the level of staff commitment to the project. In addition to being asked whether or not they supported the idea of Crestview hosting the pilot, staff members

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<sup>29</sup> A detailed explanation of Room 4 is provided further on in this chapter.

were also asked to indicate on the ballot what level of commitment they felt should be required in order for the school to accept the project.

The results from the initial vote showed that 80% of the staff was in favour of the project. This matched the average expected level of commitment that people indicated should be required in order to accept the initiative. After a lengthy discussion about these results, Wendy, Stephanie and I had some concerns about the 20% of the staff who were not in support of the initiative. This was partly motivated by the fact that several staff members had indicated on their ballots that a buy-in of 100% should be required before moving ahead. This led to a concern that those individuals who were not in favour of the program, or who felt that there was insufficient buy-in, might represent a continuous force of active or passive resistance against efforts made by Stephanie and other staff members who supported the initiative, potentially creating divisiveness among the staff.

Consequently, we decided to refer the matter to staff committee<sup>31</sup> and empower it to make the final decision as to whether or not the project should go ahead. Following that meeting, Wendy, Stephanie and I were informed that a subsequent vote had been taken, and teacher support for the project was now at 100%.<sup>32</sup> The District PBS Committee was informed that the project had been accepted. Wendy and Stephanie immediately began the process of hiring

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<sup>30</sup> This percentage of 'buy-in' was set by the District Committee in accordance with PBS guidelines that clearly outline the need for a minimum degree of school-wide commitment before commencing with programs of this nature.

<sup>31</sup> Staff Committee is exclusively comprised of staff members who belong to the local chapter of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. School administrators generally do not attend these meetings unless invited.

<sup>32</sup> Because I had introduced the project to the staff, I decided that it would not be appropriate for me to attend this particular meeting, despite the fact that I was entitled to do so as a BCTF member. This I felt would ensure that my presence would in no way influence the nature or outcome of this discussion.

someone to fill Stephanie's learning assistance position. In late January, the behaviour pilot project at Crestview Elementary officially commenced.

### Teacher and administrator perspectives on Crestview's approach to behaviour before the pilot project

Before exploring key events that took place over the eighteen months that the behaviour pilot project was located at Crestview, it will be helpful to provide a snapshot of how teachers and administrators perceived the way in which problem behaviour was being dealt with at the school at the beginning of the initiative. After written informed consent was attained from staff members and administration following the school's decision to accept the project, I began to record observations of the everyday behaviour-related events that took place at Crestview during the first few weeks of the initiative. I also made field notes of informal discussions I had with staff members and administration about their overall impression of how these events were generally being handled. An initial analysis of this data revealed several core themes that distinctly reflected considerable differences of opinion and perspective between school administration and classroom teachers. To a lesser but noteworthy extent, differences were also noted between various members of the teaching staff, and in rarer cases, between the members of the administrative team.

What emerged from this analysis was that both staff members and administrators were inclined to largely base their impressions on whether or not they felt that students who engaged in problem behaviour were being appropriately dealt with by the individual who they believed was primarily responsible for doing so at a specific stage of the response process. On the administrative end of things, impressions appeared to be primarily based on perceptions of the general 'goings-on' in a particular classroom, and how it enhanced or diminished the likelihood of problem behaviour occurring. To some extent, there seemed to be concern as to whether

certain teachers on staff were employing basic fundamentals of classroom management in order to reduce occurrences of problem behaviour that were resulting in office referrals. In relation to this, two themes in particular stood out. The first specifically related to whether or not the teacher maintained clearly established behavioural boundaries essential to guiding students to make good choices. In this respect, administration was inclined to perceive one or more teachers on staff as being 'too loose' in their approach to classroom management. The second of these centred around children being sent to the office for behaviours that the administration felt did not warrant this level of intervention. In this regard, they appeared to hold the conviction that one or more teachers on staff were on occasion too strict or unrealistic with their behaviour expectations.

On the other side of this perspective were a number of classroom teachers who clearly felt that administration was not properly handling situations in which students were being sent to the office. This dissatisfaction was generally connected to one or both of two issues. The first of these was a strong feeling among certain teachers that when students were sent to the office too often it was the case that no administrator was immediately available to receive the child, and as a result, the office staff was left to deal with the situation. The second complaint was connected to students being returned to the classroom by an administrator before a sufficient amount of time had passed. In some cases, teachers questioned whether or not the child should be returned at all without there first being some type of formal meeting held. Several of the teachers clearly felt that this process was particularly ineffective for 'repeat offenders' who seemed to be caught up in a perpetual cycle of being sent to the office and shortly after returned to the classroom only to be sent back to the office once again at some undetermined point in the future. The general impression held by these teachers was that nothing really was being done



about the student's behaviour, and as a result learning in the classroom was being negatively impacted.

### Self conscious reflection on Crestview's approach to behaviour at the beginning of the project

Before discussing the subsequent analysis of these themes using a theoretical lens of power and organizational dynamics, it is worth including in this discussion my own impressions of how the Crestview community in general dealt with problem behaviour. Despite the fact that there appeared to be a core difference of opinion between staff members and school administration around the whole issue of sending students to the office, my overall impression of Crestview at the time of the pilot project was that it had many favourable and even unique characteristics to its culture that helped it deal successfully with challenging behaviour. Primary among these was the fact that most classroom teachers, support staff, and administration at the school were not inclined to recklessly engage in power struggles with students. As a result, the school was very much characterized by the healthy relationships that existed between most of its staff and students, and this generally included even the children at the school who were formally identified as having behaviour-related special needs.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of this, Crestview for the most part appeared to successfully avoid any sense of an 'us vs. them' dichotomy taking hold between adults and students, something I have seen in other schools where I've worked. A large part of this, I credit to the fact that the Crestview staff is collectively quite light-hearted, and devotes a great deal of energy to creating a fun and creative workplace, one that is consistently being fuelled by frequent expressions of kindness,

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<sup>33</sup> The BC Ministry's Special Education policy provides schools with guidelines for formally identifying children who require moderate to severe behaviour intervention. Categories R (moderate) and H (severe) are used to identify and support these children. The latter of these results in a school district receiving an additional \$8000 per year beyond 'per-pupil' funding to provide resources to support a child who has these special needs (BC Ministry of Education, 2009b).

compassion, laughter and social engagement. I think this energy permeates throughout the halls and classrooms of the school creating an atmosphere that makes both adults and students more inclined to compromise and get along.

There are however, certain noted exceptions. As is the case within any social organization, emotional reactivity will occur on occasion within a school community. Not surprisingly, there are among the teachers, students, support staff, parents and administrative team at Crestview, certain individuals who are more prone to this than others. Situations in which emotions run high tend to increase interpersonal tension because the reactivity associated with these feelings will often fuel the kind of power struggles that interfere with constructive problem solving. Crestview is no stranger to these dynamics. In my role as the school counsellor and behaviour case manager, I am occasionally called upon to support staff and students in situations in which the emotions of one or both sides of a particular conflict are exacting a toll on the individuals involved.

Dealing successfully with these emotions is always a prerequisite to exploring resolution to the issue at hand, since people are generally less inclined to effectively problem solve if they have not first had the opportunity to vent their frustration, anger, sadness, despair, or whatever other form of emotional reaction they are experiencing to a given situation. Effectively handling these situations often involves striking a balance between empathy and containment. The former is intended to instill the individual with a sense of being heard and understood. This alone often dissipates the intensity of the emotions being felt. The latter is needed to prevent words or actions from triggering emotional reactivity from the other individuals involved. If this does not occur there is always the risk of the situation spiraling downward into a cycle of extreme, emotion-filled actions and reactions that can significantly damage relationships between teachers, students, parents and administration. The scene, *The Principal's Office*, presented in

the previous chapter represents an autoethnographic exploration of these dynamics from several of the different perspectives involved.

Another feature characteristically found within an organization is the tendency for some individuals on occasion to become complacent about their work to such an extent that others perceive it as being indifferent or underinvested in the overall well being of the community. Like emotional reactivity, this also has the potential to cause considerable tension in school settings, especially as it relates to problem behaviour, because some members of the staff and administration will inevitably perceive this complacency as an indication that not everyone is carrying their load to support a safe and caring learning environment. Within a school community, the failure of one or more teachers to establish and maintain a minimal level of order and respect among their students can have far reaching consequences for all staff and students since a considerable amount of time each day is spent in the commonly shared spaces of the playground, hallways, library, computer lab and other facilities within a school that are frequented by all members of the community. To a lesser extent than the influence that emotional reactivity can have on relationships, a real or perceived complacency toward behaviour can also exact its toll on the overall atmosphere of a school.

At Crestview, these dynamics were also present at the beginning of the project and clearly impacted the otherwise positive atmosphere that was routinely generated through the daily lighthearted interactions that commonly occurred between the various members of the community. The manner in which instances of emotional reactivity and perceived or real complacency toward problem behaviour factored into developments that occurred while the pilot project was at Crestview are important to take into consideration, particularly when examined within the context of the micro-politics and organizational dynamics that exist within the school. A further exploration of this will help to create a better understanding of how developments in

the early weeks of the behaviour pilot significantly determined both its initial trajectory and the earliest impressions people had about the project as a whole.

#### Data analysis using a theoretical lens of organizational dynamics

Using a theoretical framework of power and organizational dynamics, a subsequent analysis was conducted on the researcher, teacher and administrator perspectives of how behaviour was being dealt with at the school at the beginning of the project. This involved examining data from the perspective of authority and accountability, either as a means of promoting positive behaviour or as a means of reinforcing or resisting power structures within the school. Another perspective took into account the possibility that authority and accountability were not relevant features. This analysis also included data from the interviews carried out after the project was finished. However, consideration was given to the fact that participants were reflecting on dynamics that had existed eighteens months earlier prior to the initiative coming to the school.

This stage of the analysis led to a number of important revelations. The first of these was the awareness that a broader historical context was needed to understand some of the organizational dynamics related to behaviour support at Crestview. This included taking into consideration a previous system that was in place at the school, one that was largely centred on the use of a resource room called 'Room 4.' This space had previously been staffed full-time by a teaching assistant whose sole responsibility at the school was to problem-solve with students sent out of their classroom for misbehaviour.

This intervention was introduced as part of a previous attempt by the staff to implement a school-wide behaviour program based on the Coloroso Model (1990; 1994), the cornerstone of which involved ensuring that children take ownership for their behaviour. Room 4, at least in

theory, was designed to ensure that children would have to engage in constructive problem-solving with an adult as a follow-up to any problem behaviour they exhibited. Because this took place in an alternate setting with another adult, many teachers believed that it also preserved the learning environment in the classroom by allowing them to get on with their job of teaching. In practice, this system was set up so that in most cases the student remained out of class until the next natural break, at which point a discussion usually took place with the teacher and/or administrator as to whether or not a return to class was appropriate.

In my discussions with both Crestview's administration and a number of school district officials, it was clear that a return to a Room 4-style of behaviour system was out of the question. There appeared to be several reasons behind this position. One of them was directly connected to staffing. Without an additional resource person, Room 4 would have to be continuously supervised by one of the administrators, which would potentially limit their ability to carry out other administrative duties. The second concern was related to a fear administration appeared to have that teachers would automatically assume that students who were sent to Room 4 would not return until the next natural break. Clearly, the school's administration did not support such a policy citing the fact that a child sent out of the class within the first ten or fifteen minutes would miss between sixty and ninety minutes of instruction depending on what time of day the incident occurred. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, administration seemed extremely leery of supporting any intervention that gave classroom teachers the impression that behaviour was something that someone else at the school needed to deal with so that they could get on with their teaching.

These firmly entrenched opposing positions about Room 4<sup>34</sup> appeared to be situated within an underlying theme connected to the whole question of who was ultimately responsible for dealing with problem behaviour at Crestview. When examined within a framework of power and organizational dynamics a number of complex realities emerged. Both teachers and administrators strongly defended their autonomy to deal with behaviour situations as they saw fit. However, both groups seemed inclined to exert pressure on the approach the other was using within their jurisdiction. For certain teachers, this involved a clear desire to set in place a policy that outlined what happens to a student *after* he or she is sent to the office, including how long that child remains out of the classroom, if, when, and by whom parents are informed, and at what stage a suspension from school is administered. From their perspective this represented an essential part of holding students accountable for their behaviour through the authority invested in the school's administration. For their part, school administration appeared more inclined to concern itself with, and exert influence on, what happens to a student *before* he or she is sent to the office. This included the expectation that a teacher provide a student with one or two warnings in a manner that is free of emotion, to first use an alternate space within the classroom or in another room, and to have in place some system of positive reinforcement that might diminish the likelihood of the problem behaviour occurring in the first place. In this respect, the notion of accountability was more focused on the teacher.

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<sup>34</sup> Positions both in support of, and in opposition to, a Room 4 intervention were passionately expressed by teachers, school-based administrators and district officials at various times throughout the pilot project. A noted example of this came from a district level representative on the PBS Committee, who at one point during project deliberations declared: "Crestview better not even think about using the extra point time to create another Room 4!"

### Circuitous communication patterns both before and during the behaviour pilot project

Not surprisingly, these expectations placed by each side on the other's area of jurisdiction occasionally promoted some degree of resistance and even tension within the school community. Closely related to this, but relevant to other areas of contention as well, were the communication methods commonly employed by teachers and administrators to deal with these differences of opinion, a dynamic that also appeared to be significantly shaped by how power was organizationally situated within the school community. At times these methods seemed to only further fuel tensions between staff and administration in ways that did little to help move any particular issue beyond a place of disagreement to some form of resolution. Although each side's pattern of communication looked slightly different, the result was generally the same.

It was evident from my observations that when one or more of the classroom teachers were upset with how administration was dealing with a particular situation, these concerns were generally made known first to colleagues either informally and in private or through a more formal process of making it an agenda item to be discussed at a staff committee meeting. When the latter was the case, the teaching staff would generally discuss the issue and decide whether or not it should be brought to the administrator's attention through the chief staff representative (CSR)<sup>35</sup>, preferably in a manner that maintained the confidentiality of the person(s) responsible for the complaint.

This process for expressing disagreement or dissatisfaction with school administration follows a protocol encouraged by the teachers' union. It effectively establishes a vehicle for teachers to collectively exert power over administrators by encouraging them to be united in support of one another and wherever possible to speak with 'one voice.' In practice, it has the

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<sup>35</sup> This position is held by a member of the teaching staff who has been elected by his or her colleagues to represent the group in discussions with administration and at district-wide union meetings.

potential to act as a counterbalance to the authority instilled in school-based administrators through the leadership structure that is established by school districts. At Crestview, the counterbalance of power exercised by its teachers through staff committee was particularly evident at the time the behaviour project was initiated, but also resurfaced at a number of key stages throughout its duration. In interviews and informal discussions with both staff members and administration, it was often pointed out that the Crestview staff committee had a long and colorful history of being particularly ‘active.’

Rarely acknowledged however, was the fact that this mode of communication also appeared to have the potential to discourage teachers from expressing dissenting opinions from their colleagues, since doing so carried with it the impression of breaking ranks with the staff. Researcher observations throughout the project revealed many instances in which individual teachers discretely shared with me their disagreement with a particular position taken by one or more of their colleagues, but refrained from doing so in the larger forum of staff committee. Because most teachers perceive that not supporting a fellow teacher is looked dimly upon by the collective, there is a general sense that considerable discretion needs to be exercised in terms of how and to whom one voices any form of disagreement with a colleague. Clear examples of this were noted in various interviews and informal discussions with teachers in which impressions were very delicately expressed that problem behaviour was occurring in certain classrooms either as a result of the teacher’s emotional reactivity or because behaviour management strategies were not being effectively and consistently employed.

These dynamics appeared to be further made complex by how power was situated within the teaching group itself. In this respect, one’s perception of the status of a particular teacher seemed to play a role in the extent to which another staff member would voice an opinion of dissension about his or her approach to a particular situation or overall style of classroom



management. Consequently, if a staff member was of the opinion that a colleague was partly or wholly responsible for a particular behaviour situation, the degree to which this impression was openly shared, if at all, appeared to closely relate to the status or authority that individual held within the union structure of the organization. In cases where the teacher appeared to have less status, criticism was more openly shared in the presence of others in places like the staff room, hallways, or other common areas within the school. Criticism or questioning the approach of a colleague with higher status appeared to only occur within more confidential settings, and even then was very delicately expressed. In addition to one's perceived status within the school's union structure, the degree to which an individual was socially active within the teaching group also seemed to carry with it certain value.

Similar power dynamics were also noted among the administrative team at the school, however instances in which a dissenting opinion was expressed were considerably less frequent. I attributed this in part to the fact that between a principal and vice principal there is an explicit power relationship that heightens the implications of any perceived disagreement between them. For the vice principal, there are potential costs in terms of professional advancement for not supporting the principal's perspective on any given issue. Nevertheless, on a few noted occasions both at the beginning, and at various stages throughout the project, both members of the administrative team privately and delicately shared with me their disagreement or dissatisfaction with the other administrator's approach to a given issue or decision related to the project. In a fashion similar to the dynamics found within the teaching group, these differences of opinion were rarely presented in a public forum.

Observations and field notes related to how the school administration expressed disagreement or dissatisfaction with one or more members of the teaching staff revealed a communication process that was equally circuitous. Administrators generally appeared reluctant

to speak directly to teachers about their concerns. Instead, they were more inclined to address issues delicately and indirectly at staff meetings. In some circumstances, they subtly enlisted the help of an intermediary, oftentimes another staff member with whom they had a strong relationship, to gently get the message across to the staff that a particular approach being taken was not helpful. In my role as the school counsellor, I experienced situations like this with considerable frequency, in part because my job was often directly impacted whenever school administration and the teaching staff were not on the same page about a behaviour-related issue. Because my role involved case managing students with behaviour-related special needs, efforts to effectively establish individualized plans for children on my caseload were frequently frustrated by these communication patterns prior to the behaviour project being initiated at Crestview, and at various points throughout its duration at the school.

In this sense, both teachers and administration tended to be quite selective in terms of how and to whom they spoke about any given situation in which there was a perception that a student's behaviour was not being effectively handled. Later on in this chapter, a further examination of how these communication patterns are influenced by organizational protocols and procedures set out both by the school district and the BCTF will shed additional light on how these factors impact the manner in which a school community deals with the tensions that occasionally surface in relation to student behaviour.

### Inconsistencies in terms of office referrals

One final point that should be mentioned about Crestview's approach to behaviour at the time the project was initiated relates to the lack of consistency in office referrals, particularly in terms of why they occurred, and how they were handled. Observations made of behaviour incidents over the first few weeks of the project left me with the distinct impression that a great

deal of variation clearly existed at the school in terms of how and why students received redirections from adults. I noted that in some instances, students were sent to the office by a classroom teacher for incomplete homework or failure to come to school with certain materials. In stark contrast to this were other occasions in which students received no redirection from their classroom teacher for engaging in behaviour that was glaringly disruptive to the learning atmosphere in the classroom. To a large extent, these distinctions were a reflection of the teacher's individual style or personality. Consequently, referrals to the office varied greatly among the staff with some classroom teachers rarely, if ever, sending a student to meet with an administrator, while others did so with considerable regularity for a wide variety of reasons.

On the administrative end of things, it was my sense that no formal system of tracking office referrals was in place when the project commenced, and that both administrators insisted on maintaining a fair amount of autonomy in dealing with the students who were sent to them, oftentimes customizing their response based on various factors that they strongly felt needed to be taken into consideration before deciding on an appropriate course of action. Notes on student contacts with the office were kept as part of the administrator's private record keeping, but these were not formally integrated into a school-wide system that indicated a specific point at which additional support services needed to be activated.

Point of investigative entry: Individual and collective resistance to a school-wide response system

It was against this backdrop that the behaviour pilot project several weeks into its mandate began efforts to implement a school-wide process for staff and administration to respond to problem behaviour. How and why this came to be a focus at the beginning of the behaviour project, and continued to re-emerge as a contentious issue throughout its duration, represented one of the key revelations uncovered in this investigative journey. In no other aspect

of the research was the influence of stratified power structures and organizational dynamics more evident than in the manner that they impacted attempts to implement a school-wide process for responding to problem behaviour from the point of its initial occurrence in the classroom through to the stage at which it results in a teacher referring a student to the office.

The school-wide response system proposed in the spring of 2008 was first piloted in a number of classrooms, then implemented school-wide, revised after a short period of time, reintroduced as an optional process, and then ultimately rejected by the staff several months after the behaviour initiative ended. Interviews with teachers and administration in the final weeks of the project revealed remarkable diversity in opinions and perspectives on why the establishment of a school-wide process for responding to problem behaviour proved so contentious and elusive. However, on one point there appeared to be widespread consensus: The ‘card system,’ as it came to be known, consumed so much time and energy throughout the early stages of the initiative that it practically defined the behaviour pilot project in the minds of many members of the Crestview community.

#### Origins of the yellow and red card system

It is worth noting that prior to the behaviour pilot project Crestview had already implemented a red card system that enabled a teacher to send for emergency help if a student was exhibiting behaviour in the classroom that endangered the safety of others. It was also available for teachers to use if a child refused to comply with an adult direction to go to the office. Although the system had been in place for many years, instances in which a red card was used were quite rare. Presumably, the gravity that most children associate with being sent to the principal itself encourages a high degree of compliance.

The yellow and red card system introduced early on in the project was intended to address issues that went considerably beyond safety emergencies and extreme non-compliance. However, it is important to note that the design and implementation of this system was not initially connected to the project, but instead emerged as a potential resolution to an ongoing problem that was occurring in one teacher's classroom with respect to the behaviour of a particular student. Because of this, I was directly involved in the decision-making around using the card system in this situation through my role as the school counsellor and behaviour case manager at the school. Although the child in question had not been formally identified as having behaviour-related special needs, the administration at the school was considering this as a possibility and consequently requested my involvement.

By this point in time, the classroom teacher, principal, student and parent had met on a number of occasions to discuss the problem. Nothing to date seemed to be working, and the adults involved were becoming somewhat polarized in terms of their opinions on what needed to happen in order to improve the situation. When the school principal requested my help, I met with the student and teacher separately in an effort to gain a better understanding of each of their perspectives. Not surprisingly, their viewpoints varied drastically. The student clearly felt she was being unfairly singled out by a teacher who was "always spazzing-out" for the smallest thing. From the teacher's perspective, this was a student who was well known for causing disruptions in the classroom and yet the administration had done nothing to date to address the problem despite years of complaints by previous teachers.

Although all the parties involved appeared to hold different opinions on who was most responsible for the problem, there did seem to be consensus that a clearer response system was needed so that the student would be well aware of what was expected in the classroom and what behaviour would result in her being sent to the office. Through separate discussions with both

the student and classroom teacher there seemed to be an agreement that some warning system should be in place that clearly indicated a need for a change in behaviour. Because many of the situations that were occurring in the classroom appeared to trigger some degree of emotional reactivity from the teacher, and that this seemed to provide the student with a lot of negative attention from peers, it was decided that a non-verbal redirection would be the best way to respond. For this purpose, small yellow and red cards were introduced classroom-wide to formalize a response system that first cautioned a student that a problem existed, offered a second warning if no change occurred, and then directed the student to go to the office if the problem persisted beyond these two non-verbal redirections. (This process is outlined in Table 2 on page 148.)

During the course of designing this system with the classroom teacher, a lengthy discussion ensued around what would occur on occasions when a student was sent to the office. My sense was that the teacher was looking for two guarantees. Firstly, she was expecting that the student would not be returned to class before a prescribed length of time. Secondly, she wanted some assurance that if the child was sent to the office on a certain number of occasions a more significant consequence would result. In addition to being fairly certain that school administration would not commit itself to either of these conditions, I also felt that they were ill-advised since they would only narrow the options available to the school in dealing with this situation. I also did not want the teacher to concentrate her attention on matters that went beyond her classroom jurisdiction, since the success of the intervention was likely to depend on the willingness of both the teacher and student to buy-in into the idea that this would result in a change for both of their behaviours.

Consequently, I took a fairly strong position that this part of the process needed to remain at the discretion of the administration, and that the teacher should feel reassured that if she was

-TABLE 2-

THE YELLOW AND RED CARD SYSTEM AT CRESTVIEW

Step One

A small yellow card that reads: “*A change in behaviour is needed, please*” is discretely presented or placed on the desk of a student when he or she is engaging in behaviour that is interfering with the learning of others, or is a contravention of the Crestview Code of Conduct<sup>36</sup>. The card should be discretely placed in a non-emotional manner that does not unnecessarily single out the child or draw negative attention to him or her. It is understood that adults may use various other strategies to redirect the behaviour *before* deciding to use a yellow card.

The adult has the discretion to decide when to remove the yellow card, but is encouraged to do so as soon as the child exhibits desirable behaviour. Positive reinforcement in the form of genuine praise may accompany this action as a means of re-establishing a positive relationship between the child and adult.

Step Two

A second yellow card is presented or placed on the desk of a student if he or she continues to engage in problem behaviour after having already received an initial yellow card. Again, the card should be discretely presented by the adult in a non-emotional manner. At this time, the student is required to fill out a *Social Responsibility Report*. It is at the adult’s discretion as to whether this form is filled out at the location where the second card was presented, or in an alternate space within the classroom.

At the adult’s discretion, the student rejoins his or her classmates once the form has been completed and he or she appears ready to make good choices that are respectful of the learning environment. The teacher indicates by checking a box on the form whether or not he or she agrees with what the child has written.<sup>37</sup> Completed forms are sent to the office for tracking purposes, but there is no automatic follow up by an administrator at this point unless it is deemed necessary by the teacher.

Step Three

A red card is presented to a student if, after receiving two yellow cards and filling out a Social Responsibility form, he or she continues to engage in behaviour that is disruptive to the learning environment. At this point, the student must immediately report to the office to meet with an administrator. Whenever students are sent to the office they must bring the Social Responsibility form they filled out with them.

Immediate Red Card

Red cards are automatically issued on any occasion when a child engages in behaviour that is physically aggressive, puts at risk the safety of another child, or is extremely disrespectful. On these occasions if it is more appropriate, the Social Responsibility form will be completed at the office with the support of an administrator.

<sup>36</sup> The Crestview Code of Conduct is discussed in greater detail later on in this Chapter.

<sup>37</sup> The Social and Personal Responsibility implemented along with the card system and used throughout most of the behaviour pilot project are included in Appendix 2. A customized version of this form was created for the Primary team that would allow younger children to draw rather than write the behaviour they were engaging in that was disrupting the learning of others.

genuine in her attempts to respectfully caution the student before sending her to the office that there was a good chance this would diminish the degree to which learning in the classroom was being disrupted. This discussion ended up leading us into another matter that I felt also needed to be addressed. Administration had expressed concerns to me that the student was being sent out of class on occasions when she did not have the required materials for a particular lesson. The father of the child had taken particular issue with this approach arguing that the opportunity to receive instruction in order to later get caught up on a lesson was being lost as a result of this consequence.

In discussing this delicately with the teacher, I explained that a distinction needed to be drawn between behaviour that was interfering with the learning of others and behaviour that was only impacting the student's own learning. It was important in my mind that the card system be used exclusively for the former and not the latter if there was any hope of the intervention being successful. Although initially reluctant, the teacher agreed that it was behaviour that disrupted the learning environment that was of greatest concern, and that affecting change in this regard was the higher priority.

Consequently, we agreed to organize classroom expectations into two categories, those that represented 'personal responsibility' and those that were related to 'social responsibility.' The latter of these included refraining from any behaviour that interfered with the learning of others in the classroom. Only for these would a yellow or red card be issued. This meant that students who did not have required materials or homework completed for a particular lesson or who chose not to engage in a learning activity would only be asked to fill out a Personal Responsibility Report, and would be allowed to remain in the classroom as long as they did not disrupt others. This report would serve as a tracking record that the teacher could use to inform



parents if this behaviour occurred with a frequency that was clearly impacting the child's academic progress.

Once this was agreed on, the only other matter to sort out was how the new system would be implemented. The teacher felt that it would be useful to have a third party introduce it to the students, and model it for one or two lessons. To this end, I agreed to come into the classroom later that day and present the system. I also arranged an individual meeting to explain the intervention to the student who was continually being sent out of class. My hope was that she would embrace the card system because it provided two warnings before being sent to the office, which I felt would address her chief complaint that the teacher was unexpectedly reacting to behaviours that she didn't think were such a big deal. During our discussion about the system, the student seemed initially intrigued, but remained doubtful that it would change anything. She also pointed out the fact that everyone in the classroom was going to instantly realize that the system had been primarily designed because of her. I explained that being repeatedly sent to the office was already bringing negative attention to her, and that if this intervention worked it would reduce instances of her being singled out in this fashion. This seemed enough to encourage the student to at least give the intervention a try.

#### The inclusion of the yellow and red card system into the pilot project

Later on the same morning as these discussions, I was scheduled to take part in the first steering committee meetings for the behaviour pilot project. Stephanie had invited members of the teaching staff to join this committee offering release from the classroom so that participants would not need to give up their time at recess, lunch or after school. Because this involved paying for substitute teachers to cover these classes, the committee had to be divided into two

teams, one primary, the other intermediate. As the counsellor, I did not have regularly scheduled classroom duties that would need to be covered so I was able to attend both meetings.

During the first conversation with the intermediate team, the initial focus surrounded teacher autonomy and the challenge this would pose in terms of introducing any new behavioural approaches at the school. There was also discussion around the need to find some way to measure what was working at Crestview and what might need changing, and how delicate an undertaking this would be if it involved identifying certain classrooms where new approaches were needed. The idea of introducing something school-wide was suggested. This led me to share with the group the card system that had just been designed earlier that morning to address a particular situation in one classroom. There was general agreement among the intermediate team that such a system might not be a good match for certain teacher's styles, but that it could be an intervention made available to those who were open to trying it. Two of three teachers at the meeting expressed interest in piloting it within their own classrooms. (One of these two felt that he already had a similar system in place, and that it would be quite easy to adjust it to match the intervention that was being used in the other classrooms.)

When the card system was discussed with the primary team at the second of the two steering committee meetings, initial concerns were focused on whether or not the Personal and Social Responsibility Reports<sup>38</sup> were age appropriate for children in their classrooms. Consequently, the teachers decided that they needed to revise these forms in ways that would enable the children at the primary level to draw a picture rather than explain in words what problem behaviour had resulted in them receiving a second yellow card or being sent to the office. When it came to discussing how to make this available to primary teachers without them

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<sup>38</sup> Examples of the Personal and Social Responsibility Reports used at the intermediate level are provided in Appendices A and B respectively.

perceiving it as interfering with their autonomy, the response was considerably different than that of the intermediate team. The general consensus among those at the meeting was that it wouldn't be a big deal, and that it could simply be presented at a primary team meeting as something new that they were all going to try for a little while. Some light-hearted joking occurred around the notion that the primary team didn't have the same 'issues' as the intermediate teachers, and so it wasn't as necessary to tread lightly on introducing a new approach. Consequently, the card system was implemented on a trial basis in three classrooms at the intermediate level, and into all of the primary divisions. At the next staff meeting, teachers were informed that this was happening and that feedback on the system would be forthcoming at a subsequent meeting.

#### Thematic analysis of data about the use of the card system at Crestview

"I think the card system was one way of getting [teachers] to say, you know, we have a way to deal with discipline and make it easier...I actually saw a decline in the teachers that used to send [us] kids... there were not a lot of office referrals."

-Crestview Administrator

"I know for me, and for some of the other primary teachers it actually worked."

-Crestview Teacher

"I reacted to it negatively right away."

-Crestview Teacher

The initial analysis of all the data collected during the study revealed that the introduction of the card system carried with it considerable significance in terms of people's overall impressions of the behaviour pilot project. As such, it was identified as a significant point of investigative entry. A number of specific themes emerged from cycling through the data in an effort to make meaning of the researcher observations and staff members' impressions of the card system based on informal discussions and interviews at the end of the project. The first

theme to emerge was directly connected to the manner in which the card system was implemented. Two prominent issues were identified. One of these was the perception that an insufficient amount of consultation occurred with staff prior to the card system being piloted in a number of classrooms:

It just seemed that all of a sudden, we have a system... It was so quick in development...and a lot of people are going: "I wasn't released!" It really smelt like this had already been developed before...it was almost like this is what we say to get you to buy into it, and now boom, it's done.

Another teacher noted that her initial resistance to the system was directly related to perceptions she held about the individuals who were involved in designing the system and piloting it in their classrooms. This sentiment was subtly expressed elsewhere by others, including one teacher's impression that the primary purpose behind the card system was to deal with a situation in which an adult was being too strict with a student in her classroom. This was problematic for him because he strongly felt that his own approach to classroom management differed significantly from the "disciplinarian style of the teacher" for which the system was initially intended. It is interesting to note that the teacher who was involved in designing the intervention with me would, in a conversation more than a year later, express her steadfast belief that the whole card system was simply a stop-gap measure that had to be set-up because the student in her class was not being appropriately dealt with by administration.

The second and more prevalent issue that surfaced around the card system was the fact that many teachers felt that there came a point in time when it was expected that everyone would use the intervention in their classrooms. This theme was primarily identified in data that emerged from researcher observations and informal discussions with staff during the first seven months of the project, at the end of which time the issue was formally addressed at a staff meeting. Consequently, references made to it by teachers and administration during the interviews at the

end of the project typically included the fact that there was a distinct turning point when everyone became clear that the card system was optional:

There was a resistance in the beginning, and [teachers] were saying “I can’t do this. The yellow cards are not working for me.” We lost many of the people with the impression that you had to use it, and it had to be this way...when we made it clear that they could use them, [but] they didn’t have to...then, they just relaxed. They said, “Oh.” And then, because there was no pressure, people were using it more.

Some comments subtly conveyed a certain conviction that classroom management was a matter of teacher jurisdiction, and that any efforts, real or perceived, to encroach on this authority were likely to be met with some degree of resistance. One teacher described it this way: “Does it fit your style? If it doesn’t then it doesn’t, don’t use it. Does it fit my style? Do I need to use it? I’ll make the decision in my classroom whether to use it or not.”

Over the course of several months, the card system continued to be piloted in a number of classrooms with results that included teachers being notably impressed with its results, confused about some aspect of the process, or convinced that it made little or no difference in terms of improving the behaviour of their students. In the classroom where the situation existed that had originally instigated the card system some improvement was noted in the fact that office referrals significantly declined. However, the teacher appeared to have modified the intervention in a manner that resulted in the student being sent out into the hallway with more frequency. In a completely unexpected development, one of the administrators took the occasion of a visit by a school district official to inquire about placing the student at another school where an alternate program existed that specialized in behaviour special needs. This move completely caught me off guard because referrals to the program were usually initiated by me, and not until a formal process of identification in a special needs category had occurred. At a meeting that I did not attend, the student was informed by the school administrator and district official that she would be transferred to the alternate program if she did not improve her behaviour.

For a number of reasons, genuine staff impressions of the card system were somewhat difficult to access in the early months of its implementation. I would later learn that because most of the staff connected the intervention's origins to me, there was a certain reluctance to speak openly about their dissatisfaction with it for fear of offending me. I was also made aware of the fact that the administration at the school was expecting all teachers to ensure that students completed a Social Responsibility Report if they were being sent to the office, even if the teacher had not agreed to pilot the card system in their classroom. What appeared to happen was that the card system and the Personal and Social Responsibility Reports somehow came to be regarded as separate interventions in so much as the latter was implemented school-wide while the former remained optional for teachers. A clear indication of this based on my observations was that the Personal and Social Responsibility forms were placed by administration in all of the teachers' mailboxes while red and yellow cards were left on the counter next to them for teachers to take if they were planning to use them.

#### Pressure from 'above' to collect quantitative data

Data collected during this stage of the study including digital audio recordings of steering committee meetings highlighted the possibility that administration took the step of implementing the forms school-wide in response to pressure it was receiving from one district official connected to the PBS Committee. This person had been resiliently insistent that some form of tracking needed to be used to quantifiably validate the pilot project to the school district's executive who would be expecting to see evidence that the additional resources allocated to the school were paying off. At the steering committee meetings, this issue repeatedly resurfaced. Politely dismissed were my attempts to assure the district official that the qualitative data being collected would inform the school district about the project in ways that would help them assess

its value. It was her impression that only hard numbers would be given any legitimacy, and that school board officials would not have time to read through a lengthy report containing “anecdotes” about the project. Furthermore, the argument was made that evidence-based decision-making was a cornerstone of Positive Behaviour Support and that this needed to be integrated into the project regardless of whether or not a grass-roots approach was being taken.

In the end, the school-wide implementation of Personal and Social Responsibility forms did little to remedy the perceived need for quantitative data collection to guide evidence-based decision-making because so much discrepancy existed among teachers in terms of their willingness to use the reports. In some cases, it appeared as though certain staff members were purposefully subverting the process by sending students to the office with no documentation, or with a form that was only partially filled out. Administration also appeared to be selective in terms of when they would insist that the process be completed by a referring teacher.

More importantly, no system of implementing or organizing the data was established until very late in the project, in part because a lengthy dispute played out at the district-level over what computer program the school could use. One school district official seemed determined to introduce a PBS-backed program called S.W.I.S<sup>39</sup> that collected and analyzed data in hundreds of schools throughout the United States and Canada. Another official was steadfastly in opposition to this insisting that much of the information was too sensitive to input into a databank that could be accessed outside of the school district. Instead he argued that the current system used by the district had sufficient applications for handling this kind of data. Unfortunately, Crestview encountered endless obstacles accessing technical support to assist with training its administrative staff on how to use it, and consequently much of the data

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<sup>39</sup> School-wide Information System (Educational and Community Supports, 2010).

collected through the Social Responsibility Reports was not formally used to direct any of the decision-making related to the project.

In any event, the impression by many classroom teachers that the Personal and Social Responsibility forms had been implemented school-wide without proper consultation with staff, and that along with them came the expectation that everyone would use the yellow and red cards in their classroom, continued to gradually erode collective support for the behaviour project until there came a point that it was clear that a significant problem existed. From my observations, this turning point occurred almost seven months after the card system had been introduced, when it became evident that an undercurrent of resistance had amassed that was interfering with the ability to shift the project's focus to proactive approaches to promote positive behaviour.

In a memorable discussion I had with one of the primary teachers regarding a student in his class that was presenting with challenging behaviour, it became apparent to me that the individual was very uncomfortable about the fact that he had not been consistently using the card system. When I replied nonchalantly that he should go with what his instincts were telling him, he seemed surprised and openly acknowledged being fearful of the fact that I might discover that he was not using the system. When I expressed disbelief that he felt this way, he confided in me that there was considerable unrest among the staff about the intervention. His impression was that some teachers were confused about it, while others had taken exception to the fact that it had been "imposed" school-wide. I realized at this point that there was a lack of clarity with respect to whether or not the card system was optional, and that we had inadvertently clouded the issue from the outset when the primary and intermediate teams took away different messages from the steering committee about its implementation.

Following this discussion, I spoke with administration and suggested that this be addressed at the next staff meeting so that teachers could be reassured that the intervention was optional. I



sensed that this was received with mixed feelings. Not surprisingly, Stephanie and Wendy were somewhat defensive about the fact that some members of the staff were covertly criticizing the system rather than speaking with them directly or opening up a discussion about it at a staff meeting. They also had some concerns that it might only be a few voices that were actually behind these complaints, and that this could possibly be coming from the few teachers on staff who were still inclined to arbitrarily send students to the office with no documentation. From their end, they felt justified in expecting that some uniform process be followed at least with respect to office referrals, since, on a purely pragmatic level, their ability to successfully follow-up on a behaviour incident was greatly enhanced if the student was accompanied with something in writing that indicated the reason why he or she was being sent to the office. Nevertheless, they were both in agreement that a discussion needed to occur. It was felt that the best course of action was to request that one of the teachers on the steering committee introduce the topic at a staff meeting, and this would allow for a clarifying discussion about the card system to occur.

The staff meeting at which this conversation took place was one of the more memorable events of the behaviour pilot project, largely because so many of the teachers openly shared their opinions about their experiences with the card system to date in ways that ultimately ended up broadening the scope of the intervention. What was refreshing to hear was that the staff seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk about which aspects of it fit their personal style, and which didn't. The discussion also highlighted the fact that the card system was most useful if it wasn't regarded as a one size fits all approach to classroom management. This sentiment was echoed in several of the interviews with teachers at the end of the project:

With last year's bunch, I was totally for it. I wanted to try it. And this year, those cards have basically sat on my shelf and I haven't had to use them once. Even though I introduced them at the beginning of the year... Last year I had to use them every single day from their introduction. So, it's the nature of the class.

For another teacher, it seemed important to point out that she had at least tried to use the system before deciding that it was not a good fit:

In my class I didn't feel that I used it that much. I tried it. I tried it last year. I tried it this year. And I found that kids responded to it. They got a yellow card, they would be "oh, don't want that." But I don't think, whether it's my style or the kids I had, I didn't find I needed it. So, I stopped using it.

At the staff meeting, teachers identified two key issues with the card system that they felt were of particular concern. The first of these related to their use in a classroom where the cohort, as a group, was inclined to engage in an unusually high frequency and intensity of problem behaviour. With respect to this, a teacher who had previously complained about the high concentration of disruptive students in her class reported that the cards were completely ineffective because repeatedly issuing them to a large contingent of students within her class had little or no effect in motivating a change in their behaviour. This sentiment was echoed by non-enrolling teachers on staff who had this same group of students for two forty-minute blocks of instruction each week.<sup>40</sup>

The second problem that staff members identified was their belief that the cards were not effective for the small percentage of students who were formally identified as having chronic and severe behaviour-related special needs. This was in direct reference to students on my caseload, and on this point I both agreed and disagreed. However, I chose not to share my perspective on this at the meeting for fear that it would discourage teachers from speaking openly about the issue. Consequently, I withheld my strong conviction that in terms of helping a child to better self-regulate his or her behaviour, a non-verbal redirection if used consistently and predictably

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<sup>40</sup> A considerable amount of tension surfaced among and between the staff and administration over this particular cohort of students in the early months of the second year of the project. The classroom teacher received a great deal of empathy from many of her colleagues. Some factions of the staff directed blame for the situation toward the previous years' teachers for not doing an effective job of splitting up the students into different divisions so that the problems would not be all concentrated in one class. Over time, criticism shifted away from these teachers and toward the administration for not finding an acceptable resolution to the problem. This is discussed at greater length in next point of investigative entry.

would be successful, but only if the student was guided to a replacement behaviour that was desirable (or at least less disruptive), and positively reinforced with enough frequency over time to give it some resiliency. Unfortunately, not all teachers were equally receptive to the idea of using positive reinforcement in their classroom, and so the card system alone was not particularly successful with students on my caseload. Several teachers diplomatically pointed this out, adding that this in particular was causing them considerable frustration.

A number of key decisions about both the card system and the Personal and Social Responsibility Reports came out of the lengthy discussion that took place at the staff meeting, and these had considerable impact on the direction in which the project progressed from that point forward until it wrapped up in June of 2009. A clear understanding was established that the use of yellow and red cards in the classroom was at the teacher's discretion, but that students would continue to fill out Social Responsibility forms if they were sent to the office to meet with an administrator. However, a number of revisions to the form were requested by teachers to make it more user-friendly. Most of these related to the back of the sheet where quite a few boxes had been added to collect data that would make it easier for the office personnel to input the reports into BCeSIS.<sup>41</sup> Personal Responsibility forms would be optional for teachers to use as a method of tracking to keep parents informed if a student was consistently resistant to learning activities in the classroom or ill prepared for lessons because homework was incomplete.

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<sup>41</sup> British Columbia electronic Student Information System (BCeSIS) is a province-wide program that was implemented district wide in the fall of 2008, after it had been piloted in a number of schools the previous year. In addition to standardizing an electronic system for recording attendance and organizing other aspects of student information, the program also includes an application for recording behaviour incidents (BC Ministry of Education, 2007).

### A turning point in the pilot project

An overall examination of the data collected throughout the study highlighted the fact that this particular staff meeting appeared to represent a watershed moment for the project in terms of the focus shifting away from a school-wide response system in order to pay greater attention to how the staff could individually and collectively promote positive behaviour through proactive approaches. Researcher observations of developments throughout the school and informal discussions with staff indicate a general shift in the perception of the project, one that was noticeably more supportive.

A number of factors were identified that appeared to contribute to this change in sentiment. Addressing staff concerns about the response system appeared to remove an obstacle that was impacting some of the teachers' perceptions of the project and their motivation to actively support it. More importantly, the discussion around the card system invited a number of teachers to share with other staff members customized extensions they had created to the card system in order to positively reinforce desirable behaviour in their classrooms. As one teacher described it, "my evolution was the green card." This is in reference to her decision to expand the intervention to include placing a different coloured card on a student's desk for "being safe, respectful or caring."

Examples such as these were openly shared at the meeting in a way that encouraged staff to further consider the implications of addressing problem behaviour by actually promoting its opposite. The fact that this suggestion came from within the staff and not from administration needs to be understood within a historical context that will be critically examined in the next section as part of the analysis on organizational dynamics and power. However, it is important to point out here that the discussion at the staff meeting about systematically using positive

reinforcement appeared to not only motivate a number of other teachers to try it, but it also opened the door to introducing several school-wide initiatives that ultimately empowered students at the intermediate grades to play a leadership role in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school atmosphere.

#### Data analysis related to the card system using a theoretical framework of organizational dynamics

On a number of occasions thus far in the story, I have made reference to the notion of autonomy and how certain comments made by both teachers and administration seemed to convey the sense that each group believed that it held a certain jurisdiction in relation to dealing with problem behaviour. This was the first of two factors identified through the data analysis that appeared to be connected to organizational dynamics. The second related to the circuitous patterns of communication mentioned earlier in this section that seemed to obstruct or at least delay the kind of discussions that were needed to collectively explore the effectiveness of this intervention. Before taking a look at how territorial issues played a role in some of the tensions surrounding the card system, it may be helpful to briefly return to the topic of communication and examine how it is at least partly impacted by certain policies and procedures established by the organizational structure set up within the public education system.

While cycling through data connected to this point of investigative entry my attention was drawn to communication patterns within the organization because initially very little was openly said by teachers and administration about the card system, and yet it seemed to feature prominently in the interviews at the end of the project. When I examined this more closely, I realized that this needed to be at least partially understood within the terms of reference outlined in the BCTF's Code of Ethics (2010). Of particular relevance is the fifth 'rule' that reads:

The teacher directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private, and only then, after informing the colleague in writing of the intent to do so, may direct in confidence the criticism to appropriate individuals who are able to offer advice and assistance.

Although intended to facilitate a clear and ethical process of direct communication between teachers, this rule in practice can sometimes contribute to an environment in which colleagues engage in more circuitous patterns of discussion about individual differences in teaching styles. This occurs partly out of fear that these discussions will be interpreted as openly voicing criticism of a colleague to another individual, which often times is in actual fact the case. It is important to note that any teacher who perceives that a colleague has been critical of him or her to another individual can seek recourse through the BCTF. This generally takes the form of a mediation process being initiated between the affected parties. In rare instances, the Federation will apply sanctions against the offender, usually in the form of issuing a letter that cautions the member to exercise better professional discretion and ethics. However, permanent exclusion from the BCTF is also cited as a possible consequence for repeated behaviour of this nature.

In this respect, the code is generally interpreted by teachers as a form of protection against colleagues expressing criticism of one another to other individuals, most notably other teachers, parents or school administration. However, when examined from a Foucauldian perspective, it also has the potential of promoting the idea that teachers are subject to a certain degree of self-imposed surveillance, the result of which means they should remain ever careful about what they say and to whom. This serves to perpetuate communication patterns that often times distort the true meaning of the message someone is trying to get across because of fear that it somehow betrays a professional allegiance.

I make reference here to the Code of Ethics in part to point out a distinction between the expectations of ethical conduct set out for teachers by the BCTF that are exclusive to its

membership and do not extend to school administrators.<sup>42</sup> The result of this is that teachers generally feel little or no apprehension about openly voicing criticism to others about their school's leadership, while exercising considerably more discretion about making negative comments about their colleagues. In stark contrast, school administrators are strongly encouraged by both their school district and the BCTF to respect the Code of Ethics by not engaging in discussions with teachers that are critical of others. To deal with instances in which there is some degree of dissatisfaction with a teacher's performance, the expectation is that the administrator will make this known to that individually privately.<sup>43</sup> If the matter is of a more serious nature that falls within the realm of professional misconduct or actions that are deemed a risk to the physical, social or emotional well being of a student, than a more formal response process must be followed, one that involves the superintendent's office and the BC College of Teachers.<sup>44</sup>

Analysis of the data collected in relation to the card system revealed that certain developments that occurred were influenced by organizational dynamics that were at least partially connected to the manner in which individuals go about their professional daily lives respectful, to varying degrees, of the BCTF Code of Ethics. Put in more simple terms, over the course of the project, both teachers and administrators appeared to selectively adhere to the code, working within it, and in some cases around it, as circumstances dictated.

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<sup>42</sup> In 1987, the provincial government of the day separated principal and vice principal contract negotiations from the teacher's collective bargaining process essentially making their continued membership in the BCTF pointless. The following year, the BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association (BPVPA) was established as a professional association autonomous of the BCTF.

<sup>43</sup> The only exception to this is in cases where a criminal investigation is pending, and it is believed that informing the teacher may compromise the ability for authorities to gather evidence.

<sup>44</sup> Specific provisions of the Teaching Profession Act (BC Ministry of Education, 1996) and the College of Teachers' Code of Professional Conduct (2010) clearly outline the process that is followed whenever a teacher is under investigation for professional misconduct.

The fact that a number of teachers were upset that the card system had been imposed school-wide but refrained from bringing this to the attention of steering committee members, myself, or school administration, raises the possibility that communication patterns at the school are at least partially effected by staff members' unwillingness to openly voice their opinions in ways that might be construed as a criticism of a colleague. Nevertheless, it is clear that discussions about the system did take place between certain staff members on a more covert basis, at least to such an extent that it ultimately led to the conversation I had with a primary teacher that finally brought into the open the fact that a problem existed.

Another example of this can be drawn from the circumstances that surrounded the one classroom teacher who was repeatedly sending a particular student to the office. Informal conversations I had with both administration and fellow teachers at the school revealed perspectives that varied considerably from those held by the teacher involved. These were always delicately expressed in a manner that avoided any outright criticism. For the staff, this generally took the form of pointing out the fact that their teaching style differed somewhat from that of this colleague. In some instances, individuals situated this observation within the context of expressing concern for their colleague's health, believing as some did that the degree of emotional reactivity occurring was clearly exacting a toll on this individual.

For the administrative team at Crestview operating within or navigating around the Code of Ethics looked slightly different. More likely was the case that concern would be expressed in a manner that did not attach any teacher responsibility to it. In the example of the student who was being occasionally sent to the office as a result of not having required materials for a lesson, my help was enlisted in such a manner as to not bring any criticism on the teacher for taking this approach. Instead, it was diplomatically expressed within the context of a need to affect change in the situation so that this child would no longer be sent out of class for this reason.



Consequently, it was left for me to determine, in my role as the school counsellor, whether the problem existed with the child, the teacher, or a combination of both, in order to take certain steps toward resolving the situation.

These communication patterns appeared to also be at play in terms of the tensions that existed between staff and administration around issues of jurisdiction and autonomy. As noted, a number of teachers made clear to me either informally or as part of the interview process that ultimately they were the ones to decide how behaviour is handled within their classrooms. For their part, Crestview's administrators were equally insistent that the process they followed when a child was sent to the office was exclusively under their jurisdiction. Despite the fact that these appeared to be fairly entrenched positions, at no time during the project did I hear either side openly communicate this to the other. Instead both parties were more inclined to discretely express this conviction during informal conversations with me.

Perhaps even more telling of the dynamics involved was the fact that both administration and teachers seemed to believe that they were entitled to have some say over the way in which behaviour was handled by the other. Administration clearly felt that teachers had a duty to maintain a level of classroom management that was not too permissive or excessively strict. They also seemed to strongly endorse the use of proactive approaches including classroom-wide positive reinforcement to encourage desirable behaviour. For their part, many teachers privately expressed their expectation that students be dealt with at the office in a certain fashion. For some, this included the child meeting with an administrator in a timely fashion, followed by the applying of appropriate consequences that should systematically increase in severity with the frequency of occurrences. Others emphasized the need for a child to be kept out of the classroom for a sufficient amount of time to allow the teacher to restore the learning environment that had been disrupted by the behaviour. Still others wanted to know when was enough enough, in the

sense that a student had crossed the line too many times to allow him or her to return to the school, let alone the classroom.

In this regard, both the communication patterns within the school and the certain convictions that both teachers and administration held about whose jurisdiction behaviour fell under contributed to organizational dynamics that existed beneath the surface in ways that complicated the efforts made during the early months of the project to introduce a behaviour response system at the school. Fortunately, the shift in focus that occurred as a result of an uncharacteristically open staff meeting in the seventh month of the project helped teachers and administration overcome these tensions in order to collaboratively design and implement a series of proactive initiatives that from all accounts affected a positive change at the school.

What appeared to make the difference in this particular case was the reassurance given to staff at the beginning of the meeting that in no way would any criticism of the response system at the school be regarded as a personal or professional attack on me, members of the steering committee, or the school administration. The staff was strongly encouraged to be forthcoming with their opinions about the system. This prompted one teacher to acknowledge that people may have been reluctant to openly voice their concerns until this point in time out of fear that this would be taken personally by those who were directly involved in its implementation. In response, all seemed to be in agreement that the project was unlikely to achieve very much if we were not open and forthcoming with one another.

### Self-conscious reflection on the card system: Researcher and counsellor roles in conflict

At the outset of this investigative undertaking, I felt it was important for me to maintain throughout the research process a constant vigilance to keep in check any inclination I might have to approach this research from an “isn’t it true that” orientation. Doing this I had hoped would ensure that the study would maintain an exploratory orientation rather than becoming an exercise in testing my own hypotheses about the way things worked with behaviour in schools. I purposefully set this out in my mind way back when I first began conceptualizing the study during meetings with the District PBS Committee. In fact, I later came to realize that this was one of the motivations behind me proposing a grass-roots design for the project. If I wasn’t careful, I feared that the whole exercise would end up representing a platform for me to prove what I already knew to be true about promoting positive behaviour in schools. This can be succinctly summed up in one statement: Young people, both individually and collectively, are far more inclined to meet or exceed behaviour-related expectations when greater attention and energy is placed on proactive measures than reactive ones.

Not surprisingly, this turned out to be more difficult than I had first anticipated largely because of the dual roles of researcher and counsellor that I had to negotiate at every step along the way... (Text is suddenly interrupted)

### Using ethnotheatre to explore the impact of organizational dynamics on the researcher

*INT: Coffee shop.*

*Vincent is seated on a couch reading through transcripts of interviews. Sprawled out next to him with his legs thrown over the backside of the couch is Johnny. He is reading through an early draft of the first part of the fifth chapter, something he insisted on doing in order to, in his words “ensure that Vincent wasn’t completely forfeiting any hope of a future career in the academy.” They both work away silently until Johnny abruptly bolts up into a seated position.*

Johnny: (*exasperated*) Wait a minute! You mean to tell me that you let the whole card system be implemented exclusively as a reactive approach when you knew that it would be ineffective without integrating some proactive measures?!?!

Vincent: (*with a deep sigh putting down the transcripts in his hand*) I was afraid you were going to pick up on that.

Johnny: Well, Vincent, here's a newsflash: It's not exactly a subtle contradiction.

Vincent: I've been trying for some time to figure out why it unfolded this way.

Johnny: And?

Vincent: Well, when I initially conceptualized the study, I hadn't anticipated that my roles as counsellor and researcher would come into direct conflict with each other the way they did during this stage of the research.

Johnny: How do you mean?

Vincent: Well, first of all, I came to realize that the roles are not so easily separated from one another in the sense that at one instance I could say "right now, I'm the researcher" stepping back to observe and collect data on emerging project-related developments going on all around me, and then in the next moment, I suddenly become the school counsellor, who is right in the thick of things proposing interventions and shaping the direction of behaviour related decision-making at the school based on my own personal and professional philosophies.

Johnny: Okay, I can see where that would be a problem, but when you sat down with the teacher to design the card system for her particular class you seemed to clearly be in your role as the counsellor. Yet, you went ahead with a system that had no proactive measures. Then you end up bringing it forward to the steering committee who then decides to start piloting it in several classrooms. Could you not have expressed your opinions about it being exclusively reactive at that point?

Vincent: I could have, but I didn't. And this has been bothering me a lot. Enough so that I'm convinced that it's particularly relevant to my research question about the ethical and methodological challenges of doing this kind of research. It's compelling me to look at it on an autoethnographic level which is why we're having this conversation.

Johnny: (*frustrated*) Do you ever do anything in a simple conventional manner?

Vincent: (*ignoring this statement*) When I try to make sense of why I didn't push for more proactive measures to be part of the card system, I keep coming up with different reasons. For the initial situation, it was not a match for the teacher involved, and I would have had to push hard to get her to include it. The thing with proactive measures like positive reinforcement is that if your heart is not in it, it doesn't work. It's something that has to fit a person's teaching style. I've run up against this before when I've encouraged a teacher to use a classroom-wide reinforcement system and it tanks because the teacher hates it, and is resentful of the fact that

children are not just inclined to choose desirable behaviour as part of their responsibility as a student.

Johnny: Okay fair enough. But why not add this piece when you brought it forward to the steering committee?

Vincent: Hm. That one is murkier. I've looked over my field notes so many times and I keep coming up with two very different reasons. The first is connected to organizational dynamics that were at play, or at least this is how I perceived them to be, based on information I had received from an outside source.

Johnny: Who?

*At that instant, a man standing at the counter where the coffee condiments are located turns around and walks over to the couch where Vincent and Johnny are seated. He stirs his coffee before pulling up a chair to join the conversation.*

Stephen: Me.

Johnny: Who the hell are you?

Vincent: This is Stephen. He's a member of the District PBS Committee.

Stephen: *(adopts a corrective tone)* Was a member, Vincent...that is until you came along and bastardized it with the whole Crestview project.

Johnny: Oh right. You're the guy who quit the committee when they decided to go with a grass-roots approach.

Stephen: *(rolling his eyes)* Yeah...right... grass roots." *(Stephen raises one hand to imitate imaginary quotes. The other continues to hold his coffee)* Tell me something, Johnny, so far does it seem genuinely grass roots to you?

Vincent: *(interrupting before Johnny can answer):* Now, hold on a minute.

Johnny: *(with a furrowed eyebrow)* Well, now that you mention it.

Vincent: Okay. Give me a break already. We haven't got to the part where some members of the staff begin initiating student leadership projects. It gets very grass roots. The students themselves end up taking on a big piece of this. How much more grass roots can you get?!?!

Johnny: *(patronizingly)* You're sounding a bit defensive, Vincent.

Stephen: He gets like that.

Vincent: What you guys don't understand is how complicated it got being the researcher and still fulfilling my daily duties as a counsellor and behaviour case manager. I was always wrestling

with the question of whether or not to step back and allow events to naturally unfold, or if I should get in there and shape things in ways that I believed they needed to be.

Johnny: (to Stephen) He can get quite opinionated

Stephen: (to Johnny) Tell me about it.

Vincent: Okay, you know what? You guys are being unfair. I don't need this. You have no idea how hard it was to strike a balance between these two locations. I had times when I felt like I was split into two different people following different and often conflicting agendas. I had voices I couldn't get out of my head (*pauses for a moment to glance over at Johnny, who nonchalantly looks away as if he has no idea what Vincent is talking about.*) Then I worried about the ethics of it all, were staff members always aware that I was in the midst of collecting data as everyday events unfolded?

*(When Vincent says this, three shadowy looking individuals who are seated at a table across the room all simultaneously look up from the newspapers they are reading. They glance in Vincent's direction seemingly intent on making it known that he's under surveillance. Then in a perfectly coordinated fashion they return their attention to the newspapers.)*

Johnny: Vincent, you're forgetting that I'm here for you, brother. I'm just asking some questions. You got a lot going on here in this thing. (*He holds up the draft dissertation*). It's only natural that some questions are going to surface. I'm just curious why you chose to step back and let things focus on the reactive when you introduced the card system, only to tell us later that it's contrary to your whole philosophy, and to the participatory nature of the methodology you're using?!

Stephen: I think I know.

Vincent: Well, you should.

Johnny: I don't understand.

Stephen: Vincent probably held back because of what I told him about my experience pitching PBS to the staff two years earlier.

Vincent: (*sarcastically*) You think?

Stephen: It got pretty hostile at that meeting. One of the staff members went on a bit of a tirade about how his son was at a school that had adopted PBS. Part of this involved using a 'gotcha' system in which students were positively reinforced for behaving appropriately in the hallway. I guess this guy's son didn't receive one for some reason, and because of that he believed the whole system was patently unfair. That's all it took. From my perspective, this guy seemed to hold considerable power on staff and after he expressed his disapproval, the room went silent. There was no way PBS was going into Crestview. It's too bad because the program is so much more than just about 'gotchas.'

Johnny: *(turning to Vincent)* And you knew about this?

Stephen: I told him. I thought he should know that he was going to get his behind kicked if he tried to introduce something like that. But his response was that the project was going to be grass-roots in nature, so the staff would find its way there on its own if it was meant to be.

Vincent: And that's when Stephen quit the committee.

Johnny: It was that big a deal for you?

Stephen: That and some other stuff. The whole thing seemed politically motivated. The PBS Committee had lost its way even before Vincent came along and pushed his own agenda.

Vincent: You guys sought me out remember. And don't tell me that the committee didn't have its own agenda.

Stephen: Yeah maybe so. There's always dynamics involved. The district had its own agenda which was represented by certain people on the committee. It was partly motivated by pressure from the union.

Johnny: Yet another agenda.

Vincent: And that's just at the district level. Look at the organizational complexities that were constantly playing themselves out at Crestview. I'm still trying to make sense out of it.

Johnny: So what was the other reason why you didn't push for the card system to incorporate proactive measures when you brought it up at the steering committee?

Vincent: I think it might have had to do with the shift that occurred for me when I went from my meetings with the teacher to the ones with the steering committee. My roles were different. Within the first context I was clearly acting as a school counsellor addressing a specific situation. In the second I think I saw myself more as the researcher. I think this made me more cautious to not push for an approach that represented my way of seeing things. Doing so had the potential of making the research an exercise of proving what I believed to be true. I wanted to leave open the possibility that something new would be uncovered.

Johnny: Yeah, but doing so only ended up confirming the limitations of an exclusively reactive system based on the feedback you received from some staff members.

Vincent: I realize that. And it bothers me, because I don't think that was my intention. I didn't set it up to fail. Instead, the approach we took seemed to me to be a truer way of allowing people to self-discover what works and what doesn't work for them.

Johnny: Well at least it led to the revelation that communication patterns within the organization can sometimes get in the way of core messages reaching the people who need to hear them in a timely fashion.

Vincent: I like to think that this was something that we collectively self-discovered, not unlike the journey that led staff to eventually implement school-wide proactive approaches, including the whole student leadership piece. Clearly, there were people on staff who were already inclined this way. But others needed to find their way to this place, and because of organizational dynamics this can be a very complex and sometimes lengthy process. It's not something that can be imposed by me or anyone.

Stephen: Okay, I can see he's about to get on his soapbox, so I'll be heading out now.

Vincent: Thanks for dropping by.

Johnny: Nice meeting you.

*Exit Stephen. Johnny swings his legs back over the back of the couch and resumes reading. Vincent turns his attention back to his transcripts. Lights dim plunging the Coffee shop into darkness.*

(text resumes)

...In some instances this involved responding to emergent, behaviour-related situations in my position as a counsellor and behaviour case manager at the school. As mentioned previously, this typically entails carefully considering the relational dynamics at play between the various individuals involved before any actions are taken that are aimed at resolving a situation. Often times, this requires that I temporarily set aside personal and professional convictions in order to become better situated in the reality of the individual(s) with whom I'm working. From a counselling standpoint this is crucial because any process of change must essentially come from within the individual if there is any hope of it being meaningful and having resiliency. What clearly complicated this during the early stages of the project was the fact that I was finding myself drawing artificial distinctions between events that I regarded as part of my everyday employment duties at the school and occasions in which I was acting in the role of the researcher. This appeared to challenge the logic of inquiry that I established at the outset of the study because it was impossible to neatly separate these two locations. It was not until the



second half of the project that I felt more in synch with how these roles co-existed and were in fact interwoven with one another.

Point of investigative entry: A shift in project focus to proactive measures and student leadership

Before discussing the various proactive interventions and student leadership initiatives introduced by the staff and administration at Crestview, it is important to first point out that considerable overlap existed between these approaches and the use of reactive measures to deal with behaviour at the school. In the previous section, I identified a staff meeting held during the seventh month of the project as a turning point in terms of the initiative's focus. This should not be misunderstood to imply that staff members did not until this point in time use various techniques in their classrooms, and even in some cases at the school level, to promote positive behaviour. In fact, it is well worth mentioning that in a number of classrooms positive reinforcement systems were well established prior to the project coming to Crestview. In a similar vein, it would be a mistake to assume that following the aforementioned staff meeting, the school's focus forever shifted away from the response systems used to deal with problem behaviour both in the classroom and at the office. On several occasions throughout the remainder of the project, formal and informal discussions resurfaced about the card system, the Personal and Social Responsibility forms, and what school personnel should do when a student engages in problem behaviour. Not surprisingly, the organizational dynamics and tensions associated with these subjects resurfaced as well.

Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, researcher observations, informal discussions with staff and administration and interviews at the end of the project all indicated that a general shift in the overall energy connected to the project took place following the clarifying discussion about the card system that took place in October of 2008. In addition to an increase in interest

being shown by staff in terms of considering classroom-wide positive reinforcement programs,<sup>45</sup> there also occurred a greater appreciation for various school-wide interventions that were also being explored. In the final six months of the program these were significantly expanded to incorporate a high degree of student leadership.

Before taking a closer look at some of these proactive approaches and assessing their impact on the school community, it is important to briefly mention two events that, along with the October staff meeting, appeared to contribute to the shift in the project's focus that took place from that point forward. The first of these has already been briefly mentioned in terms of the difficulties that one veteran teacher was experiencing with a particular class of intermediate students. In addition to calling into question the ineffectiveness of the card system, and creating a certain degree of tension within and between the staff and administration, this situation inevitably forced some consideration to be given to alternative interventions aimed at encouraging an improvement in the behaviour of this group of young people.

At the point in time that I became more involved in this problem, the degree to which frustration had set in for this particular teacher considerably diminished her optimism that

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<sup>45</sup> Classroom reinforcement programs can take a variety of forms and are often customized by teachers to match their individual style. What they all hold in common is that some form of response occurs on occasions when one or more students engage in positive behaviour. For students who have behaviour-related special needs a program of this nature is often implemented on an individual level, and may consist of a 'sticker chart' attached to the top of the desk that allows a teacher or Special Education Assistant to place stickers on it whenever the child is engaging in a prescribed desirable behaviour (i.e., staying seated, remaining on task, putting hand up instead of shouting out.) A classroom where such a system is implemented for all students may have some form of chart on a board that is visible at the front, so that the teacher can reinforce individual or collective behaviour while also teaching a lesson. A number of classrooms at Crestview adopted an "Independence Chart" that I designed as a collective reinforcer for classrooms where high levels of off task or disruptive behaviour was occurring. Within this system, the teacher moves a magnet over a series of numbers whenever the class is collectively on task. When the number reaches '20' the students are awarded 5 minutes of free time that they may use at some point during the day. This system also allows the teacher to move the magnet backward as a form of non-verbal redirection when desirable behaviour is not exhibited. However, a ratio of 4-to-1 positive to negative prompts is recommended in order for a class of students to buy-in and become invested in the system. Doing this sometimes means setting the bar quite low at first in order for students to experience success and receive positive reinforcement. The teacher can then raise expectations gradually as students become better at self-regulating their behaviour. Countless other forms of positive reinforcement systems are used by teachers, many of which do not require a chart on the board, but instead may involve places beads in a jar, tickets on a desk or some other form of acknowledging positive behaviour (Maag, 2001; Powers, 1976; Sigler & Aamidor, 2005)

proactive approaches such as a classroom-wide positive reinforcement system would make any difference. She was the first to admit that the relationship between her and the students in the class had soured, and that it would be difficult to work toward genuinely reinforcing positive behaviour when she felt that so little of it was being demonstrated by so few students. The primary problem identified by the teacher was a general unwillingness by most of the group to simply stop talking and/or shouting out during instructional times. Reactive approaches, both individual and collective, had been exhausted. Many students had been repeatedly sent to the office and the class as a whole had been kept back after school on numerous occasions for detention. None of these measures appeared to have any noticeable impact.

As a result of this situation, a number of things occurred around the same time that the staff meeting was held to discuss the card system. First, some additional release time was provided to the teacher so that she and I could meet to discuss what was going on and decide on an appropriate course of action. The drastic step of reorganizing the divisions in order to better distribute the children causing the problem throughout the various classes at that grade level had not yet been ruled out by the school's administration. However, such a decision was well beyond my authority, and so I instead focused our approach on what could be achieved through other approaches.

Because both Stephanie and I were scheduled to meet with various classrooms in the school to teach social responsibility, I had the opportunity to use these blocks to work with students in this class to try and develop some degree of self regulation within the group. During these sessions, I introduced a classroom-wide positive reinforcement system that enabled the class to collectively earn free time by refraining from talking or shouting out during the lessons I was teaching. Initially, this necessitated setting the bar extremely low so that mildly disruptive

behaviour was positively reinforced as an improvement over occasions when it was moderate to severe and teaching anything seemed all but impossible.

Over the course of several weeks, I noted some improvement, especially after the intervention was extended to include a piece that gave different students in the class the responsibility for managing the Independence Chart<sup>46</sup> that was used as a visual prompt to reinforce desirable behaviour. Unfortunately, the classroom teacher reported that no significant change was occurring as a result of these efforts at other times of the day. She also expressed a certain discomfort with the fact that the intervention being used reinforced behaviour that she believed was still well below an acceptable standard in the classroom.

From my perspective, I could clearly appreciate that this group of students represented a particularly challenging teaching assignment. I openly acknowledged this to the teacher pointing out that my actual time in the classroom was comparatively less to the full days she was working in this environment. One point however, that I thought was particularly important to point out was the fact that the students in the classroom were not noticeably inclined to be disrespectful to adults or even one another for that matter. When redirected, the group would typically stop and even express some degree of remorse for being disruptive. Unfortunately, very little time (often measurable in seconds) would pass before the problem behaviour resumed unless a subsequent prompt was employed. In this regard, the students, apart from the difficulty they presented in terms of teaching and learning, were actually quite a likable group. They seemed particularly responsive to humour and were even insightful and apologetic about the fact that they were such a difficult class to teach.

It was this latter point that prompted further action on my part and that of the school administration, which led to a new level of intervention, one that considerably expanded the

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<sup>46</sup> A brief explanation of this intervention is described in the footnote on page 175.

proactive measures the behaviour project was introducing school wide. Increasingly, there was concern around the fact that this group of students by mid October was self-identifying as the “bad class” in the school.<sup>47</sup> At issue was the fact that if this collective self concept took hold it was likely that problem behaviour both within and outside the classroom would only increase and possibly expand to other forms that could significantly erode the overall climate at the school. In response to this, a number of opportunities for student leadership were designed at the school-wide level with the expressed intention of channeling the high energy of this group into a positive focus. Before taking a closer look at how this transformation occurred, it is important to briefly note the second important development that occurred at this point of the project.

In November, a mere few weeks after the memorable staff meeting about the card system, Wendy took the bold and considerably risky step of sending a large contingency of Crestview’s teaching staff to *Making Connections 2008*, an annual, locally-held conference that focuses on Positive Behaviour Support. Included in this was a two-day, pre-conference seminar designed specifically for school teams to learn the fundamentals of implementing school-wide PBS. The financial commitment associated with this included not only the conference and preconference fees, but also the costs of teacher coverage for these days. Funding was partially provided by the school district through the Office of Safe and Caring Schools, but in order to extend this opportunity to a larger group of staff members, Wendy also utilized school-based funds.

Based on the staff’s historical resistance to PBS, my initial reaction to this decision was an unmistakable sense of dread based on the fear that this would confirm in the minds of at least some staff members the belief that the pilot project had an agenda from the outset. Wendy

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<sup>47</sup> In an interview with one of the students in this class, I asked the question: “Before your class got involved in the student leadership projects, what advice would you give to a substitute who was coming in to teach a class like yours?” He replied, “Beware of our class. Don’t come.”

however, was clearly convinced that a simple reassurance to teachers that the conference was merely an opportunity for them to learn more about the program and consider what, if anything, was worthwhile exploring at Crestview, would be enough to counter any impression that there were ulterior motives. When I reviewed the list of teachers who had accepted the offer to attend, I immediately noticed that included among them were a number of individuals who I perceived to be the least receptive to certain PBS philosophies, most notably the use of classroom-based or school-wide positive reinforcement systems to encourage desirable behaviour. Consequently, I anticipated that the pre-conference seminar might turn out to be particularly divisive for our staff, especially if it involved any kind of activity that required a team to discuss various ways of implementing these kinds of interventions at our school.

Dr. Terrance Scott, a professor from the University of Florida who has widely published PBS-related research and is well established among the network of scholars and practitioners involved in this work, led the two-day pre-conference seminar that brought together almost a dozen school teams from across the Lower Mainland. I was greatly relieved that his comprehensive overview of PBS paid very little attention to reinforcement schemes like the 'gotcha' tickets, instead focusing on the importance of establishing predictable and consistent school-wide response systems that enable staffs to identify and focus their attention on problem areas. Discussed at considerable length was the need for adults to explicitly pre-teach desirable behaviour to children in these areas. This happened to be the one aspect of PBS that I found least attractive, because in practice I believe that students, especially those at the intermediate level, find it paternalistic and demeaning to have an adult teach them how to appropriately walk down the hall or eat their lunch in the cafeteria. Although other principles of PBS can be quite empowering to students, this particular feature unnecessarily reinforces a hierarchy between

adults and children that I believe diminishes the potential to empower students to play an active role in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school atmosphere.

On the second day of the pre-conference seminar, Dr. Scott devoted some of the afternoon session to the topic of positive reinforcement. His approach blended just the right mixture of openly acknowledging the discomfort that comes along with ‘rewarding’ behaviour that many adults believe should simply be expected of children, and endorsing its effectiveness as a tool to dramatically improve relationships between adults and children that can be eroded by exclusively reactive systems. By this time, Terrance appeared to have already earned the collective respect of the Crestview teachers, which seemed to go along way in terms of their willingness to listen to his message. When our team began discussing its direct application at our school, suggestions about different approaches that could be taken went unchallenged by those teachers who I had anticipated would firmly express their disapproval.

It is worth noting that among the group of teachers at the pre-conference were several who had already acknowledged at the aforementioned staff meeting that positive reinforcement systems were an established part of their classroom practice, and that in some cases they had customized the card system to incorporate some aspect of them. In this sense, the threshold of accepting that these approaches were already in place at Crestview and working, in my opinion, was crossed at this particular juncture, and that this had laid the foundation for a general acceptance that these could be extended to school wide applications. The pre-conference experience however seemed to ignite staff interest in terms of what else could be done at Crestview. An indication of this was the decision by several teachers who were attending the conference on the third day to skip the keynote address in order to hold an impromptu planning session on how to implement some of the ideas that had been presented by Terrence. Among

them was the teacher who had voiced the greatest opposition to PBS coming to Crestview two years earlier when district officials had come to the school to invite its participation.

In the weeks and months that followed, a flurry of activity occurred at the school as a wide range of individual, classroom-based and school-wide programs were implemented. At the individual level were students on my caseload who had been identified as having behaviour related special needs. Typically, these children already had as part of their individualized education plans (IEP) proactive strategies and interventions that were specifically targeted to address whatever problem behaviours were most prominent in their particular area of difficulty. However, as the school year progressed I began to notice that with some of these children new proactive interventions were suddenly springing up without teachers taking the usual step of seeking out some direction from me before implementing them.

One example of this was a system of reinforcement that a primary teacher introduced in which the student did a daily ‘check-in’ with the administrative assistant at the office to show her his sticker chart and the progress he was making on specific goals that had been outlined for him. I literally stumbled upon this one morning while waiting in the office for a fax to arrive. The student in question walked in quietly and respectfully (a very uncommon occurrence for this particular child), and purposefully approached the desk of the administrative assistant, proudly showing her by way of his sticker chart how “good” a morning he had had. For this, he received no tangible reward other than genuine praise from the staff member, something that seemed to be of great significance to him. The whole engagement particularly struck me as an example of how staff at the school had taken the initiative to explore a proactive intervention that seemed meaningful to everyone involved.

At the classroom-level, there continued to be considerable diversity in terms of teachers using reinforcement systems to promote positive behaviour, but there no longer appeared to be



any tension between staff members with respect to this. For my part, I was invited into another intermediate classroom to introduce the same Independence Chart that I had been using with the group of students that had been identified as particularly challenging. Apparently, the students from that class had told the other students about it, who had then asked their own teacher if they could do something similar in their own classroom.

What I found particularly interesting about this situation was that this teacher had already, through her own approach to classroom management, established one of the most respectful and caring learning environments I had ever come across. Consequently, I was initially at a bit of a loss as to how the system could be used in her classroom because all behaviour expectations that I had were either being met or exceeded. I explained to the group that I felt that the Independence Chart was reinforcing something that seemed to come as natural to them as breathing oxygen. This led the classroom teacher to begin considering extensions that ‘raised the bar’ in matters more directly related to learning. The incorporation of academic expectations into an intervention that was essentially designed to regulate behaviour was a first for me, and drove home the realization that a one-size fits all approach to anything related to behaviour or learning was not only impractical, but also constraining in ways that could potentially obstruct the creativity of individual teachers.

A related but even more profound realization occurred when at the school level approaches were introduced that tapped into the creativity and intrinsic motivation of the children through student leadership opportunities. In my opinion, it was these developments that most significantly distinguished Crestview’s approach from the core aspect of PBS that endorses adults explicitly teaching desirable behaviour to children. In addition to my belief that doing this in actual fact dis-empowers children, it was also my impression that at Crestview, perhaps as a result of its lower socio-economic demographic, students convey a distinct sense of being street

savvy in ways that make overtly teaching them how to behave a process that in and of itself seems to invite problem behaviour. As one teacher put it, “the kids almost feel it’s beneath them.”

Nevertheless, it was clear to members of the school’s steering committee that some work needed to be done in certain areas where problems were occurring. However, the team’s inclination was to lean in the direction of tapping into existing knowledge that students already had about being socially responsible in these settings and finding ways to get them to become invested in doing this through student leadership opportunities. The result was a number of short-term initiatives led by intermediate students that involved ‘catching’ students for doing things in a responsible fashion anyone needing to overtly teach or prompt them to do so. In order to share a few examples of this, it’s important to outline a few organizational details related to the pilot project that helped adults support young people to take on these initiatives.

#### The decision to hard-schedule social responsibility lessons into all classrooms

As mentioned earlier, long before the pilot project came to Crestview, Stephanie had been regularly meeting with various classrooms of students to discuss and problem solve areas related to social responsibility using a program called TRIBES. When additional time was provided to the school for the behaviour pilot coordinator position, Stephanie and Wendy decided to invest the majority of it in increasing the amount of scheduled blocks that Stephanie would have available to work with students in this capacity. Part of this involved what would eventually become a controversial decision to organize this in such a way that resulted in additional time being allocated to learning assistance at the school.<sup>48</sup> As a result of this

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<sup>48</sup> This basically involved Stephanie covering NIT (non-instructional time) which is the 100 minutes of preparation time that every classroom teacher is provided each week. Doing this created flexibility with the time provided to the school for pull-out learning assistance, which Stephanie had previously done as part of her non-administrative

organization, Stephanie was hard-scheduled to meet with almost every division in the school on a weekly basis.<sup>49</sup> In my role as the school counsellor, I was able to support her with this since I generally had some flexibility in my schedule that allowed me to work with classroom groups as needed. Initially, we explored co-teaching one or two blocks, but eventually decided that it would be better if I worked independently with some divisions in ways that would allow me to introduce initiatives other than TRIBES.

In the second year of the project, the FTE provided by the school district for the coordinator position was scaled back from .8 to point .6. This prompted Wendy, Stephanie and I to consider how we could best optimize this time. The decision was made to add .2 to my assignment, the equivalent of one extra day at the school, so that I could be similarly hard-scheduled into meeting with certain classes on a weekly basis throughout the entire second year of the project. Consequently, Stephanie's coordinator time was scaled back from .8 to .4, with her blessing because this would provide her some assistance in meeting regularly with all of the classes throughout the school. It was through this organization that I ended up having weekly

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duties. Consequently, through this organization the school benefitted from having an increase in its LAC time as a result of Stephanie covering NIT, which would have otherwise been allocated in ways that would not have allowed this to occur. The controversy emerged when halfway through the project, a District Official on the PBS Committee discovered that the coordinator point time had been used in this fashion. This individual expressed opposition to this decision based on the fact that it limited Stephanie's flexibility to adapt and change the way she was using the time over the course of the project because doing so would throw the entire NIT schedule at the school into disarray. The other issue was that this meant that classroom teachers were not attending the Social Responsibility lessons because this was happening when they were on their prep time. The District Official's position was that this considerably diminished the likelihood that interventions would be sustained after the project left the school because teachers had not been part of this key piece. Finally, the District Official was concerned that the staff would become accustomed to having additional learning assistance at the school and would complain when this disappeared at the end of the project.

<sup>49</sup> Because NIT for classroom teachers is guaranteed through a provision in the collective bargaining agreement, it must be provided without exception. Consequently, once Stephanie was committed to covering these blocks they became a permanent feature of her schedule throughout the remainder of the pilot project. This proved somewhat of an annoyance to the District Official on the PBS Committee. Because there was very little flexibility as to when the committee could meet, he was repeatedly forced to work his schedule around Stephanie's. In a conversation, I had with her in the final months of the Crestview project, she expressed his intention to ensure that this would not happen again if continued funding for the initiative allowed it to move on to another school site.

contact with almost all of the intermediate students, including the one division that had been identified as being particularly problematic.

#### Pre-existing and new forms of student leadership at Crestview

A number of significant outcomes and revelations occurred as a direct result of the project's commitment to ensure that Stephanie and/or I met weekly with every classroom throughout the school year to explore the topic of social responsibility. However, before exploring these further, it is first important to acknowledge that our efforts represented only one part of a larger groundswell of student leadership opportunities that emerged from various teacher-sponsored initiatives. Among these were a number of noteworthy projects like the Prep Room and RCA program, the origins of which actually predated the behaviour pilot project. The former involved empowering students in the intermediate grades to take responsibility for issuing out sports equipment to children during recess and lunch hour. The latter entailed enlisting the help of a sizable volunteer group to work in the school's library before school, at recess and during the lunch hour to engage in a variety of tasks that supported the learning and recreational programs provided by the library to kids of all ages.

Among the several new student empowerment initiatives to evolve during the second year of the pilot project was a highly successful host program. Spearheaded by Wendy, this project involved training Grade 7 students to welcome guests to the school, provide a short presentation about its history, unique culture and commitment to social responsibility, and then provide a tour of the building. In the final six months of the project, Crestview had an unusually high number of groups visit the school including teacher contingencies from the United Kingdom and China. Informal discussions that I had with a number of these visitors conveyed a genuine sense that they perceived something quite special existing at Crestview, particularly in

terms of the way children appeared to be actively involved in so many facets of its day-to-day operations.

One example of this that two of the visitors specifically pointed out was the fact that morning announcements at the school were read by Grade 7 students. These announcements informed the school community of any special events that were scheduled for that day. The students would also welcome by name any substitute teachers or other guests who were visiting the school, and extend best wishes to students and members of staff who were celebrating a birthday. Finally, the students would draw everyone's attention to whichever aspect of the school's code of conduct was the theme for that particular month, and make concrete suggestions as to how students and staff could act in ways that would support this focus.

Another initiative that seemed to draw the attention of visitors was the fact that during the lunch period, intermediate students supervised the primary classrooms. This entailed assigning groups of two or three Grade 6 students to sit in with the younger children and have lunch with them. In addition to ensuring that the younger kids made good choices and followed the code of conduct when no adult was physically present in the room, this program more importantly forged meaningful relationships between younger and older children at the school. Primary teachers reported that in some cases lunch monitors had taken the initiative to introduce clean-up routines with the younger children and had even organized activities for the kids to play once they had finished their lunch.

### Crestview R.O.C.K.S

Throughout this chapter, several references have been made to Crestview's Code of Conduct, which featured prominently in almost all aspects of the proactive measures used to promote positive behaviour and social responsibility at the school. In accordance with the BC

Ministry's safe, caring, and orderly schools policy, Crestview had designed and implemented its code in 2005. The acronym R.O.C.K.S. was employed to represent its core principles of Respect, Ownership, Cooperation, Kindness and Safety. Widespread knowledge of the code among students had been greatly enhanced by one staff member's efforts to compose music and words for a catchy song titled "Crestview Rocks / Everybody Rocks at Crestview." In the year it was implemented, all teachers devoted some of their classroom time to help students learn the song in preparation for a school-wide assembly at which the entire school community came together to enthusiastically sing it.<sup>50</sup>

During the pilot project, R.O.C.K.S not only provided a monthly theme for students to highlight during morning announcements, it also became the core focus for the weekly social responsibility lessons that Stephanie and I facilitated with classrooms throughout the school. Although our approaches to this material differed markedly, we frequently collaborated to share ideas and brainstorm ways in which some of our classroom activities could be further extended to support school-wide interventions. Over the course of the pilot project, both Stephanie and I experienced somewhat of an awakening as to what it truly means for students to 'learn' social responsibility. For each of us, the path to this awareness took a considerably different route. However, the end result was the same in terms of us both coming to the realization that social responsibility is something that can only be meaningfully actualized through the process of 'doing' rather than merely 'thinking' or 'saying.' Realizing the importance of getting social responsibility "on its feet" represented one of the key understandings that we took away from our work with classrooms throughout the school.

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<sup>50</sup> In the final weeks of the behaviour pilot project, Crestview won the "Best School Spirit Award" at the annual District Track and Field Meet. The teachers who attended this event reported back to a staff meeting that Crestview students had passionately sung their Code of Conduct anthem during the athletes' parade that opens the yearly event as well as several times throughout the day as they sat in the stands cheering on their schoolmates.

Early on in the second year of the project, Stephanie and I discussed the fact that the Ministry of Education's performance standards on social responsibility consisted of language that we both agreed was not very meaningful to the students it was intended to assess. One of the earliest undertakings of Stephanie's social responsibility classes was an attempt to translate the assessment rubric provided to teachers by the ministry into 'kid-friendly' language. This was no easy task, due partly to the fact that many of the students working on this initiative had a hard time understanding why the whole thing was worded in this way in the first place! Stephanie also acknowledged that the student's initial excitement about this undertaking seemed to dissipate quickly, as she eventually found herself working hard to motivate the students to complete it.

While Stephanie was engaged in this daunting task, I was initially consumed by my concerted efforts to promote some degree of insight among the classroom of Grade 7s whose behaviour at this point was exacting a considerable toll on a number of teachers at the school. My first approach was to facilitate open discussions with the group using a tried and true 'circle' format I had developed that incorporated various word and drama games that required a considerable amount of turn-taking. Over time, these activities generally promoted the students' ability to actively listen and respond in turn to each other's comments. My experience with older students is that this ultimately leads to more meaningful discussions that are situated within a quasi-democratic format in which students are encouraged to openly share their opinions and perspectives with the assurance that they will be listened to and respected by the group. Ideally this leads to some form of collective decision-making with respect to any particular issue that might be arising within the group.

With this particular class of students this approach failed miserably. The ability to even engage the class in the initial games that were intended to help regulate the continuous chatter and frequent shouting out over one another proved too high an expectation. On my third attempt

to facilitate a discussion using a circle format, I abruptly gave up and returned the class to the more conventional seating arrangement (in rows) that their classroom teacher had set-up. From that point forward, I decided to shift the focus away from their behaviour (by that time, they had already had a series of lengthy ‘talks’ about the problem with the Principal.) Instead, I simply implemented a classroom-wide reinforcement system and got on with introducing a new subject that I hoped would be somewhat motivating for them.

This shift in focus brought my attention to the fact that the students were excited about doing drama but needed a highly structured environment and a specific focus from the outset in order to have any success. Clearly, the idea of doing some type of performance for the entire school was of great interest to the group. Fortunately, this coincided well with an initiative Stephanie had introduced to the steering committee in which intermediate students would be given the opportunity to lead monthly school-wide social responsibility assemblies that rotated in focus through each of the code of conduct themes.

Engaging the students of this class in small group brainstorming activities that required them to give careful thought as to how they could use drama to communicate one or more core messages related to social responsibility appeared over time to affect somewhat of a shift in the students’ perspectives. Unfortunately, this did not result in measurable change in relation to the classroom behaviours that adults in the school had identified as problematic. Informal discussions I had with teachers suggested that the difference was minimal at best. However, the field notes I recorded during this time reflect an impression that change of another nature took place that extended beyond the actions or attitudes of the children in this classroom. Inviting these students to not only participate in, but actually design and perform, an activity that genuinely invested them in teaching the rest of the school about social responsibility, struck a



decisive blow to a collective self concept that was becoming otherwise invested in the image of being the “bad class” in the school.

In terms of the impression that other members of the school community held about this class, my sense is that this did not significantly change until members of the students in this group were involved in subsequent leadership opportunities that had widely recognized positive implications for the school. Even then, I strongly suspected that some continued to keep at the forefront of their minds the fact that this collection of young people had proven itself to be a very challenging group to teach. Before discussing one initiative that members of this class took a decisive role in initiating and carrying through to successful completion, a number of other leadership opportunities occurred throughout the final months of the project that received significant positive feedback from the school community.

In much the same way that I discovered the value of expanding social responsibility lessons beyond getting students to simply think and talk about how our behaviour impacts those around us, Stephanie’s work with other student groups reflected a similar evolution that led to kids becoming active and invested in making positive change in the school. She breathed life into the work the students had done in translating the Social Responsibility Performance Standards into language that was accessible for children by organizing classroom visits during which these students explained the new wording to younger children. This step alone seemed to make a considerable difference in terms of the motivation that children brought to this whole undertaking, renewing a passion that Stephanie first detected was there when she initially suggested to the students that the standards the adults had designed needing ‘fixing.’

During one of her social responsibility blocks with a Grade 5 classroom, Stephanie initiated a discussion about a school in Nova Scotia where kids organized a day on which the majority of the student population wore pink in support of a classmate who was being constantly

bullied (CBC News Online, 2007). Once again the meaningfulness of this particular topic didn't seem to quite take hold until the Grade 5s decided that Crestview needed to have a similar campaign. With Stephanie's support, the students took the lead in publicizing this event through classroom visits, hallways posters, and the morning announcements. An impressive number of staff and students at all grade levels responded by wearing pink on the chosen day. With Stephanie's encouragement, and compelled by the enthusiasm shown by these students, teachers throughout the school took this opportunity to facilitate discussions within their classrooms about bullying, the different forms it could take, its impact on both an individual and school-wide level, and what everyone could do to prevent it from happening.

At the same time students at the Grade 6 level were working with me on a unit that examined the real life story of Josh Waitzkin, a child prodigy, whose gift at chess exacted an unexpected emotional toll on both him and his family. His father's book (Waitzkin, 1994) retells the story of how his son's success revealed some unpleasant things about himself including his desire to see Josh win at all costs even at the expense of being kind and caring toward his competitors. I organized this unit to explore Howard Gardner's conceptualization of Multiple Intelligences (1999), with particular emphasis being placed on interpersonal and intrapersonal traits and how they directly relate to personal and social responsibility.

Throughout the unit, the students seemed to be quite captivated by Josh's story, especially the fact that he was the one to finally teach his father what really matters in life (a message that echoed the sentiments of respect and kindness found in the Crestview Code of Conduct.) However, I was left with the distinct impression that these ideas needed to be explored in ways that went beyond merely identifying their importance in this story. What the students really needed was an opportunity to actualize them in their everyday school lives. To this end, drama proved particularly useful in two respects. Initially, the class explored a number

of fictional and real contexts in which being respectful and kind seemed particularly challenging. This highlighted the reality that these are things that often times are much easier to talk about than to demonstrate in certain situations.

However, an even more meaningful experience for the students appeared to come out of the opportunity they were given to facilitate these drama games and activities with children in one of the primary classes. In order to ensure this success, the Grade 6 students first practiced facilitating a circle with their peers until they felt comfortable enough to try it with younger children. I was pleasantly surprised by how cooperative classmates would be when one of their classmates was first experimenting with the role of facilitator. (In most cases, they weren't anywhere near as challenging as they could be with me whenever I had been in this role.) This alone provided a genuine opportunity for positive reinforcement because it was clear that the students understood what it meant to extend kindness, respect and cooperation to classmates when they were faced with challenging circumstances.

The next layer of meaningfulness emerged from the students' ability to successfully facilitate circle activities and drama games with a dozen or so primary aged children. The activities themselves were greatly simplified with the primary focus being placed on having fun. However, essential to all of these games was the ability for the younger children to turn-take, and the older students, with some guided support from me, employed positive reinforcement strategies to achieve a remarkably high level of structure with the younger children. An observation that particularly struck me was the fact that one of these primary groups included a child who was on my caseload, identified as having severe behaviour-related special needs. After a lengthy discussion with the classroom teacher, we decided that it would be unfair to not have him participate. However, I strongly suspected that this child would exact a considerable toll on

the confidence of the Grade 6 facilitators (as he often did with adults,) as they struggled to establish and enforce rules of respect, kindness and cooperation with him during their games.

As it turned out, the complete opposite occurred. The identified student responded with a degree of self regulation and compliance seldom seen when a teacher was in the role of authority. For these successes, he received repeated and genuine positive reinforcement from the older students in ways that clearly impacted his self concept beyond anything that could have been achieved through adult praise. This remarkable occurrence repeated itself on three occasions, each of which involved different Grade 6 facilitators. Throughout these engagements, the classroom teacher and I, while observing from the periphery, exchanged repeated glances of disbelief, the most memorable of which came at a moment when the Grade 6s asked the younger students to line up at the door to return to their classroom, and the child in question offered his spot at the front of the line to one of his classmates.

The final revelation that occurred as a result of the school-wide focus on proactive measures and student empowerment was connected primarily to two intermediate boys who happened to be part of the notorious Grade 7 class that had drawn so much attention, both positive and negative, to itself throughout the year. Conversations with this group often tended to take on a more candid tone, which in part was one of the strategies I employed to keep the kids engaged in a manner that tended to reduce their inclination to have separate conversations with their classmates during instructional time.

A discussion with the class about an unrelated topic somehow prompted one of the boys to respectfully challenge me about something I had said earlier in the year regarding genuine student leadership. Apparently, the point I had made was that real student leadership should not exclusively involve students taking on roles and responsibilities at the school that merely reflect

what it was that the adults want to see happen at the school. That it should be as much if not more about the students having opportunities to create and carry out their own visions.

At the time that I was confronted with this, I couldn't immediately recall making the comment (no doubt a selective amnesia triggered by fear of where this conversation was going.) However, it did sound like something I might say to a group of challenging intermediate students, especially if I wanted to motivate them to channel their energy toward something positive and meaningful rather than wasting it all on pointless and self-indulgent problem behaviour. Consistent with the spirit of this particular group, I barely had the opportunity to respond before a chorus of voices shouted out that I had indeed said this. The conviction I detected in their tone led me to believe that I was going to be called into account through a request of some form or another.

This was in fact the case, and the idea which appeared to originate from two boys in the class was to hold a school-wide talent show. My initial reaction was relief, because this seemed like something that was within the realm of possibilities, given that up until several years earlier talent shows had been an annual event at Crestview, but they were discontinued when the teacher responsible for their organization left the school. For this reason, I anticipated that the staff would not have any serious objections to the idea, and might even embrace the return of a tradition that had previously been one of the highlights of the school calendar. However, it was clear to me that I really didn't have any idea what kind of planning would be involved, and figured that such an undertaking would require considerable adult support if it was going to be primarily student led. I promised the students that I would explore the idea with the staff and get back to them.

In conversation with Stephanie about the request, we came up with the idea of putting the item on the next staff meeting agenda and inviting the two Grade 7 boys behind the project to

attend and pitch their proposal directly to the teachers. The boys reacted to this suggestion with a mixture of disbelief and excitement. Stephanie and I provided them with a few pointers regarding how they might want to present this idea. In the forefront of our minds was the hope that one or two staff members might respond with offers to become involved in the undertaking.

At the second to last staff meeting of the year (and of the project,) a talent show was added to the agenda and the boys did a wonderful job of courageously standing in front of a room filled with more than twenty members of the staff and administration to pitch their proposal. They received an overwhelming amount of support from the group including some very helpful suggestions on how they might want to handle the thorny issue of auditions.<sup>51</sup> Offers by staff to volunteer their time to the project were immediately forthcoming, and first among these came from the boys' own classroom teacher whose patience they had undeniably worn thin over the course of the academic year. The discussion led to the recommendation that the students organize a number of committees each of which had specific responsibilities. At least one teacher volunteered to sit on each of these committees and support the group as needed. To oversee all of this, the boys were encouraged to co-chair a steering committee. This would enable them to deal with some of the larger organizational decisions and liaise with the subcommittees and school administration. By the end of the meeting, nine teachers in total had put their names forward to support the talent show.

In the days immediately following this staff meeting there erupted a frenzy of committee organization, planning, rehearsals and publicity that seemed to noticeably charge the atmosphere

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<sup>51</sup>District policy with respect to athletic programs for elementary schools has as one of its core principles the understanding that every student who wants to participate in a team sport will be included on the team and receive equal playing time regardless of skill or ability level. This means that there are no 'try-outs' for team sports in elementary schools. This poses a bit of a dilemma for talent shows. Because there are very real limits to the amount of time that children, especially at the primary age, are physically able to sit on the floor of a gym and attend to a program, difficult decisions have to be made about which students are chosen to perform. This has to be handled delicately so that those children not included are not negatively impacted.

throughout the school. Kids were regularly seen hauling instruments to and from designated rehearsal spaces that were set-up during the lunch hour. Other students seemed inclined to spontaneously practice their dance routines at any given moment regardless of where they happened to be. Seemingly overnight the walls of the school became plastered with posters advertising the upcoming event. Daily announcements provided performers with important details as to rehearsal locations and upcoming auditions.<sup>52</sup>

On one memorable occasion, I happened upon a highly organized rehearsal session in which a ‘panel’ of Grade 7s had set themselves up at a table in a manner that seemed to replicate the television show, *American Idol* (Fox Television, 2009), in order to observe and provide feedback to a series of performances by children of various age groups. Gathered on the floor in front of the impromptu stage, a respectful audience of students had gathered to watch. The initial expression on my face must have conveyed some degree of concern that no adult was present to supervise because one of the panelists immediately spoke up to reassure me: “Don’t worry, Mr. White. We only give positive feedback.” To this, another student immediately added, “Yeah, we made a rule that no one is allowed to be Simon Cowell!”<sup>53</sup>

### Self conscious reflection on the researcher’s role in shifting the project’s focus

Specific reference to experiences like this one, as well as other ‘feel-good’ moments like the one in which a child with identified behaviour-related special needs offers his spot in line to another student after having been consistently reinforced for positive behaviour by an older

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<sup>52</sup>After only a few days of rehearsals, it was clear that some support and direction would need to be given to students about their performances, and in some cases this involved delicately encouraging them to realize that a performance in front of the school might not be in their best interest. Intermediate and Primary Program Committees were formed that consisted of both students and teachers who together collaborated on which performances would be included in the show.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Cowell is one of the judges on *American Idol*. The television show’s website describes him as: “notorious for his unsparingly blunt and often controversial criticisms about contestants and their singing abilities” (Fox Television, 2009).

schoolmate compels some consideration as to what extent the researcher was inclined to see the surrounding world through rose-coloured glasses once the momentum of student leadership and school-wide social responsibility appeared to take hold.

Field notes recorded during the second half of the project indicate a greater degree of comfort with the active role I played in shaping events and developments that occurred throughout the school. The previous uncertainty I had in terms of determining when it was appropriate to step back and observe and when I needed to fulfill my role as the school counsellor diminished significantly as I immersed myself in what appeared to be a school-wide shift of focus toward proactive measures and student leadership. However, some of the self-conscious reflections I recorded during this time did raise the question of whether or not this change in perspective had moved the investigation further away from an exploratory orientation and closer to proving something that I already knew to be true about promoting positive behaviour in schools.

One important awakening I took away from the analysis of these notes was to acknowledge the fact that a researcher may be predisposed to ‘explore’ his or her surroundings in a manner that confirms a certain worldview, particularly so if that exploration takes place within an environment in which the individual holds a certain degree of professional investment. It is worth mentioning that coming to this realization did not provoke the same degree of angst that had occurred at earlier stages of the investigative journey when I found myself confronted with evidence to suggest that my logic of inquiry could be somewhat askew. Instead, I took comfort in the fact that the autoethnographic component of the research was well serving its purpose to surface these uncertainties in ways that only brought greater clarity to all three of the research questions that were guiding the inquiry.



### Data analysis from a theoretical framework of power and organizational dynamics

“We don’t need to be fixed, we want to do it ourselves” is a quote that can be found among the data collected during the final months of the behaviour project. At first glance, one might be inclined to assume that it came from a student in the class I worked closely with all year, the one that had caused considerable grief to teachers but had also taken on a number of student-led initiatives that considerably impacted efforts to promote social responsibility on a school-wide level.

In actual fact it was recorded during one of the interviews I conducted with a classroom teacher. I purposefully make note of this here because it encapsulates a key finding of the research in relation to power and organizational dynamics, one that appears to synchronize the realities of adults and children within the public education system. Among the various realizations to emerge from the data analysis was the fact that neither teachers nor students respond very favourably to being overtly told what to do. Yet, both groups have a seemingly limitless capacity to become ignited with passion and creativity whenever the opportunity to self-discover new understandings about their everyday world is genuinely provided.

Data collected throughout the project, and in particular during the interviews in its final weeks, conveyed a consistent message that something very positive had occurred at the school as a result of staff and students being given the opportunity to lead in meaningful ways that brought the community closer together. As one teacher noted, “It brought the staff together... It brought the kids together, because of the things that they are doing together. That has just made it a very positive thing for everybody.” Related to this was another teacher’s emphasis on the fact that many students at the school appeared to have developed an “intrinsic motivation” to become more socially responsible. What she felt was particularly meaningful about this is that it didn’t

occur because they were instructed to do so, but that “they have decided to make the decision on their own.”

It is interesting to note that similar sentiment was expressed at other times by other staff members, but in reference to the teachers’ decision to take the project in a direction that was more intrinsically motivating for them. A key piece of this seemed to be the ability for teachers to know that there was room for them to explore and experiment with various approaches: “If I don’t feel like I’m free to kind of figure it out on my own, play with it a little...figure out what didn’t work and what I’m going to do next time...then I find it overwhelming...and more of a hindrance than anything.” In other instances, teachers made reference to the fact that considerable diversity existed within the Crestview staff in terms of teaching styles and personal passions, and that the project’s success was dependant upon it being flexible enough in design to allow for these differences.

This confirmed certain observations that were made during the final months of the project that highlighted the fact that members of both the staff and administration tended to gravitate toward student leadership initiatives that matched their own personal and professional interests and skill sets. For the school principal, the manner in which guests were received at the school was of great importance. Not surprisingly, she engaged intermediate students in an initiative that directly related to this particular focus. The teacher at the school who generally organized all of the sports related activities was responsible for designing and implementing a program by which students lent out athletic equipment at recess and lunch hour. The music teacher was heavily involved in the talent show. In this respect, proactive approaches to promoting positive behaviour and social responsibility appeared to provide greater opportunity for staff to customize their involvement than did the focus on a response system that established a fixed process for office referrals.

Clearly noted in the field notes recorded around these student empowerment initiatives was the absence of any significant forms of resistance from staff or students. The only exception to this was an off-handed comment made by one teacher in relation to the pink shirt / anti-bullying campaign that indicated she was not in favour of mimicking an intervention that had been set in place at another school for a specific problem that had not been identified as an issue at Crestview. However, she appeared to resign herself to the fact that this had become a school-wide focus and allowed for it to go forward without any overt opposition.

Even more significant was the fact that little or no resistance occurred to the introduction of several positive reinforcement systems at the school-wide level that involved Grade 7 students presenting younger children on the playground with ‘green cards’ for expressing gestures of kindness to one another or playing safely. With both of these interventions, once a certain number of cards were issued all of the students at the school were rewarded with an additional recess. It is important to note that the implementation of this kind of school-wide, reward-based reinforcement system had been the primary reason behind one staff member’s steadfast opposition to Crestview becoming a PBS school. Yet, he expressed no public opposition to these efforts when they were introduced during the final months of the project. However, an interview with this teacher several weeks after these initiatives had finished revealed that he had not significantly changed his opinion on the matter:

I’m totally against any kind of material thing being given other than a recognition like a green card or something that leads toward intrinsic [motivation], if it’s candy, or a ‘gotcha’ in that way, I just don’t support that at all. I think I even struggle with the green card... because I think it’s too easy to miss the quiet, well-behaved student who may be doing exactly the same thing that someone who is more outspoken or just in the teacher’s eye more, that child may never get a green card.

From an organizational dynamics perspective, the question emerges as to why this teacher’s opposition to a school-wide proactive approach did not result in some form of active or passive

resistance similar to that which took place when the school-wide response system for office referrals was introduced. One explanation for this is the fact that the students themselves were actively involved in designing and carrying out this initiative, which may have deterred this teacher from expressing outright opposition to it. In this respect, one wonders if power structures, and resistance to them, may represent a factor in the sense that interventions introduced by a figure of authority, whether it be at the district or school-based level, are more likely to provoke resistance than they would if they originated from places elsewhere in the power hierarchy. Two other events appear to support this. The first of these was the staff's receptivity to hosting the behaviour pilot project when I proposed the idea to them after they had rejected a PBS initiative two years previous when it was brought forward by district level officials. The second of these was the willingness to look at PBS approaches when they were presented by Terry Scott, (someone outside of the power hierarchy) at the *Making Connections Conference*. Their willingness to explore this represented a complete turnaround from their steadfast resistance to the school district's encouragement to adopt this approach.

One other aspect of power and organizational dynamics that did not appear to resurface in relation to the focus on proactive measures and student leadership was the circuitous communication patterns that were evident in earlier stages of the project. The data identified two themes that might account for this. The first of these is related to the fact that proactive measures and student leadership are fundamentally 'feel good' undertakings that don't carry with them the same level of contention that do reactive approaches that deal with problem behaviour. Because of this, it would seem more likely that teachers and administrators would have an easier time expressing more directly any forms of disagreement they might have about a particular intervention. The second factor that was identified related to the issue of autonomy and the fact that for the most part, neither proactive measures nor student-led initiatives pose any direct threat

to areas that either teachers or administrators might view as their jurisdiction. The only exception to this might be the use of positive reinforcement systems in the classrooms, which were purposefully made optional for teachers since it seemed obvious that this was not something that could be forced on to an individual's professional practice.

Arguably, the opportunity for teachers to become further involved in student-led initiatives at the school-wide level diminished the emphasis on classroom autonomy in part because it increased their exposure to, and involvement with, children outside of their own classrooms. This appeared to promote a mindset that transcended the notion that the only students that are of concern for a teacher are those who are in his or her class: "The way teachers view the children is that they all are our kids and its not as though this is my class and I'm going to do this in my own class. It's, this is what we are going to do as a school because they are all our kids."

#### Winding down the behaviour pilot project at Crestview

The excitement and energy that permeated throughout the school in late May and early June of 2009 no doubt impacted the impressions that both staff and administration were left with about the behaviour pilot project as it drew to a close. In addition to the talent show, preparation was underway for Grade 7 graduation, which by its very nature often provokes a certain degree of nostalgia among school personnel as they prepare to say good-bye to a large contingency of students who have grown up before their very eyes. Interviews that I conducted with a number of Grade 7 students revealed a similar inclination to focus attention on all that was positive about their experiences at Crestview as they prepared to take the momentous step of moving on to high school.

It was against this backdrop that I made every attempt to take stock of how people felt about the eighteen month journey that was now winding down, and what impact, if any, it had on the way in which staff and administration at the school were inclined to deal with problem behaviour. With respect to this, a number of points featured prominently. Every individual who was asked to share their impression of the project made specific reference to the card system, student-leadership or both. Without exception, all individuals who were interviewed felt that the project overall had been a positive experience for the school. Some gently qualified this with pointing out a particular event or development that could have been better handled. Not surprisingly, considerable variation existed in terms of people's impressions of how significant an impact the project had on the school. This ranged from some teachers highlighting the fact that the project had effectively expanded pre-existing student leadership initiatives at the school to others conveying a sense that Crestview had been essentially transformed by this journey.

One issue that was consistently raised throughout the interviews was the question of whether or not any of the changes that had occurred at the school could be sustained once the additional resources were taken away. On more occasions than not, I detected the resurfacing of a certain cynicism toward the system for under-resourcing schools in ways that diminished the ability for staff to give some resiliency to positive changes like the ones that had taken place: "You should come back and interview us a year from now after the funding is gone. We'll see then how much of this is still going on. Who's going to pick-up some of the projects that you and Stephanie have been working on when the extra time is gone? That's the problem."

Two events brought the project to a close in a very meaningful way. At the Grade 7 graduation, I was asked to acknowledge the work the students had done through their leadership initiatives. This marked an occasion when I felt that the school community was genuinely aligned in its perspective of the positive experience that had occurred at Crestview, particularly

as a result of the emphasis that had been placed on student empowerment. It was an emotional moment for many of us in the community, but one that I felt reflected a collective awakening to what had been achieved.

The second event took place in the school library and was instigated by a request from the Director of Safe and Caring Schools that a presentation on the project be given to other staff members throughout the district who might be interested in hosting the initiative at their school the following year.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that this took place at one of the busiest times for classroom teachers, the Crestview staff attended the session in impressive numbers. Following a brief presentation about what had taken place at the school over the course of the eighteen months that it was engaged in the project, the classroom teachers in attendance essentially took over the meeting to share their personal impressions of what had been meaningful for them. This solidified in my mind a conviction that the behaviour pilot project at Crestview had to a large extent fulfilled its initial mandate of being grass-roots in design. Those who spoke about the project referenced almost everything in terms of what “we” had achieved. The conversation was meaningfully balanced between comments made by Stephanie who had served well as the project’s coordinator, and a large number of staff members who gave the distinct impression through their own personal accounts that this was an experience that the community at Crestview genuinely and collectively ‘owned.’

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<sup>54</sup> In June of 2009, the School District Executive decided to continue funding the behaviour pilot project for the following academic year with the understanding that it would be relocated to another elementary school in the district. A message was sent out to school-based administrators inviting them to express interest in hosting the program. Crestview was asked to present an information session about the project so that interested administrators and teachers could learn more about it.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### DISCUSSION

#### An encounter with perception: Using ethnotheatre to explore researcher assumptions

EXT: *Rose Garden UBC campus. Vincent is seated alone on a park bench overlooking the garden and its breathtaking backdrop of coastal mountain peaks stretching back endlessly against the horizon. In the corner of his eye, he notices a cloaked figure stealthily approaching, carefully looking around to assess whether or not her presence is being noted by others, despite the fact that she and Vincent are clearly the only ones in the garden. She momentarily seats herself on a bench several feet away from the one Vincent is seated on, only to get up again after barely a few seconds to dart over to Vincent's bench positioning herself within whispering distance of him. The covert nature of the stranger's actions leaves Vincent feeling more curious than alarmed. In a contrived fashion, the stranger looks around the garden and up at the mountains in a vain attempt to imply that her only purpose here is to appreciate the majestic scenery.*

*A brief moment passes. Then without turning her head she speaks in a whispered tone.*

Stranger: I want to talk to you about the opening scene.

Vincent: Pardon me?

Stranger: The opening scene... your dissertation... you and Johnny. I have some issues with it, but not in the way that you presumed I would.

Vincent: Who are you?

Stranger: I think you know who I am, but let's just say we didn't have this conversation.

Vincent: Huh?

Stranger: You make some pretty sweeping generalizations, don't you think?

Vincent: What do you mean?

Stranger: C'mon you know exactly what I mean: The whole Ivory Tower portrayal of the academy. The crack you make about the elitist language. Portraying me in the shadows showing disapproval of your approach because it's sooooo unconventional (*rolls her eyes*).

Vincent: You are the...?

Stranger: Don't you think it's a bit convenient to profile the academy in that way, and me along with it?



Vincent: Well, the part about you was intended to inject a bit of humour.

Stranger: Right. And now you got me lurking around campus stifling to death in this trench coat. Remind me to take you to task about this at your oral defense.

Vincent: Yeah, that's exactly what I'm afraid of.

Stranger: (*leaning toward Vincent to emphasize a point*) Don't you see? That's the missing piece here! *Your* fear. Why have you left that out? Where is authority and accountability situated in terms of your own academic journey? How does your fear factor into your approach to this research?

Vincent: I hadn't really considered that.

Stranger: That surprises me because you drop hints about it everywhere. You've got me and the members of the Ethics Committee lurking around in the shadows portrayed as ominous authority figures who keep you under surveillance in order to hold you accountable for your work.

Vincent: I guess it kind of comes across like that.

Stranger: I also sense a certain caution in the way you retell the story. You step pretty delicately around certain aspects of the organizational dynamics at Crestview. You're going to need to be a bit more explicit in this chapter about their implications.

Vincent: I'll try to keep that in mind.

Stranger: While you're at it, why don't you apply the same questions you ask about authority and accountability at the school to your whole take on the academy? Maybe there is a bit more to us than you've made us out to be.

Vincent: What do you mean?

Stranger: The whole thing about the academy not taking your research seriously because you've pushed it too far with your unconventional approach. This fear you have that someone is going to come along and dismiss it. You make no effort to get underneath it, despite the fact your work is supposed to be all about that. Authority and accountability are examined from several theoretical perspectives in terms of how they relate to a school community. Yet, when it comes to this side of the equation, these ideas conveniently drop out of sight. In their place is left this profile of us being rigid authority figures, elitist and inaccessible to the outside world.

Vincent: I'm just wondering to what extent authority and accountability are used within the academy to reinforce the sovereignty of its hierarchy? Are you telling me that's not the case?

Stranger: It might be to some extent. And if so, I'm sure that it's organizationally situated in ways that are every bit as dynamic as what you uncovered at Crestview. However, I'm not sure I agree with your derogatory reference to it as 'the club.'

Vincent: *(with a smirk)* Johnny called it that, not me.

Stranger: You need to look beyond this idea that it exists merely as an instrument to reinforce a certain power structure within the academy. Are not authority and accountability necessary to some extent in order to maintain a standard for what constitutes research that has integrity? And what about the forces of resistance that push back against these power structures? You make no mention at all of that.

Vincent: You're right I don't.

Stranger: I think you do us a bit of a disservice by making us all out to be so one dimensional in nature and orientation. Many of us have committed a lifetime's work to disrupting these power structures. I dare say you benefit from a trail that was blazed before you.

Vincent: Did I not acknowledge that when I laid out the framework for this methodology, especially in terms of the ontology and epistemology on which it's grounded?

Stranger: Yes, somewhat. But then you turn the whole thing around and set it up as though you are trapped in some kind of panopticon, perpetually under surveillance in case you make the wrong move. It brings an unnecessary fragility to your work, and you seem to be looking for someone to blame for it.

Vincent: But you yourself admitted that there are certain forces at play here. Organizational dynamics exist within the academy that perpetuate fear. For goodness sake, the whole process culminates in a defense! How the hell does that not contribute to a certain sense of vulnerability?

Stranger: Shouldn't you be asking yourself how much of that has to do with your own perception of it? What about the whole dialogical process of meaning-making that you keep referencing throughout this work? Does it not compel you to consider the role you yourself play in perceiving authority and accountability in this manner? Does not perception play a role in organizational dynamics in ways that may actually shape people's impressions of authority and accountability? Isn't this what determines whether one either justifies its necessity or decries its oppressive agenda?

Vincent: That is something I hadn't even considered when I started out on this whole journey.

Stranger: But you're aware of it now because you've uncovered both sides of these perceptions along the way. You've identified instances in which members of the school community embrace it as an essential tool for dealing with behaviour, but you also point out places in which it causes tensions and resistance whenever people perceive the will of others being imposed on them.

Vincent: Absolutely, but not until now had I realized the important role of perception.

Stranger: Perhaps you need to consider it in terms of your take on the academy? Maybe it's time to ask yourself the question how much of this is a prison of your own making?

*Vincent takes a moment to ponder this statement. It unsettles him that he doesn't know quite how to respond. His mind drifts inward shifting his focus away from his immediate surroundings. He feels a distinct sense of awakening... and then turns back to share it with the stranger.*

Vincent: I have to admit that...

*Vincent discovers that the place next to him on the bench is vacant. A wind blows swiftly by making Vincent aware that evening has arrived. Noticing the silence surrounding him, he quickly gathers up his belongings and heads back to his office.*

*Exit Vincent.*

*Lights dim plunging the stage into darkness.*

*House lights turn on indicating an end to the performance. The flood of light reveals an audience area that is empty with the exception of Vincent who is seated alone in the back row.*

#### How perception of authority and accountability may be organizationally situated.

Over the course of Crestview's eighteen-month investigative journey, a number of key events occurred that revealed the existence of certain organizational dynamics related to various ways in which power was situated within our school community. Whether it was the delicate and carefully thought out process by which we first introduced the project to classroom teachers, the ongoing tensions that surfaced around our efforts to implement a school-wide response system, or the decision by staff members to get actively involved in supporting student leadership initiatives, power was an influential force that determined to what extent tensions would occur between individuals and groups within the school. Through the process of examining these events from a theoretical perspective that took into account organizational dynamics, I arrived at an understanding that these tensions were often related to how authority and accountability were being consciously or unconsciously perceived by individuals in each circumstance.

The theoretical framework conceptualized for this research was primarily intended to give critical consideration to how these power dynamics were organizationally situated at Crestview in ways that may have influenced how behaviour was dealt with by staff and

administration, and how they together engaged in an initiative that was intended to explore this. The importance of perception was not something that I initially contemplated. Instead, the conceptual framework was intended to determine to what extent stratified power structures existed, and what impact they had on the reactive and proactive approaches employed to promote positive behaviour and social responsibility throughout the school. Part of this involved exploring the possibility that this hierarchy of authority might perpetuate active or passive resistance whenever individuals sensed that a given approach was being imposed in ways that served to reinforce the sovereignty on which the leadership structure was based.

To varying degrees, aspects of this were identified at different levels of power both within Crestview and at the larger school district level. At the inception of the behaviour pilot project, and on various occasions throughout its 18-month journey, concerted efforts were made by district-level personnel to force the coordinator of the project at Crestview to collect quantitative data that would substantiate the value of the additional resources that had been invested in the school. Recordings from project meetings clearly indicate a sense that accountability was something that district-level committee members wanted the coordinator of the project and those supporting her to keep constantly in mind. To what extent this reflected conscious or unconscious efforts by district-level personnel to exert authority over school-based leadership is hard to determine with any certainty. It is worth considering that this may have simply reflected the extent to which authority and accountability were being exerted by the school district's executive leadership on district-level administration. If this was indeed the case, it illustrates how these dynamics can filter down from the top of the power structure to school level personnel.

As noted in the first chapter, from the earliest stages of conceptualizing the behaviour project there appeared to be a natural inclination by district level committee members to do

whatever was necessary to get schools to adopt interventions or approaches that were endorsed at that level of the district's power structure. This begs the question of whether or not the sovereignty of leadership at this level was somehow invested in its ability to impose its will on those who were situated beneath it in the pecking order. One cannot help but wonder if failure to demonstrate an ability to affect or impose change on others might have invited the uncomfortable question of whether or not this layer of leadership represented a good use of the school district's limited resources. In relation to this, it's worth mentioning that when the opportunity arose in the final months of the Crestview project to present and discuss its successes with Executive Administration, district level committee representatives elected to do so without inviting any member of the school community to attend the meeting including the project's coordinator!

At the school level, stratified power structures also appeared to exist and have some influence over the different ways in which authority and accountability were reinforced. Power in this sense not only refers to that which is organizationally invested in the school's administration, but also to the authority that teachers have over their students. For the most part, actions taken by either of these groups did not appear to be consciously or unconsciously driven by a need to establish or maintain the sovereignty of their leadership over others. There were a few noted exceptions in which I sensed that certain individuals felt that their authority was being threatened or undermined. With classroom teachers, this usually came by way of parents calling into question a particular decision made or approach taken that they perceived as having a negative impact on their child. Administrators also occasionally faced these challenges, but added to these were the rare instances in which the teachers as a unionized collective took action in ways that the administration perceived as a challenge to its authority.

Far more common were instances in which teachers or students demonstrated some form of resistance to authority in a manner that did not represent an overt challenge to the leadership structure, but nonetheless led to an increase in tension and divisiveness within the school community. Data collected throughout the study revealed a number of different ways in which forces of resistance were at play at the school. These were reflected in the tensions that emerged on numerous occasions and in various contexts between the school's administration, classroom teachers and the students. The insistence by both staff and administration that each maintain a certain degree of autonomy over student referrals to the office is one example of this. Passive forms of resistance were obvious on both sides of this issue with some teachers intent on sending students to the office with no documentation, and administrators in turn sending students back to the classroom whenever they felt that the process agreed upon had not been followed.

Taken to its extreme, this conjures up an almost comical image of a child travelling back and forth between two locations serving as the primary instrument through which power and resistance are being demonstrated by adults. This is not unlike what happens when a child goes back and forth between two parents seeking permission for something that neither is willing to take responsibility for granting or refusing. Often it is the case in these situations that neither parent is willing to initiate a discussion with the other about the child's request because some form of power dynamics are at play and the child as a result ends up stuck in the middle.

At Crestview, when tensions emerged as a result of efforts by one or more people to affect change in others by exerting power or authority, a circuitous pattern of communication often resulted, one that clearly complicated collective problem solving of any sort. What is interesting to note is that these unhelpful communication patterns were often the result of the way in which staff and administration interpreted and put into practice various protocols provided by either the BCTF or the school district's human resources department. In this respect,

organizational dynamics at both provincial and district levels had the capacity to impact how the school community dealt with the various issues that emerged.

In some cases, this was driven by ‘informal’ policy, like the one in our school district that encourages school-based administrators to activate higher levels of authority whenever a member of staff does likewise. Consequently, if a teacher decides to go beyond union support at the school level and involves a representative of the local chapter of the BCTF, then a school principal is expected to do likewise by activating the support of the district’s human resources department. Ironically, doing this rarely achieves anything more than having higher levels of authority direct school administration and staff to deal with the problem at the school level in a manner that is ‘closest to its source.’ What it does seem to achieve however, is some form of validation for the stratified power structure that exists. Both administrators and staff members seem to achieve a sense of reassurance by sending a particular issue up the ‘chain of command,’ even if the most common result is to have it sent right back down!

As mentioned, the analysis of various key developments that occurred during the project revealed that whenever individuals perceived that authority or accountability were being used to impose a particular approach or mindset, there was an increased likelihood of resistance that often created a certain degree of divisiveness among and between the individuals or groups involved. Examples of this even predate this research undertaking when we consider the staff’s reaction to district efforts to implement PBS at Crestview several years before the behaviour project came to the school. Then again, throughout the early months of the pilot, we saw tensions arise between staff and administration in response to each other’s attempts to exert some control over the process by which office referrals occurred and were handled. In terms of the students, both individually and collectively, resistance emerged against concerted efforts to affect change in their behaviour through reactive measures that included being repeatedly sent to the office or

held back after school for detention. Even when district-level administration attempted to impose the collection of quantitative data on the school-based administration and members of the project's steering committee it was met with resistance.

In this sense, it appears that whenever authority or accountability are perceived to be threatening autonomy or attempting to exercise control over behaviour it provokes a reaction from those whose agency is at risk. In each of the examples stated above the efforts of one group could easily be perceived as exercising power over another. In all but one example, this involved individuals who were 'higher up' on the stratified power structure of the system being perceived as using their authority to enforce accountability on individuals who were situated beneath them: school-based admin over teachers with respect to the office referral process, school-based admin and teachers over students in regard to unacceptable behaviour in the classroom, district admin over school-based admin and teachers in relation to collecting quantitative data. The only exception to this was the efforts by teachers to impose a certain accountability on school-based admin with respect to how they handled office referrals. Ironically, in this case, teachers were calling for greater accountability within the system while resisting efforts to have it imposed on them in terms of the process through which they referred children to the office. Similarly, school-based admin were yearning for greater accountability from teachers through a uniform process and tracking of office referrals, but resisted any attempts to have a similar uniformity imposed on them in terms of what happened whenever a child was sent to the office.

#### Dynamics of language and symbolic power

It is important to deconstruct any notion that all members of a particular subgroup within a school community perceive and react to these dynamics in a similar fashion. Presumably, not all teachers regarded efforts by admin to standardize the office referral process as a threat to their



autonomy, just as different student responses occur when adults attempt to redirect unacceptable behaviour through reactive approaches. Similarly, it is safe to assume that within an administrative team there is some diversity in perception of district-level admin attempts to impose certain policies and procedures on the leadership of its schools. Likely the same can be said of how the executive leadership of school districts variously view the directions they receive from the Ministry of Education.

For this reason, it is important to consider Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) notion of language and symbolic power in terms of which individuals are perceived to have the social capital to act and speak as authorized representatives of the larger subgroup to which they belong. Certain teachers, students, parents and administrators (both school-based and district-level), inevitably become instilled with the status and authority to represent the voice of others at their level of the stratified power structure. Perhaps more than any other feature of organizational dynamics, this significantly impacts the way in which a school or district community operates.

By applying our new understanding of how the perception of authority and accountability influences the degree of resistance that occurs within the system, we can gain greater insight into these organizational dynamics. Like everyone else, individuals who have attained the status or social capital to speak and act as one of the authorized representatives of a group perceive the system around them through a particular worldview that is shaped by complex sociocultural forces influenced by professional and personal lived experiences. This significantly impacts the way in which a particular individual perceives and reacts to authority and accountability, and as such, largely determines the way in which the group responds to it.

Few would contest the impact, both negative and positive, that a small number of teachers who have acquired the status to speak as authorized representatives can have on an entire staff. The same can be said of one or two students on a classroom, a few parents on a

Parent Advisory Council, and a small number of administrators on an entire leadership team. What makes this inherently more complex and dynamic is the fact that within the system people will respond (and often over-respond) to the actions and words of authorized representatives on the misguided impression that they present the unanimous perspective and opinions of the group to which they belong. Consequently, a teacher may alter, adapt or abandon a lesson based on the resistance exhibited by one or two children who possess a certain degree of power within the group. In fact, when planning the lesson, it is entirely likely that the teacher already anticipated their reaction and consequently shaped the approach in a fashion that he or she believed was least likely to provoke this resistance. Similarly, school-based administrators are understandably inclined to shape their approach to each and every leadership task based on what they anticipate will be the response from authorized representatives of the teaching group, parent group, or both.

The obvious question to emerge from an awareness of these dynamics is what, if anything can be done to ensure that this does not adversely impact the overall health of a school community by impeding its ability to grow and evolve in a manner that is meaningful and fulfilling for all of those who belong to it. Simply taking into consideration the nature of these organizational complexities has the tendency to make such a goal seem patently idealistic. However, this should not discourage those individuals who are inclined to devote energy to this from embracing an orientation that can promote both an individual and collective sense of well being throughout their community. Some would argue that the existence of these organizational dynamics does not discharge school leaders from their responsibility to do everything in their power to facilitate this.

### Contemplating a healthy orientation to organizational dynamics

A number of awakenings that occurred during this research compelled me to consider how members of a school community can orient themselves in ways that diminish or limit the extent to which organizational dynamics erode its overall well being. I believe that these can be best understood in terms of three distinct but related mindsets: emancipation, empowerment and embodiment.

Among other things, the first of these speaks of the need for individuals to become more self aware of this tendency to over-generalize the perspectives and opinions of one or a few authorized representatives of a subgroup to the larger whole, and resist the temptation to over respond to words or actions that originate from this source. This does not mean that we can simply ignore or set aside these perspectives, nor should we underestimate their capacity to ferment unrest among a subgroup. However, emancipating oneself from a mindset that creates too great a sensitivity to these opinions can only contribute to a healthier orientation to one's professional surroundings, one that constantly recognizes the diversity of worldviews that comprise every social organization.

Liberating ourselves from these vestiges of symbolic power also requires a greater attentiveness to the organizational dynamics that exist within one's own subgroup. It is here that we can commit to inviting different perspectives and opinions from those whose social capital is overlooked or undervalued in ways that obstruct their ability to speak as authorized representatives. Consistently bringing these voices into the dialogue has the potential to create a greater balance of perspective so that no singular worldview is over-represented. Unfortunately, individuals too often want to promote this within other subgroups, without examining the dynamics that are going on within one's own.

A classic example of this is the fact that many members of the BCTF are in my impression firmly invested or philosophically situated in the mindset that the membership must always speak with one voice. Seldom is critical attention ever given to how it is determined what this one voice expresses on behalf of the entire group. Instead there is the explicit understanding that teachers are stronger when they stand together and weaker when our perspectives and opinions are incongruent. In this sense, the rationale for this ‘single-mindedness’ is substantiated by the need for power to counterbalance the authority that is invested in the governance structure of public education.

On numerous occasions, I have heard administrators besmirch this mentality, in some cases even calling into question whether individuals who subscribe to this philosophy should regard themselves as professionals in any sense of the term. And yet, the very same mindset is demonstrated within the administrative ranks where it is an extremely rare occasion that an administrator speaks or acts in a fashion that counters the position held by the employer. The rationale for this behaviour is sometimes substantiated by a misguided interpretation of what it means to act as ‘an agent of the board.’

In addition to both groups calling on the other to move beyond this tendency to always think and act ‘with the herd,’ teachers and administrators alike, often in chorus with parents, are routinely calling on children to employ critical thinking skills in every facet of their lives, so that they learn to self-regulate a knee-jerk tendency to follow the actions and opinions of their peers. To illustrate the value of this, school communities often promote various issues of social justice that involve pointing out to children how a particular cause only emerges and gains momentum after one voice has the courage to break away from the majority mindset. Rarely do adults come clean about the fact that their own professional approach is deeply entrenched in whatever worldview is outlined for them by those who speak with authority on behalf of their group.

Emancipating ourselves and our school communities from these dynamics involves moving beyond this tendency to point out the shortcomings of herd-thinking within other subgroups, and concentrating our energy on affecting some change within ourselves and our own professional associations, which is by far a much more challenging and riskier undertaking. Having the courage to publicly express an opinion that varies from either our union or our employer will inevitably cultivate into our professional dialogues a greater comfort and acceptance of diversity, and hopefully diminish any real or perceived threat of consequences for breaking ranks with our ‘brothers and sisters’ or ‘the boss.’

Doing this involves maintaining a constant mindfulness to resist dynamics within our professional groups that compel us to revert back to the kind of oppressive power structures that demand compliance and single-mindedness through what Foucault describes as visible but unverifiable power. A perfect example of this is demonstrated within the leadership structure of a school district where most assume that one’s advancement within the organization is more likely to be facilitated by compliance than it is by regularly expressing positions that counter those held by individuals who are situated higher-up within the stratified power structure.

For this reason, Paolo Freire (1981) insists that the key to maintaining an environment in which community members are emancipated from these oppressive power structures rests with those who are in positions of authority. It is left to them to decide whether to exert power over those who they regard as subordinate to them, or to use their positions of authority to emancipate individuals from these structures through a praxis that empowers their meaningful contribution through a shared pursuit of knowledge and goals. Freire points out that there is a cost associated with failing to invest in the latter. He argues that “leaders who deny praxis to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis. By imposing their word on others, they falsify that word and establish a contradiction between their methods and their objectives” (p. 126).

This notion that within oppressive leadership structures a contradiction exists between methods and objectives strikes at the heart of what a school community often wrestles with when dealing with the various challenges it confronts, including problem behaviour. At Crestview, students are consistently encouraged to follow the core principles of their Code of Conduct. Whenever an individual falls short of this, there is a general expectation held by most members of the community that some form of consequence will result, and here it seems is where the slippery slope exists.

Consistent with fundamentals of positive behaviour support is the idea that meaningful consequences are only one piece of a successful intervention, and that they should be predictable, consistent and applied in a manner that is free of negative emotion. What would seem to tip the scale to a point that constitutes an oppressive structure is when such interventions are introduced in a manner that betrays the very principles of respect, ownership, cooperation and kindness that they are intended to promote. Over the course of the project at Crestview, there were occasions when certain members of the staff called on administration to ‘draw the line’ on a particular student in the sense that they wanted a threshold established that once crossed would result in the child being no longer welcome at the school.

Missing from these conversations was an open discussion about whether such methods were congruent with our objectives. Organizational dynamics at the school were such that only the authorized representatives of the teachers voiced their insistence that the school adopt a policy which clearly established a point at which ‘enough was enough.’ Much of the discussion around this took place in a format that was consistent with the circuitous communication patterns that typically accompanied tension-filled situations. Not surprisingly, school administration stood its ground that putting a child out of school indefinitely was simply not going to happen. The discussion as I remember it represented one that was rigidly entrenched within positions that

neither side was inclined to explore in a manner that remotely represented a shared pursuit of resolution.

On a number of levels, Freire's notion of imposing 'the word' on others only to falsify it through contradiction rings resoundingly true for some of the events that occurred at Crestview, and I would guess that it is hardly alone in falling prey to this. Both individually and collectively, the staff and administration rarely took any ownership for the role we played in a given behaviour situation. Teachers and administrators, well aware of the adult dynamic in certain circumstances purposefully looked the other way, resorting instead to circuitous communication patterns that did little to draw attention to a key piece of the problem. Ownership, it would seem, was a goal that the code of conduct set out exclusively for the purpose of students.

On other occasions, respect and kindness were clearly missing from certain adult interactions with children who had engaged in problem behaviour. Whether it was the tone of voice adopted by the adult or the decision to scold the child publicly in front of peers, there were clear examples of when members of both the school administration and teaching staff resorted to behaviours far removed from the principles set out in the school's Code of Conduct. One can assume that it was on these occasions that the students' impressions of authority at the school were perceived in their most oppressive light, and any notion of being held accountable for one's behaviour was likely to be viewed as either inherently unfair or a contradiction to the messages consistently being voiced by adults.

In a similar vein, adult perceptions of authority within the system appeared to be significantly shaped by the degree to which they were regarded as fair and consistent in message. However, what appeared to be of even greater importance was whether or not authority was perceived to be imposing its will on the staff in a manner that reinforced stratified power

structures within the organization. In this light, the notion of emancipation could arguably be expanded to take into consideration how both sides of any circumstance should pay careful attention to how authority is situated and being employed. So far we have highlighted the resistance and tensions that occur when this is perceived as doing little else other than to reinforce the sovereignty of the stratified power structures that exists within a social organization. Now we will turn our attention to what can occur when authority is perceived to be primarily invested in empowering others.

#### Using authority and accountability to promote student leadership

By far, the most compelling story to be told about Crestview's eighteen month journey is the fact that the administration, staff, and students engaged in various leadership initiatives that demonstrated a willingness and capacity to emancipate the school at least on some levels from organizational dynamics that generally provoked resistance. The behaviour pilot project, after it experienced a crucial turning point, appeared to turn its collective attention to expanding on many of the leadership projects that already existed at the school. In this sense, the project itself did not seem to affect a transformation of the power structure, as the propensity for this already existed and was demonstrated in various ways that suggested it was already interwoven into the fabric of the school culture. Instead, the project seemed to propel the school community to invest greater time and energy to this orientation, shifting the focus away from reactive responses.

The behaviour pilot project revealed that at Crestview an inherent inclination toward student empowerment co-existed alongside a hierarchy of authority that under certain circumstances asserted itself in ways that had the potential to diminish or undermine the advances made by students and adults through various leadership initiatives. It was typically on occasions when the behaviour of one or more students drew the heightened attention of certain



adults in the school community that calls for more stringent authority and accountability were made. These calls came from both teachers and administration usually in ways that were subtly directed at one another. On these occasions, student empowerment typically disappeared from focus as adults became preoccupied with reactive approaches that concentrated on who needed to do what to whom in order to exercise the necessary power to ensure accountability. It was at these times that Crestview seemed to revert back to leadership structures that were unnecessarily oppressive and designed to impose the will of one subgroup on another. On teachers, pressure was exerted to follow a clear and concise process for redirecting behaviour long before a referral to the office was even contemplated. For administration, the expectation was that they would employ a clearly-outlined system of escalating consequences and agree not to return a student to the class prematurely. For students, there were calls for increased surveillance and the clear demonstration of meaningful consequences, the latter of which even included the expectation that a child be forced to leave if a certain line of behaviour was crossed. Not surprisingly, all of these efforts to impose the will of one group on another met with various forms of resistance.

In stark contrast, were countless occasions when efforts to affect change took the form of providing opportunities for empowerment. Here, little or no resistance occurred, and in some cases a unifying effect was noted. The staff at Crestview accepted almost unanimously the offer to engage in a behaviour pilot project that by design was intended to empower the school community to explore the different ways it approached student behaviour. Some teachers began to incorporate positive reinforcement systems into their classroom practice once it was presented within the context of an optional intervention that could be customized to fit their own individual styles. PBS-related approaches were suddenly embraced by certain staff members once they were provided the opportunity to learn more about the program without any pre-conceived expectations being placed on them. (It's worth noting that this knowledge came from a source

that existed outside of the school district's power structure.) A cohort of students who had gained a reputation for consistently exhibiting problem behaviour in the classroom responded enthusiastically to opportunities provided to them to promote social responsibility within the school through leadership initiatives.

### Drawing a connection between emancipation and empowerment

These approaches highlight how notions of 'leading' and 'educating' can be deconstructed to foreground the significance of social interaction and mutual empowerment as critical components of human relationships. Clearly, a mindset of this nature has significant implications for affecting how authority and accountability are perceived within a school community. This has the potential to transform the way administrators, teachers and students understand what is meant by leadership and learning on various fundamental levels.

In the classroom, cultivating a learning environment that is based on mutual empowerment can be a challenging task. At the heart of this approach is a student-teacher relationship that provides genuine opportunities for self discovery and empowerment. This is most effectively articulated by Paulo Freire (1981), in his monumental work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "The teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid" (p.67).

Paulo Freire's notion of emancipatory education is meant to address inequalities that extend far beyond the classroom. However, in terms of affecting systemic change within public education, it is how he envisions learning as a shared pursuit of knowledge that is of critical significance, with direct implications for how a school goes about promoting positive behaviour

and social responsibility. This represents a fundamental paradigm shift away from a public education system that is invested in stratified and highly regulated authority structures that often times systematically disempower students, teachers, administrators and school boards. Freire encourages us to understand that in order for learning to be meaningful and transformative, individuals must be emancipated from these oppressive structures.

In order to achieve this, everyone within the system needs to feel genuinely empowered to fully and actively participate in knowledge gathering, alongside and in collaboration with their ‘teachers’ or ‘leaders.’ For students and adults alike initiatives must be designed in a manner that promotes intrinsic motivation and opportunities for discovery that are customized in such a way that is meaningful to everyone involved. They need also to move beyond rationalist paradigms that are constrained by a preoccupation with “right answers, correct knowledge or accurate understandings,” in order to embrace a pedagogy that concerns itself with “powers of oppression that have harmed and continue to damage” relationships within a social organization (Cannella & Viruru, 2007.) In this regard, members of a school community demonstrate a willingness to examine an issue like behaviour on a level that surfaces some of the unhelpful organizational dynamics so that they can be better understood and resolved. Such an undertaking greatly increases the likelihood that change will be sustainable because it is inextricably linked to a belief that all community members have been genuinely empowered to affect a transformation that is meaningful to them.

#### Empowered learning spaces for students and teachers alike: Self discovery, initiative, and agency

In this sense, emancipation is further envisioned in terms that not only liberate teachers and students from stratified power structures, but also cultivates learning experiences in which both are given opportunities to individually and collectively discover new knowledge. In 1916,

John Dewey wrote, “teachers would find their work less of a grind and strain if school conditions favored learning in the sense of discovery and not in that of storing away what others pour into them” (p. 159). Today’s classrooms and schools lose the opportunity for these types of meaningful and transformative learning experiences whenever they are pushed aside by a mindset that compels educators to act first and foremost as authority figures, protecting children from another, and promoting individual academic achievement of a nature that can be quantifiably measured.

Dewey and others identify empowerment and self discovery as essential components for transformative learning experiences. Jerome Bruner (1966) was among the first of the educational theorists to not only criticize learning that was based on the rote memorization of facts, but to provide a conceptual framework in which meaningful learning is dependent upon some degree of self discovery within an ongoing and evolving process. He wrote that teaching a child “is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge. We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself, to consider matters as an historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process not a product” (p. 72).

Reed Larson (2000) believes that for young people participating in the process of knowledge gathering is most meaningfully structured within genuine opportunities for initiative. Larson emphasizes the need to “get adolescent fires lit,” as a means of intrinsically motivating them to become invested in their lives and their learning (p. 170). He argues that this can only be done if we focus our attention on what is relevant to young people in their present lives at this very moment, rather than the future trajectory that adults seem to endlessly make reference to when trying to convince children of the importance of a particular academic task.

Here again, I would argue that what holds true for young people extends to all levels of the power structure within public education. In the very same fashion that learning experiences in our classrooms are made most meaningful when hierarchical power structures are dismantled, similar fundamentals are required if we hope to get staff members ‘fires lit’ when we collectively examine any aspect of our professional surroundings. In either instance, one cannot afford to simply disregard whether or not individuals are genuinely invested by simply rationalizing the importance of a particular undertaking. All too common are those occasions when teachers resort to using their authority to force students to comply with learning expectations under threat of consequences. The result is usually some form of resistance. For adults within the system, any perception that authority is similarly being used subtly or explicitly to compel engagement generally produces a similar outcome.

Freire, Dewey, Bruner and Larson make a convincing case for leaders, whether they are teachers or administrators, to move closer to the world of those who they are leading in order to gain a better appreciation of that which is meaningful and intrinsically compelling. Dependant on this is a willingness to set aside pre-stated learning outcomes or a pre-designed curricular or behavioural model in order to actively engage people in tasks in ways that tap into their seemingly insatiable curiosity about the world around them. Such an approach essentially orients the system toward emancipation and empowerment in ways that promote genuine opportunities for designing and implementing initiatives at every level of the system. This may involve the need to shift away at times from a focus on accountability in relation to prescribed learning objectives or social responsibility toward a mindset that is orientated toward (un)prescribed learning ‘subjectives’ in which individuals are engaged in change that is emergent, meaningful and personal. This is as important for the superintendent of a school board as it is for a child in a Grade 5 classroom. Neither greatly benefits nor appreciates having rigid

expectations imposed on them. Both often believe that the authority above them does not fully appreciate the realities of their world. And most importantly, when the will of others is imposed on them, they are likely to experience a gradual diminishment in their own agency (and passion) to be curious about, and meaningfully engage in positively influencing, the world around them.

Consequently, an orientation that is grounded on empowerment reconceptualizes the notion of knowledge in a manner that prioritizes agency over acquisition. In terms of promoting positive behaviour and social responsibility, encouraging all community members to become invested takes precedence over enforcing compliance through authority. With respect to assessment, the emphasis is placed on process and not product so that the notion of measuring progress recognizes and embraces the fact that learning and behaviour are ever evolving, and will at times experience regression. Finally, rather than concentrating attention and energy on affecting change within one individual or subgroup, the organization fosters a collective mindset that empowers communities of adults and children to pursue with passion the curiosities that naturally arise about the world around them, including solutions to the everyday problems that are encountered. Within this mindset, adults and children collaboratively address issues related to safety and learning from a place of agency and empowerment rather than fear and authority.

### Essential embodiment in meaningful learning and inquiry

A third orientation that should help individuals and subgroups within a school community insulate themselves from unhelpful organizational dynamics directly relates to the notion of embodiment. On a number of critical levels, analysis of the data collected in the study brought about an awakening of how learning and leadership represent human behaviours that are characteristically active in nature, and not meaningfully experienced with adults or children sitting passively in classrooms or offices simply thinking, reading, and writing about ways in

which to affect change in their everyday surroundings. Instead these are activities that should represent byproducts that evolve out of passionate and embodied engagements with the various curiosities and problems that naturally arise in the everyday world. To borrow a performative notion from J.P. Taylor (2002), there comes a point when learning and leading “exceed the limitations of the page” (p. 192).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, breathing life into the various student leadership initiatives involved first coming to the realization that promoting positive behaviour and social responsibility was something that has to be done on one’s feet. This appeared to hold true for both students and adults as was evidenced by the fact that the least amount of progress came out of thinking and discussing what could be done to create a safe and caring learning environment. In stark contrast, any occasion when the adults and children were actively engaged in the process of ‘doing,’ yielded considerable change, particularly in terms of people’s perceptions about their school and its collective commitment to social responsibility.

A critical component of these types of engagements is that they seem to thrive within a context of emergence in the sense that individuals are meaningfully engaged in events that are naturally evolving in ways that present new challenges. This differs considerably from working within a framework that is focused on pre-stated learning outcomes that are presented within an artificial context. Thinking, discussing, reading, and writing all remain critical components of embodied engagement, but rather than prioritizing them as abstract skills that one needs to develop for later use in life, a more emergent and embodied approach meaningfully employs them in the here and now as part of a reflexive process that can uncover new information that will inform the next stage of the process.

Within this mindset, educators resist foregrounding academic tasks as the only important component of learning, and instead place equal or greater emphasis on holistically responding to

everyday curiosities that include addressing problems the community is facing. Both teachers and students take part in the quest to find the appropriate tools for the job, and through this process they become actively and purposefully engaged.

This approach has the capacity to develop intrinsic motivation toward certain academic tasks that are otherwise regarded by both children and adults as ‘work.’ Whenever thinking, discussing, reading, writing, calculating, etc. serve a purpose that is directly linked to an embodied engagement both adults and children seem to attach a heightened meaningfulness to it. A concrete example of this occurred with the talent show that was proposed, organized and staged by students with adult support. The capacity for young people to think and discuss various complex challenges associated with pulling off an event of this nature far outstripped any abstract discussion I had facilitated with the group during my weekly lessons with them. Math-related tasks associated with determining the optimal number and length of performances had attached to them a significance that naturally compelled student engagement in complex learning tasks. Equally significant was student self discovery of how positive behaviour and social responsibility were essential ingredients to making an initiative successful. Older students experienced this firsthand whenever they were engaging younger children in a particular task whether it was a friendship circle or rehearsals for the talent show. While observing students in these leadership roles I recognized the same facial expressions I often see worn by colleagues as they try to figure out how to respond to a particular behaviour or move an activity forward.

On many different levels embodied engagement represents an essential component of learning. As Larson (2000) points out, “conditions that make structured youth activities a fertile context for the development of initiative... also make them a rich context for the development of an array of other positive qualities, from altruism to identity. Children and adolescents come alive in these activities” (p. 178). Indeed, this notion of coming alive very much describes the



impact that student-led initiatives had on the overall atmosphere of Crestview during the final months of the project when adults and children together engaged in various emergent and embodied undertakings that appeared to have a transformative impact on everyone involved.

### Deconstructing an individualistic mindset in favour of promoting collective achievement

It is worth briefly considering how these types of engagements fit with approaches and objectives endorsed by the BC Ministry of Education's *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2008). In the second chapter, I highlighted the fact that this document placed considerable emphasis on the importance of creating a learning environment that was free of fear in order to optimize individual student achievement. That academic achievement is repeatedly defined both in this document and in the *School Act* (1996) in a manner that pertains to the individual rather than the collective raises a number of questions. Some consideration must be given to the influence of this individualistic mindset and its potential impact on the ability for schools to promote social responsibility. In many respects, the competitive environment that is fostered within the public education system through various means (most notably the ranking of students through the assignment of grades) represents a direct contrast to an environment in which the well-being and diverse interests of others are regarded as fundamental.

Complexivist discourses on teaching and learning challenge an individualistic conceptualization of achievement, arguing that it works against a natural tendency toward social self-organization in which, as Brent Davis (2004) argues, "the child (and for that matter the adult) is oriented toward structurally coupling with others" (p. 167). Davis advocates for learning environments that harness the natural capacity for individuals to come together as 'cognitive unities.' I note with particular interest that these systems are highly dependent on the levels of diversity that exist within them. In this respect, the complexivist framework provides an

epistemological justification for recognizing and embracing diversity within school settings, going significantly beyond simply creating the sense of belonging or connectedness called for in the safe, caring and orderly schools document (BC Ministry of Education, 2004, p.12).

Not surprisingly, this policy conceptualizes the threat of harm in schools entirely in terms of student-to-student interactions. In the section on school safety, much emphasis is placed on issues of bullying, harassment and intimidation. Although the policy mentions the need for students and staff to work together to prevent such incidents from occurring, the interventions suggested are exclusively reactive in nature, focusing on the responsibility of students as ‘bystanders’ to take appropriate action, and the responsibility of adults to respond effectively when informed of such occurrences. Clearly, an important step in addressing these issues involves mobilizing everyone within a school community to regard such behaviour as unacceptable, and encouraging them to respond accordingly. However, to be truly effective, I believe that a policy of this nature must also provide meaningful direction in terms of explicitly outlining proactive measures to diminish the likelihood of such incidents occurring in the first place.

One step in doing this would be to deconstruct the term ‘bullying.’ Proactive solutions require that careful consideration be given to the complex social dynamics that are typically involved in situations that are broadly classified as bullying. Young people would be the first to debunk the classic characterization of bullying as a student pinned up against a locker by a group of thugs and ‘shaken down’ for lunch money. This is not to dismiss instances in which children may face threat of physical aggression within a school setting. However, research has shown that bullying not only takes a variety of forms, most often incessant teasing or exclusion from peers, but can also be fuelled by diverse power dynamics that depend heavily on the social status of the children involved (Vaillancourt, Hymel & McDougall, 2003). The social hierarchies that exist

within all peer groups play an integral role in determining who is more likely to be picked on, and why. Given this dynamic, it is not uncommon for a student who may be bullied by one or more peers, to also engage in similar behaviour with others who are situated lower in the ‘pecking order’ (Veenstra, Lindenberg & Oldehinkel, 2005). Taking these dynamics into consideration moves the discussion significantly beyond a simplistic model in which ‘bully,’ ‘victim’ and ‘bystander’ are rigidly defined as is the case in the safe, caring and orderly schools policy. More importantly, it provides several points of engagement from which proactive approaches may be undertaken. These are highly dependent on approaches that are foundationally situated on emancipation, empowerment and embodiment.

The first of these is to recognize the invaluable resource that students themselves represent in terms of helping adults better understand factors and circumstances that may increase the potential for one or more people to use power in a variety of ways that constitutes bullying. It’s especially worth noting that in every school there typically exist students who clearly possess a certain capacity to deal more successfully than others with situations in which their own personal interests are at stake (White, 2003). In this regard, policies like *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* might want to consider the implications of Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) ‘zone of proximal development’ as it relates to children’s social and moral capacities. Recent research suggests that these tools may first be appropriated from others before becoming internalized as part of one’s emerging development (Turner & Chambers, 2006). Consequently, peers, because they are closest in terms of developmental proximity, play a critical influential role in teaching other children social behaviours both positive and negative. A proactive approach for schools might entail identifying and harnessing the skills of those children who seem particularly adept at engaging in pro-social behaviours with peers and successfully

managing situations in which other students misuse power through bullying, harassment or intimidation.

A second approach might entail somewhat of a larger paradigm shift in which the notion of fear, as it relates to these situations is put into perspective. I think it is particularly worth noting that adults, for the most part, fail to come clean about the extent to which power is misused within their own personal and professional lives. Bullying, harassment and intimidation are issues that extend well beyond the realities of a school environment (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). To acknowledge that these behaviours are commonplace in the adult world might prove immensely useful in diminishing the sense of fear and helplessness that children experience in these situations at school. Normalizing these difficulties in a manner that suggests a shared struggle may prevent children from resorting to the kind of extreme and desperate acts that have been sensationalized in the media and government policies (BC Ministry of Education, 2003; CBC News Online, 2005a).

Although *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* does make explicit reference to the important role that all members of the community play in creating a positive school environment, it does not explicitly promote a mindset that acknowledges that bullying, harassment and intimidation in various forms occur across life settings. I regard this reluctance to engage young people on this level, as a form of what Paolo Freire (1981) describes as the *paternalistic social action apparatus* that characterizes much of public education (p. 60). In essence, addressing these issues as a phenomenon exclusive to school settings represents a form of what Freire calls *domesticating reality*, which, although well-intentioned, thinly veils an inherent contradiction in order to empower adults to approach these issues from a place of authority.

Over the course of its eighteen month journey, the staff, students and administration at Crestview illustrated countless ways in which it effectively moved outside of stratified power structures in order to actualize empowered and embodied approaches to promoting positive behaviour and social responsibility. It also demonstrated ways in which authority and accountability could be employed to provide predictable and consistent responses to problem behaviour. Unfortunately, establishing a school-wide approach to this process was perceived by too many members of the staff as an attempt to impose a certain will over them in ways that threatened their professional autonomy. The tensions and resistance this triggered highlight the importance of considering how power is dynamically situated within the system. Perceptions of authority and accountability being used to substantiate or reinforce stratified power structures can greatly impact a school community's ability to come together in an effort to establish and maintain a safe and caring learning environment. However, the compelling story to emerge from Crestview's journey is the natural inclination staff, administration and students appear to have to ultimately set aside unhelpful organizational dynamics in order to foster meaningful, collaborative and transformative learning experiences that contribute immeasurably to the overall well being of a school community.

It is this enduring spirit that creates opportunities for a school community to awaken itself to the infinite possibilities that exist for overcoming any challenge it faces, whether they originate within the student population or are a byproduct of power dynamics within or between the adult subgroups that exist within the leadership structure. Promoting empowerment throughout the system requires that we emancipate ourselves from certain mindsets and structures that foster unnecessary tension and rigidity. Clearly, the opportunity exists for us to orientate ourselves otherwise so that our passions, our creativity, our diversity, and our inherent nature to care and learn from one another are where our attention and energy are concentrated.

### Areas for further investigation

From the outset, a key intention of this research endeavour was to uncover new paths of inquiry for better understanding the various dynamics that impact the way in which a school community deals with problem behaviour and promotes social responsibility. The district-sponsored behaviour pilot project at Crestview Elementary afforded a unique opportunity to explore this on a number of compelling levels. From a purely exploratory perspective, this research reveals some possibilities of what can happen when a school community is provided additional resources to examine the various approaches it takes to student behaviour. The methodological design employed in this instance represents only one of many investigative frameworks that could be utilized to explore such an undertaking. Key variables such as the researcher's location and relationship to the organization and the degree to which school personnel are made active in determining the research agenda highlight two areas in which further investigation could be reframed.

With respect to the former, there is of course the possibility to undertake efforts to determine to what extent some of the 'realities' uncovered at Crestview hold true for other elementary school settings. Doing so might involve sharing with other staffs the various themes identified through the analysis of data collected during this project in order to determine if certain trends are commonly found across school communities. This would represent a decisive step toward establishing more specific and generalizable findings that educational leaders might find useful to consider when introducing a new initiative into a school community or implementing policy that impacts the everyday lives of teachers and students. For some, substantiating research findings in this fashion is essential. For others, merely experiencing some degree of resonance with what took place at Crestview is enough to inform their approach to

educational leadership, even with the understanding that much of what took place during this particular journey is unlikely to repeat itself in other settings or under different circumstances.

Whereas a research trajectory of this nature would essentially expand the lens of inquiry beyond one school community in an effort to uncover commonalities within public education, I am of the opinion that there is much more to be uncovered by narrowing the investigative focus to ‘drill’ further down into the dynamics of power that exist within one school community. At the end of the fourth chapter, I acknowledge the fact that this inquiry concentrated much of its attention on how power was organizationally situated at Crestview and, to a lesser extent, the school district which oversees it. I would be remiss to not acknowledge that there is so much more to explore with respect to power relations at Crestview Elementary, and in some respects this research undertaking only begins to skim the surface of these dynamics. Race, gender, age, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status undoubtedly factor into these organizational complexities in ways that determine who holds power and privilege within this school community. How these forces determine who speaks with authority, and for whom, within the administrative and union power structures would represent an important lens of inquiry that is likely to considerably re-shape how emancipation, empowerment and embodiment are conceptualized in this discussion.

A prerequisite to drilling further down into these dynamics arguably involves either replacing the researcher or including a co-investigator whose locations do not carry with them the privilege and power that goes along with being a white, heterosexual male of lower middle class origins. Inevitably, doing so would immediately reset the investigative lens in ways that can only bring into focus important power dynamics that existed outside of the theoretical framework employed in this study. Such an undertaking would require a great deal of courage and an approach that would respectfully invite a staff to take a closer look at itself in ways that

are likely to reveal some unpleasant realities. Having experienced firsthand how delicate it can be to conduct an investigation into how power dynamics are organizationally situated within a school community, I can only imagine the forces of resistance that would emerge in reaction to concerted efforts to get further underneath these complexities.

Here, the opportunity also exists to employ an investigative approach that differs from the design used in this study. A more ‘purist’ application of participatory action research or narrative inquiry might strengthen de-centralizing forces within the school community in a manner that gives greater voice to those who are systemically silenced. Determining to what extent the researcher is compelled to interweave an exploration of self into the investigative framework would depend largely on where he or she is situated in relation to the social organization. I would argue that the closer the researcher is to the community, the greater the responsibility he or she has to maintain an ongoing process of self-conscious reflexivity.

I purposefully direct the final word about where we go from here toward and the members of my own school community, and I certainly include myself in this respect. The staff, administrators, parents and students who together create what Crestview Elementary is everyday, do so in a fashion that compels a seemingly endless array of curiosities. I know from my daily discussions with community members that I am not alone in my fascination about our school community. However, for reasons I have yet to fully understand, there is a tendency that exists among us to regard our own educational endeavours as something to get over and done with as soon as possible. The staff, administration and students at Crestview are not unique in this respect. I have recognized it as the norm among course participants I have taught at the graduate and undergraduate levels in the Faculty of Education at UBC over the past seven years. Despite an inclination many of us have to identify ourselves as life-long learners, and to frequently place on children an expectation that they bring passion and commitment to their learning, we



ourselves often demonstrate an aversion to it. Too often, and I again I include myself in this, we situate our discourse about continued educational endeavours within the context of “when are we going to be finished?” rather than focusing on what it is about ourselves and the world around us that compels our attention.

Although at first glance, identifying this as an area for further investigation may seem somewhat of a stretch from a focus on organizational dynamics and approaches to problem behaviour in schools. A closer look reveals a connection between this and a commitment to explore and get underneath some of the organizational complexities highlighted in this research. Cultivating within a school community a passion and commitment to learn more about itself on an ongoing basis may incline its members to become more self aware of unhelpful dynamics that we bring to certain situations. This in turn may encourage us to collectively dismantle or reconfigure certain aspects of the stratified power structures, both union and administrative, so that each exists and exerts influence in ways that only contribute to the well being and growth of a school community.

Embracing a mindset of this nature involves a willingness by teachers to re-think what it means to ‘break ranks’ with the membership. For administrators, the idea of serving as ‘an agent of the board’ would need to be situated within an understanding that doing so affords school leaders the autonomy ‘to lead’ rather than ‘to manage,’ and that this might entail cultivating collective decision-making that counters preferred positions at district and ministry levels. For both groups, orientating ourselves in this fashion would invariably bring us in closer alignment to what we teach our students in terms of becoming critical thinkers. Self-regulating the tendency among ourselves to think, speak, and act ‘with the herd’ would emancipate us from locking into the majority mindset and enable us to begin judging perspectives and opinions based first and foremost on their merit instead of where they originated. One can only hope.

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APPENDIX A – PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT

**\*School letterhead omitted for confidentiality**

## Personal Responsibility Report

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Today, at school I was unable to fully participate in learning because:

(Below, list what you were missing)

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After filling out this report, I listened and participated in the lesson to the best of my ability, even though I wasn't fully prepared because of the reason stated above. I did not disrupt or interfere with the learning of others. Once the teacher was finished giving instructions, I waited until he or she was able to help me deal with this problem.

I understand that not being personally responsible impacts my learning. Incomplete homework, not studying for tests, forgetting materials, or being disorganized will affect my grades in this subject. It may result in me receiving an "I" on my report card.

APPENDIX B – SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT

**\*School letterhead omitted for confidentiality**

## Social Responsibility Report

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Today, at school an adult respectfully asked me to discontinue behaviour that was interfering with the learning of other students in my classroom.

I was:

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I am filling out this report because even though an adult respectfully asked me to stop this behaviour, I continued to do it.

☐

After two warnings and completing this report, I returned to my desk and no longer interfered with the learning of other students in the classroom.

☐

After two warnings and completing this report, I returned to my desk and continued to interfere with the learning of other students in the classroom. Because of this I was sent to the office. (See Office referral on reverse)

## APPENDIX C – RESULTS FROM PARTICIPANT CHECK ON THEMES

1) “Within Crestview’s organizational structure, teachers possess very little power, and as such, have little ability to oppose any new initiative or idea that is being introduced at the school.”

Strongly Disagree 20%	Disagree 50%	Somewhat Disagree 20%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree 10%	Strongly Agree
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2) “Teachers at Crestview prefer to have new projects proposed to them by an individual who is already a member of their school community and knows its culture rather than someone from outside the school.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree 10%	Somewhat Agree 10%	Agree 20%	Strongly Agree 60%
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3) “While the behaviour project was at Crestview, the yellow and red card system was more effective at promoting positive behaviour than was the various student-led leadership initiatives that occurred throughout the year.”

Strongly Disagree 10%	Disagree 10%	Somewhat Disagree 20%	Neither Agree nor Disagree 40%	Somewhat Agree 20%	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4) “Any new initiative that is being introduced into Crestview must be done in a manner that enables its staff to customize it in a way that represents a best fit for its unique culture.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 20%	Agree	Strongly Agree 80%
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5) “The Crestview staff is collectively quite light-hearted, and devotes a great deal of energy to creating a fun and creative workplace, one that is fuelled by expressions of kindness, compassion, laughter and social engagement.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree 10%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 10%	Agree 50%	Strongly Agree 30%
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6) “On some occasions, certain members of Crestview’s staff and/or administration will emotionally react to a child’s problem behaviour in a manner that may make a situation worse rather than better.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree 10%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree 60%	Strongly Agree 30%
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7) “The allocation of additional resources, particularly in the form of extra staffing (even if temporary) will significantly enhance the likelihood of Crestview’s teachers supporting a new initiative or project that is being introduced into their school community.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 20%	Agree 10%	Strongly Agree 70%
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8) “Among Crestview’s teaching and administrative staff, there are no individuals who are perceived as being complacent or lax in their approach to behaviour in ways that may hinder attempts at the school to promote social responsibility.”

Strongly Disagree 30%	Disagree 50%	Somewhat Disagree 10%	Neither Agree nor Disagree 10%	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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9) At Crestview promoting student leadership has always been a priority even before the Behaviour Project came to the school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree 10%	Somewhat Disagree 10%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 60%	Agree 10%	Strongly Agree 10%
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10) “At staff meetings, all members of Crestview’s teaching staff are equal in power and influence. There are no teachers whose opinions or positions carry more weight than others.”

Strongly Disagree 20%	Disagree 20%	Somewhat Disagree 20%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 20%	Agree 20%	Strongly Agree
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11) “When tensions arise in relation to a particular behaviour situation at the school, circuitous communication patterns often emerge along with them. In these situations the individuals involved are more inclined to discuss the problem with a third party than to speak directly with the person(s) connected to the situation.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 50%	Agree 20%	Strongly Agree 30%
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12) “Any new initiative or project that is being introduced into Crestview must respect the professional autonomy of both teachers and administrators. This applies to the implementation of a response system that sets out a process for referring students to the office and outlines what happens when they are there.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree 20%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree 10%	Agree 20%	Strongly Agree 50%
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13) “The success of a new initiative or project at Crestview is highly dependant on the extent to which the members of the school community feel a sense of ownership toward it.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree 20%	Strongly Agree 80%
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14) “Establishing authority and accountability at all levels of the leadership hierarchy in public education (*Ministry of Education, School District Executive, school-based admin, teacher, student*) is essential to student’s social-emotional well-being and safety.”

Strongly Disagree 10%	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree 20%	Somewhat Agree	Agree 40%	Strongly Agree 30%
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## APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher made clear to the interviewee that all answers would be reported in a manner that ensured the anonymity of the source.

All interviews were conducted in an informal manner using the following questions as starting points to open up a discussion about: i) Crestview in general, ii) How staff and administration deal with behaviour and promote social responsibility at the school, and iii) What, if anything, was significant about the pilot project.

1. How long have you been a teacher? How many years have you taught at Crestview? How would you describe this school?
2. What are your thoughts about how student behaviour was handled by adults at Crestview before the pilot project came to the school?
3. When the behaviour pilot project was introduced at Crestview was there anything about the approach taken that in your opinion enhanced or diminished the staff's receptivity to it?
4. Over the course of the eighteen months that the project was at Crestview, is there anything that stands out in your mind that occurred at the school, either negative or positive, as a result of the project?
5. Overall, would you say that the project has been a positive or negative experience for Crestview, and why?
6. What are your thoughts on the yellow and red card system and what occurred when it was introduced at the school?
7. Has anything changed at Crestview as a result of the project?
8. What advice would you give to the District about introducing a project like this into a school?
9. Do you think organizational dynamics within or between the staff and administration at Crestview in any way influences how behaviour is dealt with at the school? If so, how?
10. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you feel is important to point out?

## APPENDIX E – UBC RESEARCH ETHICS CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

### CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b>	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b>
George Belliveau	UBC/Education/Language and Literacy Education	H08-02721

**INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:**

Institution	Site
N/A	N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: f	

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):**

N/A

**SPONSORING AGENCIES:**

N/A

**PROJECT TITLE:**

Exploring factors that influence teacher support for new initiatives that are aimed at effecting systemic change within their school: A study of one school community's journey to promote positive behaviour.

**CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:** December 8, 2009

**DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:**

**DATE APPROVED:**

December 8, 2008

Document Name	Version	Date
<b><u>Consent Forms:</u></b>		
Informed Consent	N/A	November 25, 2008
<b><u>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</u></b>		
Interview Questions	N/A	November 25, 2008
<b><u>Letter of Initial Contact:</u></b>		
Initial Contact	N/A	November 25, 2025
<b><u>Other Documents:</u></b>		
Agency Approval Form - Not yet signed	N/A	November 25, 2008

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the **Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
and signed electronically by one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair  
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair  
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair  
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair  
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair  
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair