The Critical Place of Community Development in School Transformation:
The Story of the Vaughn Family Center and Pacoima Urban Village

By Matt Oppenheim

In an effort to support children, many urban schools are beginning to address the social barriers to education, attempting to resolve issues that affect the family (Dryfoos, 1994; Jehl & Kirst, 1993; Smrekar, 1993). These include problems of health, lack of employment and family support services, and community safety (Dryfoos, 1994; Koppich & Kirst, 1993). Many believe that as these problems abate, children are better prepared to succeed in school. For that purpose hundreds of school-based parent and family centers are sprouting at school sites in urban areas. In converted classrooms, these centers have become supportive environments and "one stop shops," where parents receive an array of services, from counseling to healthcare; parenting classes to free food, and are drawn into participation. From these centers parents may become involved as classroom assistants, playground monitors, and they sometimes participate on school governance committees. Often, parents are hired as paraprofessionals and help advocate for other parents.

Matt Oppenheim is a service learning coordinator with the Volunteer Center of the Los Angeles Unified School District and an associate with the Prout Research Institute, Los Angeles, California.

In working with the school community, two approaches have emerged as ways of addressing the social barriers to education. One emphasizes a service provision approach (Dryfoos, 1994; Koppich & Kirst, 1993), in which community deficits are identified, and families are treated as clients and consumers of service. A second approach supports a community development process, in which the community is understood to have inherent strengths and capacities. In this approach residents become the primary agents of community change, as their expertise is acknowledged and they emerge as leaders in directing the future of their communities (Chang, 1993; Chaskin & Richman, 1993; Keith, 1996).

While publications proliferate in support of each approach, there is a lack of empirical research supporting either model and the debate remains largely theoretical. Some argue that the community development approach offers a sustainable future for communities and their schools, whereas the service provision model continues a cycle of dependency (Keith, 1996). Thus another critical social barrier to success occurs when schools fail to support community strengths, capacities, and indigenous leadership. In this regard, there is a growing acknowledgment that sustainable communities must be grounded in a process that is immersed within and emerges from the community itself (Batten, 1967; Goodenough, 1963; van Willigen, 1993: 91). Family centers as community development projects represent an emergent professional development setting, demanding the same critical attention that teacher professional development and school transformation now receive. In the process of understanding this emergent developmental setting, the voices of parents and community residents must take center stage.

This article tells the story of transformation of the well known Vaughn Family Center (Chang, 1993: 216; Dryfoos, 1994: 159), which is affiliated with a charter school; the Vaughn Next Center Learning Center. As parents became empowered, tensions arose with the School Principal. Many of the parents departed from the School and formed their own nonprofit organization, the Pacoima Urban Village, which has now blossomed into a vital and resilient movement for community transformation and self-reliance.

The story of transformation in the Vaughn Family Center and Pacoima Urban Village (These two projects will often be referred to jointly as the Center) is derived from formal ethnographic research undertaken between February and October of 1996, and subsequent informal ethnographic observations, as the author became involved with the Pacoima Urban Village as a program coordinator. The paper begins with a discussion of the argument for community development, followed by the theoretical framework and ethnographic methodology. The development of the Vaughn Family Center and the emergence of the Pacoima Urban Village are narrated. The themes of community development that were discovered through ethnographic research are then presented and analyzed in terms of learning organization dynamics. Finally, recommendations for collaboration between schools and their communities are offered.

The Community Development Argument

Keith (1996) presents a persuasive argument for a shift in attention from service provision to community development in school restructuring. She believes that while many existing schools are forging partnerships with parents and community organizations, the reasons for this may be highly biased: "The prevailing orientation belongs to a traditional social welfare approach; although recognizing the wider ramifications of social problems, this approach emphasizes service provision to the poor and 'disabled' and ultimately constructs service recipients as the problem" (1996: 240). Parents and community members are said to be cast in the perpetual role of service recipients and are the "objects of change rather than change agents" (1996: 241).

Community development seeks to restore the place of democratic agency. Keith (1996: 244) challenges schools to take up the cause of community development in their efforts at reform:

> Educators must take the lead in insisting that ways be found to build genuine community participation and community development practices into community schools. They must bring to the surface the philosophical and practical implications of the culture of consumerism for community schools, and oppose to this the more appropriate philosophy of democratic participation.

The Vaughn Family Center and Pacoima Urban Village together offer a significant contribution to the issues of community development in school-based family centers for three reasons. First, they present a successful example of community development. Parents and community members who once sought services were employed there and directed many of their programs. They were the primary agents in a process of transformation. They learned to recognize and build upon the talents and expertise of residents in their community, to nurture and support initiative and innovation, and to help people set and achieve goals for their future.

Second, the Center has been successful in lessening the social barriers to education. Since its beginning, both school attendance and academic assessments have risen. In a 1994 survey (Family Care Healthy Kids Collaborative, 1994), teachers, school administrators, agency staff, parents, and community participants involved at the School said that the Center had significantly affected student performance, how families were treated by School staff, how problems were solved, and the ways teachers interacted with children.

Third, family centers engaged in community development are also in the process of becoming a "learning organization" (Senge, 1992). School reformers look to notions of learning organization or the way that staff in schools work together: collaborating, setting goals, creating guiding values and discourses about learning in creating a school climate that is receptive to the community (Fullan, 1995; O'Neill, 1995; Starrat, 1995). Advocates of school reform assert that

Increased attention to and partnership with the community, and pedagogy that is participatory and attuned to community ways of learning, enhances the chances for student success. The family center as a community development project is an ideal context for schools and their communities to build a common learning community together, yet no research to date has focused on the family center as a learning organization. In this particular case study, conflicts between the School and the Center were not resolved, and for the community development process to continue, many parents left the Center to form their own non-profit organization. Thus educators are presented with a critical scenario with which to contemplate, debate and hopefully dialogue with their communities.

In the early stages of this study parents and staff expressed their concern that many program evaluators gathered statistics but never wrote about people's experiences or portrayed their points of view. They believed that the significance of their project could be best understood in the detailed experiences and expressions of individuals, not in statistical generalizations. My task as anthropologist was to look for a way to describe and organize their philosophy. Hence I listened to the words people used and watched the people who worked at the Vaughn Family Center and the emerging Pacoima Urban Village in order to find themes that represented their underlying philosophy. The themes that emerged reflected the language used by the staff at the Center and included "sharing our dreams"; "we are the experts"; "telling our story"; "we are here for the children"; "how do you walk a mile in our shoes?"; "I am a cheerleader, a mentor, and a coach"; "to get together and think"; and "helping others to fly."

Theoretical Framework

In order to study school-based community development, Keith's argument guides us in two ways. First, we are directed to study the role of agency; in other words, understanding the way people act to create meaningful change. Second, we are directed to understanding the role of community development in school restructuring.

Keith defines agency as "people taking an active role in defining and constructing their world" (1996: 255). The role of agency is critical to participatory democracy, which "counsels approaches that make the most of local strengths and capacities for renewal and that build on concepts of citizenship that stress the development of agency" (1996: 254).

Vygotsky (1978) helps us address the role of agency in community development. Those researching community development often look to Vygotsky in focusing on behavior that is modeled by successful learners. Vygotsky formulates the concept of the "zone of proximal development" in understanding a developmental state in which learners move from their current developmental level, to their potential level of development through the influence of guidance or collaboration (1978: 86). Del Rio and Alvarez (1995) discuss the importance of the zone of

proximal development to agency or voluntary action, when people are conscious about their actions and are involved in constructing their social environments.

In this study the concept of the zone of proximal development is applied in examining the role of agency in the Center. Here, the author looks to the voices and behavior of parents and community residents who had become paraprofessional staff. When these people modeled their beliefs and behavior to others, they were using agency, or conscious action, to create an environment in which new volunteers and participants had the potential to become effective agents as well.

The second directive by Keith is to consider the role of community development in school restructuring. Senge's (1992) concept of the learning organization is applied by school reformers and is also a theoretical framework with which to study a community development process. He presents a core philosophy comprised of four components that organizations can use to create a dynamic, creative, and collective learning environment. These four concepts include "personal mastery," "shared vision," "team learning," and "mental models."

Personal mastery focuses on the ability of people to use their existing knowledge base and goals for personal development. Having shared vision creates a purpose to unite a group of people and a lofty goal that inspires people to work together. Team learning identifies the ways that people collaborate, work, dialogue and make decisions together. Senge defines mental models as the framework within which people see and act in the world around them.

Learning organization dynamics were applied in two ways in this study. First the concepts of personal mastery, collective vision, mental models and team learning were used in writing interview questions. The second way learning organization dynamics were used is in the analysis of themes that arose from fieldwork. Senge's dynamics were used in understanding how the themes from the research relate with the concept of learning community. Treating this setting as a learning community, we can then begin the work of weaving community development into a school restructuring process, as Keith suggests.

Methodology

The research process involved two phases. First, in February 1996, a broad range of activities at the Center were observed and recorded. Informal interviews were conducted and more was learned about the School and neighborhood by visiting teachers and walking about the neighborhood. Documents on the Center were also reviewed to understand its history.

In mid-June, the second phase of the study began with a formal interview and observation schedule that would continue throughout the summer and into the fall. Most of the interviews were with "paraprofessional" staff members who were parents and community residents. Other interviews were held with "outsider professional" staff who lived outside the community, such as the Center director

and the social worker. People from the School, partner agencies, and children of paraprofessionals were also interviewed to get a variety of perspectives. A good deal of time was spent observing meetings, adult education classes, and other activities.

Interview questions were developed from learning organization theory, and earlier fieldwork. Interviews began by leading participants through a brief life history, which included questions about the history of Pacoima and the development of the Center. Specific questions were asked about their experiences in the Center, focusing on the learning organization dynamics. The data were then coded into manageable categories, from which the eight themes emerged. Parents and paraprofessionals wanted the stories told in their own words and choose to waive anonymity. To respect their wishes their names are retained when presenting these themes, and the titles of the themes are taken from their own words.

History and Background

After decades of rapid industrialization, Pacoima suffered from extensive urban blight. Residential areas were rezoned commercial, and a remote Los Angeles City Council left streets in disrepair and city regulations unenforced. After an early wave of Latin immigrants in the 1920s to 1940s, Pacoima became predominantly African American from the 1950s to the 1970s. As African Americans became upwardly mobile, Latinos again grew in prominence, becoming 85 percent of the population in the 1990s. Resources for education and public resources dwindled and academic achievement scores at the Vaughn School were amongst the worst in Los Angeles County. Pacoima also had one of the county's worst high school dropout rates. At the same time, residents had strong social networks and helped each other navigate a de-humanizing social welfare system. They supported one another, shared resources and life experiences, and continued to have a positive impact on their neighborhoods and communities.

Parents at Vaughn Elementary School had been participating in a parents club for several years, but were frustrated when neither an African American, nor a Latino principal were able to ease racial tensions or improve the school climate. They told the school superintendent that they wanted a "neutral" principal, and a Chinese principal was hired in 1991. Parents increased their involvement, helping to build school walls, erasing graffiti, and painting murals. As parent interest grew, they were given a small room, previously the nurses office, as a parent center. In this center, they began talking about their needs and special problems and began initiating more projects on the School grounds.

In 1992 the School caught the eye of Connie Dubin from Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP), and Dorothy Fleischer, a social worker with United Way. Dubin and Fleischer were inspired by Gardner's concepts of "integrated services" (1993) in developing a project to bring comprehensive social services to a school site. They began facilitating meetings at the School, listening to what
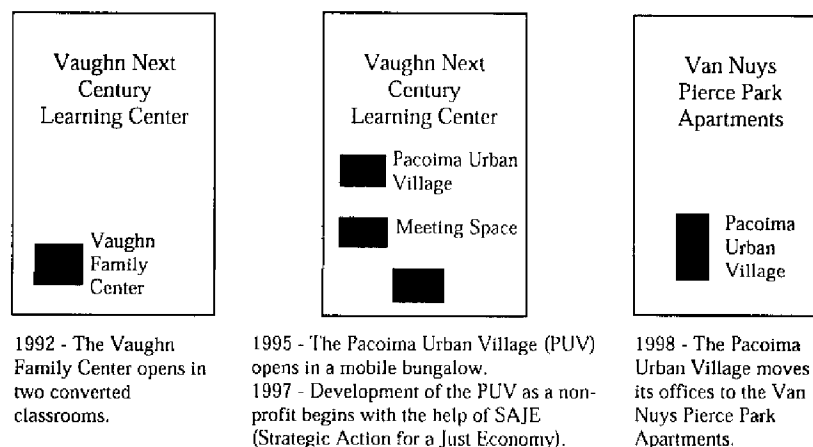
parents had to say. Parents pointed out the tremendous needs in their community—many houses lacked enough baths and children often went without food, adequate clothing, or medical care. At the same time, parents believed that they had the capacity to help themselves and wanted meaningful support and partnership rather than handouts. When the question arose about hiring family advocates, who would help counsel and advocate for parents, the activist parents were adamant that they should be hired for these positions. They were confident that they knew their community better than outsider professionals.

Late in 1992 a director was hired, and the Vaughn Family Center opened in two converted classrooms (see Figure 1 for a graphic history of the Vaughn Family Center and emergence of the Pacoima Urban Village). The new director soon created an atmosphere where parents felt safe and supported. She began to nurture their development by encouraging their initiative and providing education programs at the same time that she attracted agency providers to come to the Center.

After a few months, parents were officially hired as family advocates. At the same time a case management system was put in place, where at-risk students were referred to a social worker who worked with a team of teachers, family advocates, and school personnel in providing extensive support for children and their families. Many partner agencies came to the site to offer health screenings and referrals, counseling, cultural and tutoring programs and a wide array of classes for parents.

The Center became a hub of community involvement, collaboration, and school-related services. Parents and community residents felt at home and increasingly came to volunteer. In the back of the Center was a circular table, where women

Figure 1
The Vaughn Family Center and Emergence of the Pacoima Urban Village

Vaughn Next Century Learning Center ■ Vaughn Family Center	Vaughn Next Century Learning Center ■ Pacoima Urban Village ■ Meeting Space ■	Van Nuys Pierce Park Apartments ■ Pacoima Urban Village
1992 - The Vaughn Family Center opens in two converted classrooms.	1995 - The Pacoima Urban Village (PUV) opens in a mobile bungalow. 1997 - Development of the PUV as a nonprofit begins with the help of SAJE (Strategic Action for a Just Economy).	1998 - The Pacoima Urban Village moves its offices to the Van Nuys Pierce Park Apartments.

would share food, make crafts, develop fundraising projects and talk about their lives. The Center was a place for family support and personal transformation, where dreams came true. It was a place where residents and parents who once came in need of help for their children, family counseling, a job or just friendship emerged as decision-makers, program managers, and role models.

Parents began to realize that economic empowerment was a key to lasting change. When owned by people who lived outside the community, businesses continued to offer low quality jobs, and eventually moved to Mexico for cheaper labor, community residents felt vulnerable and victimized, and could not support their children. They began to plan for the "Pacoima Urban Village," a vision for economic self-reliance introduced by organizational psychologist, Key Inaba. In 1994, offices for the Pacoima Urban Village were established in one of the bungalows that were placed at the School after the Northridge earthquake. Soon programs were started for job development and neighborhood beautification. Family advocates who had supported and counseled families at the school were developing jobs, helping ex-gang members, and working on neighborhood beau-tification projects. In the first year of "Job Connections" over one hundred and thirty people obtained jobs. Several outside partners were attracted to join with the Pacoima Urban Village. In 1996 a partnership began with a collaborative of funders: the Los Angeles Urban Funders (LAUF).

By early 1997, the School had ascended from the position as one of the worst elementary schools in Pacoima in standardized test scores and attendance to the best school in reading scores. It also had one of the highest attendance records in the state (Chan, 1997: 3). As early as 1994, many people, including teachers, administrators, parents and agency staff linked the School's emerging success to the way that the Center served parents and children in the School (Family Care Healthy Kids, 1994).

At the same time that the Vaughn Center and other Pacoima Urban Village began thriving in its process of transformation, there was growing friction with the School Principal. Many expressed that the principal's management style was more "directed" than process-oriented, and many parents began to feel that when parents really began to have voice in school decision-making, she would often override their decisions and talk to them demeaningly. While she was improving school facilities, attracting large grants for school improvement, and gaining national attention, parents wondered why she couldn't recognize the critical importance for them to have their own "sanctuary" and stake in decision-making? A committee formed of parents and teachers helped resolve some issues, but this committee stopped meeting when critical agreements were not made.

In late 1996, the Center director left her position, preferring to work on community issues on a national and international level, rather than in the Pacoima community.

While the principal was withdrawing her support for the Family Center and the Center director left, several funding sources were drying up. Funding cycles were

ending, and some of the funders were more interested in collaboration amongst agencies than supporting grass roots development. But with these changes an amazing thing happened. Without any funding to support their positions, parents and community residents continued to run the Center voluntarily. In fact, without a director or any pressures from outsiders, the Center became more truly democratic. Those who had worked as family advocates formed a team to run activities. An outside organization, Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), volunteered to help the organizational development of the Pacoima Urban Village. They decided on a cooperative model, with residents forming the "Assembly," its board of directors. Various teams would lead programs that would focus on health, education, economic development, and childcare.

In October 1997, the Pacoima Urban Village (PUV) was formed as a non-profit organization by many of the parents who had worked at the Vaughn Family Center. They were invited to move to offices at the Van Nuys Pierce Park Apartments, a low-income housing project with a sympathetic manager. The management of the housing project refurbished a two-bedroom apartment to be used as offices. Members of the PUV went through a process of defining their goals and objectives and wrote their own vision statement:

> We are a community of activists working for the benefit of the people of this community: children, teenagers, and adults of all races, religions, and cultures. Without boundaries, our goal is to expand to surrounding communities, working with those who share our goals and ideals. We are a place where people find support, programs, services, help and guidance; a place where we celebrate, create and develop our potential together to achieve our chosen future.

In each of the projects of the Pacoima Urban Village, community residents took the lead, facilitating meetings, inviting collaborators, and taking initiative. The Dental School at the University of California, Los Angeles, began collaborating to develop a cooperative dental clinic, where residents comprise the board of directors. There is also a childcare cooperative formed to open a childcare center and train women to be licensed childcare workers. Job outreach continues and there is a cultural collaborative forming. There is also a youth leadership program to develop jobs and meaningful involvement that gives young adults a way to shape their future.

In the Pacoima Urban Village, community residents have taken center stage in directing their own nonprofit organization. The undercurrent of community development is vibrant and evolving. Open dialogue and collective decision-making is apparent at all meetings. People transform into leaders, taking initiative and directing programs in a way that is impossible in the service provision approach.

The themes of this research are being put into to practice in the work of the "Village Academy," a project of the Pacoima Urban Village where community development is applied to community education. Curriculum is being developed by

residents who use their talents to help others along a lifelong path of advancement. Two local teachers are developing and implementing a curriculum for Spanish literacy, math and computer training, where residents learn literacy while building on their existing talents. There are citizenship, ESL, and GED classes for adults to obtain their high school diplomas. Youth programs include: drama, sports, leadership, and tutoring programs. The cultural collaborative sponsors community festivals, poetry evenings, music classes, and has a resident mariachi band.

Jorge Lara, one of the earliest family advocates form the Vaughn Family Center, is now the executive director of the Pacoima Urban Village. He grew up in Jalisco, Mexico, selling candy and newspapers on the streets, and was an activist for school reform at an early age, challenging the authority of a corrupt high school principal. He mentors other residents to take initiative, to stand up for their rights, and to form cooperatives for self-reliance. He works directly with funders and university faculty, and is a strong voice in community, state, and national collaboratives. Lara believes that the Pacoima Urban Village has a strong role to play in making schools and other organizations accountable to the community. He wants to place the voice of parents and community residents at center stage, rather than on the periphery.

Community Development Themes

The following are the themes that arose from ethnographic research. The goal was to listen carefully to what paraprofessionals had to say and watch the ways they interacted to come up with consistent behavior that was modeled persistently to others. These themes express a philosophy of community development, and a vital learning culture. The phrases from interviews, meetings and presentations were used in framing concepts and titles for these themes. After a brief review these themes are analyzed within the framework of learning organization dynamics.

Sharing Our Dreams

Dreaming of the future occurred in meetings, discussions with staff, and public presentations. It also occurred when people entered the Center in need of service, or began to volunteer. In the development of the Center, collective dreams first arose in planning sessions, then were realized as individuals were nurtured into participation.

On December 14th, 1991, the first collective dream was facilitated in a planning meeting:

> Our dream is that all children of the neighborhood will grow up as healthy, curious, confident, skilled, knowledgeable people. The Vaughn Family Center will be a caring place where all family members can give and get help to become strong. The Vaughn Family Center will be a catalyst for creating high quality preschool and school environments and a safe neighborhood. (Draft of Vision Statement 1.9.92)

By dreaming together, people had communion. A sense of common purpose

was nurtured and values reaffirmed, and people just entering the program felt a sense of inclusion and support. As one participant noted:

> I enjoy these dreams and these visions. I can see them coming into reality. That's a good feeling and that's enough that'll drive me for a month. Another thing that's so great about it; ideas that pop into our heads are thoroughly discussed amongst all of us. It seems we look at things in a positive way and how we can do good and help a family and help an individual.

At one point, the staff was led in a visioning session, where they imagined and then drew their ideal future with crayons. Generally, people in the field of futures studies believe that those who are not involved in shaping the future of their communities talk more about a generalized global future or details of a personal future, but remain inarticulate about their own neighborhoods and communities. In this session, staff vividly portrayed the future of their community. Several people portrayed their community with a university and arts complex, dance halls, and a sports facility in which Aztec architecture was featured. Recycling cooperatives locally owned businesses, a Pacoima credit union, barter systems, skating rinks, and schools that were integrated into the community were also drawn. A few expressed that schools would be owned and directed by the community. Others portrayed adobe housing, buildings that blended with nature, and a plaza in Spanish Baroque style surrounded by businesses. People talked about local medical clinics and law-offices, community decision-making processes and community-based policing.

We Are the Experts

There was a shift from dependency on outside expertise and resources to the recognition of skills and resources inside the community. Staff believed that they had the knowledge, insight, and ability to serve the community appropriately. They wanted to be recognized as leaders and as equals in decision making. Elsa Rojas, a family advocate, remarked as much at a public presentation:

> We don't want charity. We're gonna be part of the process and we're going to become very active in terms of how we can do those things. I didn't speak good English, but we fought, and we said: "We want to be the advocates; we want to become the ones that work directly with other people and we want to make sure that that happens," so we debated back and forth.

Parents at the Center also knew that working within a deficit model, where services were provided by outsiders to people in need, perpetuated a system of dependency that they wanted no part of. They wanted support from outside partners, but wanted to achieve their own success. As Jorge Lara explained:

> It doesn't matter how much you spend on our children, it's not gonna make any difference. The only way you're gonna make a difference is by us getting involved, and finding out what is needed and then for you to provide it. So we want to become experts in how we get those resources here. So they said, "Yeah, its no problem,"

because we knew. We even did the assessment in the community. We know what we need to be successful.

Staff referred to three types of expertise. First was the expertise that developed through years of experience living and advocating for people in the community. There was a unique relationship with residents in the community that was hard to gain by outside professionals. Even before coming to the Center, people engaged in advocacy. Lara would come to the welfare office with his relatives to help them struggle through the system as he had. Because of his special empathy, he was trusted in the community and people in need came to him, where they might not come to an outside professional. Eva Barajas, in charge of food and clothing distribution, elaborated on the importance of this type of knowledge:

> In other schools, I think that could be one place were the parents could go, but there are not the persons to give them the welcome! Here the majority of people are from the community, thus they know the necessities and know how the community feels. I think that is the special thing that we have.

A second type of expertise identified by staff members was the skills that people brought with them from Mexico and Central America (which remain unrecognized and uncertified in the United States). While many immigrants in the neighborhood near the school were dentists, lawyers, teachers, technicians, or crafts people; in the eyes of the system, i.e., the school system, medical system, government and social welfare system, they remain uneducated and unemployed. The Center was able to recognize and use these skills. One woman who had been a teacher in Mexico worked with special education children. Another woman who was a qualified lawyer in Mexico gave people free legal advice.

Finally, as staff developed and implemented programs, they developed new expertise in helping their community. They learned to evaluate and reflect on problems and accomplishments, and to evolve their own process for managing programs. They found the way to attune their projects to important values that they held sacred. As Lara explained:

> We see it happening so we discover all those expertise and I mean like for example, what we did in the Pacoima Urban Village. I mean who's gonna say that we're gonna discover that interview process in our own way, you know and particularly every time that we have, it relates, it resonates to your life.

Telling Our Story

When new people first came to the Center, during public presentations and during staff meetings, people shared the stories of their lives and the development of the Center. They talked about their early life experiences, their immigration to the United States and Pacoima, and the story of their involvement. They talked about coming in need of services, how they were supported and drawn into participation, and how they became leaders and initiators of projects.

New volunteers were often pushed to talk about their experiences in meetings and presentations. At a conference attended by partners and funders, Alex Cuevas, a job developer and recent gang member, began the program by telling his story of life as a gang member. Afterwards, Rojas stood up to tell her story once again, but cried first because she was touched by Cueva's story. Through stories people renewed their sense of identities to others and made explicit the qualities that they wanted others to model.

The importance of "telling our story" came to the forefront of discussions during a meeting when they had to decide whether to hold their December public presentation or not. After lengthy discussion, Rojas summarized the value of story-telling:

> When I do presentations it recharges me and gives me strength. I see myself five years ago and I see myself in the present. I see I am a parent, community leader; as a liaison with the school, and with other schools, and as a role model. For new people, it's important to see how we started.

I am a Cheerleader, a Mentor, and a Coach

I heard the phrase "I am a cheerleader, a mentor, and a coach" repeated several times by people at the Center. As a cheerleader, people talked about how Center staff inspired and uplifted others. In Center presentations, after people would get up to speak for the first time, or speak in Spanish (in the case of non-Spanish speakers), or English (the case of native Spanish speakers) for the first time, people would cheer and applaud, and often come up later to hug them.

As mentors, paraprofessional staff were important role models. Barajas noted that leaders were those who took responsibility, applied their skills, learned from others, and were always ready to help.

Leaders were also mentors in that they pushed people into involvement. In presentations to the public, new volunteers and staff were literally pushed to step forward and talk about their lives. They were also pushed into facilitating meetings and encouraged to speak their minds. Lara maintained that leaders encouraged people to do what they were afraid of, by assuring them that they were capable.

To Get Together and Think

> That's one of things that the Center has, how do you say, encourages people, I guess to be a thinker, to cooperate. The way that everything is set up—meetings, meetings, meetings. And it's interesting because it's one of places that I said: "Man this place is all about meetings, meetings and meetings. But I mean you look at the effect of those meetings and you realize how important it is for people to get together and think. (Eddie Palofax)

Meetings were the most pervasive way that people came together to dialogue, share experiences, make decisions, and take initiative. Barajas emphasized the importance of meetings in her interview: "And you can see we all sit in the table and

I think that's very important, because if you communicate and you talk things over then I thinks it's very healthy."

Meetings were often held in busy work areas or even the child care area, with children playing nearby. There were few complaints about limited space or hectic activities around meetings. This seemed to be part of an all-inclusive, open process of the "democracy" of the Center. The open atmosphere of communication drew new people into participation. As Dawn Weisz said: "They kind of soak it up by being here. They hear everything; we don't really have private meetings." Elba Alvarez agreed:

> The purpose of our meetings is to be connected so that we share information. Even though we're on the same side sometimes, we just don't have the time to connect with one another and give feedback of the different changes that is going on in the Center and in the Pacoima Urban Village. So that is one of the reasons why we have these meetings. Another is that this makes it a unique way of doing our work. I don't think it's done anywhere else, where we sit down, have a meeting, and have lunch. We have sort of like [have] a potluck and everybody is welcome to share food, so we sort of eat and exchange information.

People coming to the Center were encouraged to join in and later to initiate projects themselves. This process of open dialogue was the means by which people took responsibilities and shared equal voice: "Before I would come and do my work, my ideas were my ideas, and I wouldn't share them with [others]," explained Eddie Palofax:

> Now it is different. It's changed me totally, to be involved in something that works together with people, and do it from scratch and get it together and work as a group. That's one of the things that I've learned a lot from here. Everything that we did involved meetings. You know if you wanted to do an event you would have to have meetings, and plan it, and just that fact helped it to be more of a thinking effort. We did several fundraising activities and we had meetings, and we had several people to work together, so it was a whole team; like meetings, meetings and meetings.

How Do You Walk a Mile in Our Shoes?

Staff challenged potential partners to empathize with their experiences. At a meeting with a group of funders, Lupe Perez, a parent who had been with the Center since its inception, issued a challenge. She stated that to be a partner you have to understand the problems and struggles people face. She asked them, "How do you walk a mile in my shoes?"

Developing a partnership involved a clear process. First, potential partners learned about the experiences of staff. A dialogue then began about true partnership. Partners were challenged and tested to see if they could be trusted. Staff talked about how they challenged United Way and LAEP workers to support parents and community residents in taking leadership roles. As Lara stated: "From the very beginning we said that we don't want anything planned by all the outsiders. We said

from the very beginning, if you want a partnership it has to be equal."

True partnership began when partners showed commitment, appreciated Center values and worked as equals with staff. If they did not show this commitment, friction often ensued. In many cases, true partnership did not develop. Sometimes when potential partners made presentations at meetings, the staff sensed that they were not really there to support them and turned down their offers to participate. In other cases, partners went through the initial dialogue and challenge successfully, but when the work started showed an unwillingness to work in an interdependent relationship.

We Are Here for the Children

A major intention was for the lives of children to improve through services to and involvement from their families. Caring for children was one of the prime moral forces behind the philosophy of the Center. One staff meeting became a celebration of the new babies in the community. Six infants were passed around and ogled at. The director grabbed a moment of silence: "We make a commitment to the future of these children, they are the future leaders of the community."

When staff reflected upon their experiences, the well being of children was foremost in their minds. They continually perceived success in terms of the benefits they brought to children. As Lara remarked,

> I feel rich in terms of knowledge in terms of accomplishments and then most of all, what made me happier than anything was to see those children happy. They might not be achieving yet, but they will achieve.

Children would often attend meetings with their parents. They would sit by their sides, or sit by themselves, or play by themselves or with friends under the tables. Children would be introduced and then asked for their opinions so that they could take part in decision-making. Children became empowered through their involvement. They modeled their parents' behavior, and also participated in meetings and activities. Baraja's teenage daughter, Veronica, volunteered at the reception desk, helped with food and clothing distribution, and tutored younger children. Below I select a few passages from her interview:

> MATT: And what do you think about your mother working here?

> VERONICA: It's good helping people out. That's why I come and help her out sometimes. Sometimes I just come to keep her company, but I could help. I think it's nice, helping other people, helping out the community.

> MATT: Do you see yourself helping in the community?

> VERONICA: Yeah I do, like I guess that's why I want to be a teacher, you know to help out people, and that's what I like. I like helping other people out.

> MATT: What do you think about the future of the community?

VERONICA: Well, I'm not sure about it, but they've been doing a lot of things to help the community. They try to help people understand that we need more businesses here that we have to go out of our way sometimes to Panorama [City] just to go shopping in a real mall. Or we don't have a Sears nearby, and that's what they're trying to do, bring companies here. But it's real hard, cause we have such a bad reputation.

MATT: So you think it can change?

VICTORIA: I think it can and that way it can happen.

MATT: So have you worked with kids in the school at all?

VICTORIA: Yeah, last time I was on vacation. I would help with the teacher, or a long time ago I would help my mom out to take care of the kids when they had meetings or something. I could do everything, cause I just volunteer practically everywhere, cause I just volunteer almost anywhere when I have spare time.

Helping Others To Fly

In public presentations, Center meetings, and interviews, staff talked about their process of transformation. This theme integrated all the other themes into a meaningful whole. Transformation involved dreaming about the future, acknowledging and developing expertise and inner wisdom, becoming a "cheerleader, mentor, and coach" to others, standing up for the children, being able to partner and collaborate with others, developing an identity based on shared experience, and being able to dialogue and make decisions with others. The Center director discussed transformation as a process self-discovery and self-awakening:

> What I see happening is the development of self-awareness, discovering their own voice, the coming into their own sense of power. What happens with that first awakening, in my experience, that first awakening engenders a lot of anger. The veil is being lifted; they're realizing that they've been given the short end of the stick all these years. The next step is what do you do with that? How do you help the parents come to the point that they continue to retain that passion and integrity about their own feelings, but at the same time transform these feelings into something constructive?

When telling their story of transformation, staff first discussed the period of their involvement in which they were supported and nurtured. Victoria Alvarez said that when she came to the Center she had severe asthma. Her asthma nearly vanished, according to her account, because of the open, supportive environment. As the staff grew in their sense of self-confidence, commitment and responsibility, they continued to take on greater challenges. Rojas became a trainer for Al-Anon and organized her own classes. She was also on the board of directors at The Northeast Valley Health Corporation and was a parent organizer at San Fernando High School. Lara was first a family advocate, then became the coordinator for the job outreach program; now he is the executive director of the Pacoima Urban Village.

Family advocate Francis Johnson spoke of her transformation in terms of the identity she developed from increased responsibility and involvement:

> I'm a community liaison. I'm also a grandmother here at the school. I'm on the beautification committee and the facilities committee [a school governance committee]. I'm a tutor. I also work in the playground at lunchtime and break time, and I help out at the Center whenever I'm needed. One of my jobs is to bridge the gap between the African Americans and the Spanish-speaking people. So I get out into the community and let them know the different services that's going on at the family Center and that they can always come anytime from seven-thirty until five, and sometimes we're there until seven p.m.

By their awareness of their own transformation they reaffirmed their conviction to the purpose of the Center. Here was Lara reflecting on his journey:

> A very beautiful journey, I would say. Myself, I grow so much in the last five years that I could never grow in my whole life. I think of those five years and I feel so happy with myself, proud of myself. I feel rich in terms of knowledge and in terms of accomplishments and then most of all, what made me happier than anything, was to see those children happy. They might not be achieving yet, but they will achieve.

How These Themes Relate with Learning Organization

Learning organization is about the art and practice of collective learning (Senge, 1992). It helps people understand how to tap their individual capacities, and desire to achieve goals within a collective context. It also identifies collective approaches to achieve organizational or community goals. Here individual potential is expanded within a context of team learning and collaboration, so that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Senge identifies four interdependent dynamics within his concept of learning organization: personal mastery, team learning, mental models, and shared vision.

Why is it important to understand these themes in terms of these dynamics? For people to be effective agents in their communities or schools they must learn and grow together. They must work as teams, know what their goals are for the future, and be able to learn, adapt, and grow in response to the environment around them. We have seen in this study that individual agency seen collectively can be treated as a community development philosophy or process. Now we can analyze the "learning organizational" qualities of this process.

Learning organizational theory is being applied to efforts at school restructuring. Educators realize that schools are learning organizations and that processes such as team learning, collaboration, collegiality, and shared visions based on shared values and shared purpose, are critical to improving the learning processes and achievement of children. Since there is often a strained partnership between schools and community based organizations, such as a family center focused on community development, portraying the Center as a learning organiza-

tion is a critical framework for schools and their communities to understand their joint project.

Personal Mastery

Personal mastery is defined as "personal growth and learning" (1992: 141). It is grounded in competency, skills, and spiritual growth and is an approach to life as a creative work. Senge coins the phrase "creative tension" as the challenge of moving from current reality to the desired future (142). Negativity can be overcome by focusing on intrinsic values and processes and not just secondary goals.

At the Center, people believed in their expertise. This is fundamentally a belief that they had the ability and wisdom to shape their future. They acknowledged their personal competency and skills, such as their life experiences, their specific talents and professional expertise, and their knowledge gained from serving the community. They were encouraged to acknowledge and put into practice this expertise by advocating for people in their community and taking initiative in developing and running programs. There was a creative tension, in Senge's sense, when they strove to bridge the gap between their current reality and the dreams they had for themselves and their community. Creating dreams and setting goals was ever evolving and constantly renewed through meetings and interpersonal dialogue.

The theme "helping others to fly" is a focus on personal mastery. Expertise was acknowledged, personal dreams emerged and then merged with shared vision. Within this process people reflected upon and developed their intrinsic values. Setting goals were seen within the context of serving children and benefiting the community. Leaders offered a shoulder for support, challenged people to achieve, and stood by their side as they learned.

Mental Models

Mental models are cognitive maps or models of our view of reality (Senge, 1992). The discipline of mental models helps expose the underlying assumptions of the way current reality is seen. This helps people to rise above limited views and to understand the wider system around them. Senge believes that if the ways of looking at the world remain unconscious, we remain unable to advance to new ways of looking at reality.

At the Center, people rose above their limited roles as parents or community residents and looked at the needs of the wider community. As people like Rojas, Lara, Francis Johnson, and Palofax rose in their leadership capacity, they also helped others rise above their limited roles to believe that they could accomplish their chosen goals. In this way, people were articulating their mental models, or the assumed way that they looked at their world, and were open to changing the way they saw reality based on the urgent needs in the community. By basing their decisions on what would benefit children, they were rising above these limited roles

and the structures of the institutions around them. The process of transformation, discussed in the theme titled "helping others to fly," was the narrative of how people came to the Center in need of services and support and then transformed their thinking and action to believe that anything was possible.

Team Learning

To Senge, team learning occurs when people align and harmonize their personal mastery and vision into a common direction with a commonality of purpose (1992). Team learning creates a synergy of the other dynamics of personal mastery, shared vision, and mental models. When team learning begins, there is a group wisdom that transcends and empowers each individual. The first critical dynamic for team learning is dialogue, where people begin a "deep listening;" suspending their own views (1992: 247).

In the theme "to get together and think" people dialogued and built consensus. In meetings people planned projects together, told their stories, talked about their expertise, developed shared vision, reflected upon their guiding values and purpose, and solved problems. This process of dialogue helped people to inquire, to step beyond their limited perceptions, and to develop common ground. It is also a process in which potential partners had the opportunity to join in and learn these team learning dynamics.

In the theme titled "sharing our dreams," we listened to people transforming individual dreams into collective vision. This process was dynamic and developmental. Through "telling their stories" people reflected upon their life experiences in dialogue about the important values and purpose of the Center.

Shared Vision

Shared vision gives people a common aspiration, a guiding purpose and collective ownership over an organization (Senge, 1992). It helps people gain trust and develop a common identity. In the face of stresses, shared vision compels new ways of thinking, allowing people to expose their thinking in pursuit of a higher purpose that keeps people united. A genuine shared vision also attracts commitment, reinforcing and supporting individual vision that is united under a common purpose.

Shared vision at the Center was represented in the themes: "sharing our dreams," and "we are here for the children." People who became involved at the Center were invited to dream of their future from the outset. At the same time they were encouraged to shift from a personal view of the future to one that is shared and evolves from collective visioning. Shared vision was not static, merely placed on walls and in brochures, but came to life and was renewed through interviews, presentations, and meetings.

The theme, "we are here for the children," reflected the dynamic tension established between the current reality and chosen goals. People at the Center recognized the problems that children faced in the community. As they told their

stories, they talked about the problems their children faced in school and at home, and how they overcame these problems.

It is clear that the Center was a learning community. The dynamics of learning organization underlie its philosophy as expressed through the eight themes of this study. The Center had a dynamic and organic process of developing shared vision. It recognized personal mastery, by acknowledging expertise and wisdom and by developing a transformation process through which people cultivate personal mastery as a discipline. The Center was enmeshed in team learning, and there was a pervasive focus on dialoguing and collective decision-making, and the building of consensus based on core values. Staff at the Center also reflected upon, inquired about and engaged in the discipline of mental models.

The purpose of seeing these themes in terms of organizational learning theory is to be able to identify the Center as a learning community, applying the same dynamics that schools and others studying community development apply to their organizations. Both schools and communities have much at stake in the process of serving their students. Urban communities will not diminish gang violence, use of drugs, child abuse and unemployment without leadership and direction from within the community. Schools do not have a monopoly on educational processes—to the contrary, they must begin to look elsewhere when in crisis!

Wherever people are active in helping to create the future of their communities, there is a critical learning culture present. This learning culture should be a major presence in the effort at school restructuring and curriculum reform. If it is not present in schools, we should ask: "What form of citizenship *is being* modeled at a school?"

When people who live in the community take responsibility for their future, and gain the skills to work together to accomplish their goals, resilience develops that sustains itself over time. While programs directed from outside the community come and funding for these projects certainly comes and goes, the community itself is the only fundamental entity that can assure what happens in the future.

Recommendations for School-Community Partnerships

Develop Collective Vision and Purpose between Schools and Communities

A true partnership can only be sustained by developing a shared vision. School personnel and community residents must share common goals and common values, based on a guiding purpose. If schools and community projects continue to work for different purposes and in different styles, neither will ever be able to develop a true partnership. Reflecting upon desired visions for the future helps people to acknowledge similar and different values that guide their goals. In this manner, communities and their schools can understand and negotiate their differences as well as work on what is common. In this process, parents and community residents must take a leading role. Outsiders should not be the primary decision-makers for the future of a community.

Create a Shared Dialogue about Learning

Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) believe that one critical element missing from schools is the encouragement of shared teacher dialogue about learning. Another and just as critical area for dialogue is between schools and their communities. We must find ways to turn the attention of teachers and school administrators from the authority of their districts or the state to learning conversations with their communities. Here dialogue is emphasized in Senge's sense of suspending assumptions and rising above limiting views of reality. In this process people transcend oppositional standpoints and truly begin to understand differing points of view.

Inquire about Community Contexts for Learning

The work of several educational anthropologists have proven the benefit of teachers learning more about the educational settings of their student's homes and communities. Gonzalez (1995) at the University of Arizona has trained teachers in ethnographic method in inquiring about the "household funds of knowledge." In this project, teachers identify the knowledge and expertise found in households and neighborhoods and then partner with community residents in designing curriculum that is culturally appropriate. Parents and community residents have strong experiences, voices and beliefs about what their children should learn and what role they want in education.

Research the Effects of Community Development and Collaboration on Student Learning

Educators and parents alike are focused on the academic achievement of their children. There is little research analyzing the impact of community development and community/school collaborations on student achievement. From my observations it is clear that the children of parents who are active agents in their schools and communities are successful learners.

School Reform and Community Development Must Be Tied to a Movement for Self-Reliance

For a community to develop resilience, enabling people to transform their community towards their chosen goals, there must be clear social and economic goals. When business interests continue to shape the economic and educational climate of a community, forcing people to move elsewhere or to become subservient in order to keep a job, residents have no participation in shaping their future. Participatory democracy places decision making in the hands of community residents in shaping the educational culture and a community's economic future.

The Pacoima Urban Village is an emerging model of economic empowerment that should be followed carefully. Here, residents are forming their own economic cooperatives with the goal of economic self-sufficiency. It is immersed in the

process of economic democracy, where no individual has the right to exploit others or hoard resources. Economic self-reliance then becomes the foundation for cultural, spiritual, and educational renewal. For this, policy makers and local, state, and federal government must play a supportive role; handing over their resources to local communities.

In this regard, Indian philosopher Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1992) has evolved a social theory and method for community development that integrates personal and collective transformation with a movement for regional self-reliance. This theory, termed *PROUT* (Progressive Utilization Theory), suggests that communities focus on a process of regional self-reliance. Here, resources—intellectual and spiritual as well as physical, are shared cooperatively. People in this process are supported through the stimulation of intellectual challenge and inquiry, intuitional development, a core of ethical principals, and awakening social consciousness.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the community development process deals with the issue of cultural sustainability. It deals with the question of how norms; values, and ideals are articulated and transmitted from one person to the next, and thus sustained for future generations. Schools, like any other social institution, must recognize their place in inhibiting or stimulating this process within a community. When a community development process is guided primarily by and immersed within a community, then cultural sustainability is likely. When community change is guided and directed primarily from outside the community, then others play the largest part in constructing the culture of that community. Success can be measured best by understanding the transformative process by which individuals inspire, support, dialogue, work together, dream and then act towards achieving their chosen futures.

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