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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to professionally acknowledge Dean Fiene for his support and believing in me. I would personally like to thank my husband for his sacrifice of time and resources to support my many research ventures.

100 Dinners Project, Conceptual Change Theory in Education: Reshaping Teacher Perceptions of Students Through Dinner-Home-Visits

Audrey Hovannesian

Abstract

Teacher perceptions of their students have been shown to play a key role in how teachers design and implement curriculum (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) as well as how 'connected' a student feels within the classroom (McNeeley, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). In areas undergoing rapid changes in student demographics, measures may need to be taken to ensure teacher perceptions of their students are aligned with actual student attributes to maintain a high level of School Connectedness.

The 100 Dinners Project, a mixed-methods study designed to reshape the perceptions of teachers to increase School Connectedness through application of the Conceptual Change Theory Protocol (CCTP) is presented. The CCTP aligns with Posner, Strike, Hewson, and Gertzog's (1982) goal of creating four situations to create conditions necessary for conceptual change.

Teacher participants, Team Members, underwent the CCTP through a series of meetings, attendance of dinner-home-visits, reflections, and interviews. The CCTP was successful in reshaping teacher perceptions of students through the critical situation of dinner-home-visits in which teachers were exposed to actual attributes or funds of knowledge, to form their perceptions of students rather than relying on extrinsic student behaviors.

Recommendations for administrators include assessing School Climate often to measure barriers inhibiting and items which foster School Connectedness. If barriers are identified, use of the CCTP focused on the perceived barrier area, may assist in reshaping

perceptions and increase School Connectedness for the benefit of students, families, and staff.

Author Interview

Which professors (if any) have helped you in your research?

All of the professors in the Ed.D program added to the creation of my overall study whether through the suggestion of articles to read, theories to pursue, or methodologies to utilize. My committee members (Dr. Piller and Dr. Sandlin) provided a wonderful practitioner lens while my Committee Chair, Dr. Mahoney, challenged me as a researcher and educational leader.

What are your research interests?

My research interests include advocating for the creation of programs which develop strong scholarly practitioners solving problems of practice through action research. I'm also interested in change models related to K-12 and higher education and the construct of connectedness.

What are your plans after earning your degree? What is your ultimate career goal?

My current plans include retaining my current contract as Assessment Coordinator, Program Evaluator, and Common Core Curriculum Specialist. I enjoy working on many projects that are both interesting and challenging. My future career goal is to find a position which best utilizes my educational, business, leadership, and philanthropic skills. I hope to excel in one fantastic position rather than juggling many positions.

Acknowledgements

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Keywords: *Perceptions, School Connectedness, Conceptual Change Theory Protocol, Dinner-Home-Visits, Funds of Knowledge, Data Visualization*

Introduction

All change, even very large and powerful change, begins when a few people start talking with one another about something they care about. Simple conversations held at kitchen tables, or seated on the ground, or leaning against doorways are powerful means to start influencing and changing our world (Wheatley, 1996, p. 67).

Areas across the country have undergone demographic shifts, causing periods of change, confusion, and conflict. Our country's uniqueness derives from diverse populations' merging to create an eclectic society drawing from attributes of the parts. Unfamiliar with changing student demographics, teachers may rely on perceptions of students formed by outside sources such as the media (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), teacher preparation courses (Raths, 2000), and other teachers. Perceptions formed by such constructs often do not align with actual student attributes. Though teachers design lessons to best fit their students, their student perceptions may alter lesson directions and result in a lack of student-teacher connection or School Connectedness.

The *100 Dinners Project*, a participatory action research study, was designed to align teacher perceptions of students with actual student attributes. The Conceptual Change Theory Protocol (CCTP) was the change vehicle employed to identify current teacher perceptions of students, how perceptions were formed, and to reshape perceptions found to be misaligned to actual student attributes.

The CCCTP has previously reshaped student perceptions of math and science concepts (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). Due to the similar underlying structure of conceptual formation, this study used the CCTP to reshape perceptions teachers held regarding their students to increase School Connectedness. This involved learners' (i.e., six participant teachers identified as Team Members) identification of current perceptions of students through facilitator-led discussion (team meetings). Team Members experienced a critical situation (dinner-home-visit) to expose them to new information regarding their students,

followed by encouragement and guidance to restructure perceptions (team meetings).

Key to the CCTP is the catalyst of perceptual reformation, the critical situation. Dinner-home-visits were the critical situation to assist reshaping of teacher perceptions by placing teachers in an unfamiliar social environment. The dinner-home-visit provided social interactions between teacher, student, and parent, not often experienced, to increase communication and provide educators with valuable information about the student and their family (Ginsberg, 2007).

During the fall 2010, the researcher was employed at a junior high school located in the "high desert" region of Southern California. Originally a desert getaway for 1950's celebrities, the area has become home to increased populations from a variety of ethnic backgrounds moving from urban regions throughout California. Though the community demographic has shifted from 84 percent White, 10 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, 3 percent from other races in 1980 (Meyers & Park, 2001) to 31 percent White, 43 percent Hispanic, 20 percent Black, 6 percent from other races in 2009 (www.city-data.com/city/Victorville-California.html), teacher demographics at the participating junior high school site remained relatively static; ten years ago 87.5 percent of teachers identified themselves as White, while in 2011 77 percent identified themselves as White. This shift in student demographics contributed to a disconnect between staff and students which led to discipline issues and low staff morale, resulting in low School Connectedness.

In 2010, the school's student population was 881 7th and 8th grade students. 89.80 percent of students received free or reduced lunch. 57 percent of students were identified as Hispanic/Latino, 28 percent as African American, and 11 percent as White. The remaining 4 percent identified from various other ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, teacher ethnicities identified as 77 percent White, 17 percent Hispanic/Latino, and the remaining 6 percent as Asian and African American.

To address the issues of low School Connectedness, this study was driven by the following questions:

- 1) The Conceptual Change Theory Protocol has been demonstrated effective in changing subject-content concepts in students. The applicability of this protocol will be investigated in teacher perceptions.
- 2) How have dinner-home-visits served as a critical situation and acted as a catalyst for perceptual change among Team Members?

Study participants included a 100 Dinners Project Team comprised of six (6) volunteer junior high classroom teachers (termed Team Members). Included on the 100 Dinners Project Team was a teacher-researcher facilitator (the author). The six Team Members represented 20 percent of the credentialed teaching staff. The number of participating Team Members was purposely limited to maintain a small, tightly knit action research group. The selection process ensured representation from each grade level (7th and 8th grade), CORE subject area (English and Math), and representatives from other departments (Science, Electives, and Special Education). Team Members received a \$1,000 stipend as compensation for time to complete the dinner-home-visits, write narrative Reflections after each dinner-home-visit, attend Team Meetings, and complete an Individual Interview. In addition to the Dinners Project Team, participants included parents of students from each Team Member's classroom who partook in dinner-home-visits. No compensation was provided to parents.

Step 1: Identify Current Perceptions of Students

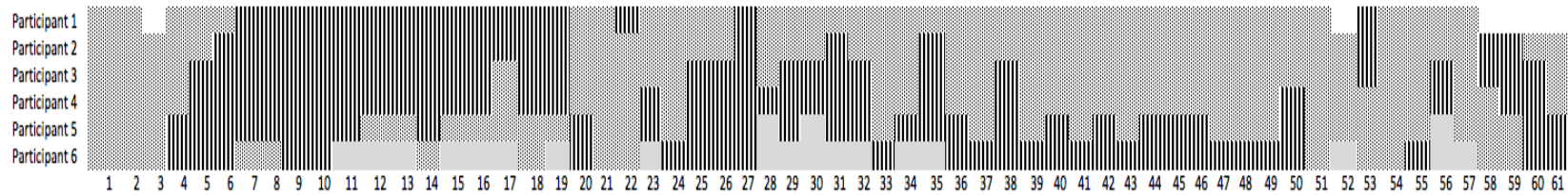
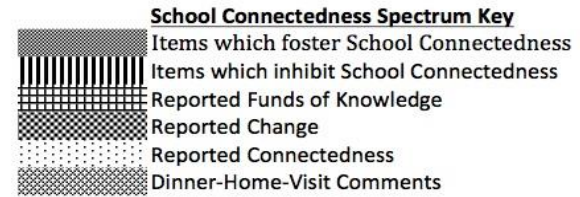
To identify teacher perceptions of students, Team Members completed the *Teacher School Climate Survey* to assess School Climate. The survey was created from the *2008-2009 California School Climate Survey (CSCS)* (WestEd, 2004) and researcher created items. The CSCS is utilized statewide to guide school improvement and foster positive teaching and learning environments. The CSCS has been used since 2004 by California school districts as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) compliance, and is used nationally by schools participating in the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* program. The CSCS is a

unidimensional measure with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .82$ to $.88$) and concurrent validity ($r = .44$ to $.55$) across 18 sociocultural groups (Furlong & O'Brennan, 2011). Cronbach's alpha was not calculated due to only six respondents. Five surveys responses were complete. Survey results were not shared with Team Members during the study.

Team Members' Initial Perceptions of Students as Indicated on the *Teacher School Climate Survey*

Survey results are presented as a data visualization spectrum (See Figure 1: Teacher School Climate Survey Spectrum).

Figure 1: Teacher School Climate Survey Spectrum



↑
 Teacher perceived student-
 related-barriers inhibiting
 School Connectedness

↑
 Teacher perceived school
 environment-related barriers
 inhibiting School
 Connectedness

↑
 Teacher perceived staff-
 related barriers inhibiting
 School Connectedness

Responses indicated a concentration of student-related items which inhibited or acted as barriers to School Connectedness related to extrinsic student traits. Although Team Members identified nearly all students as being healthy, physically fit, alert, and rested when they arrived at school, they also identified students as being unwilling or unable to turn in homework assignments and lacking pride in their work. Team Members also overwhelmingly identified their student perceptions based on other extrinsic traits such as being disruptive and lacking respect for staff. Team Members reported students, occasionally, engaged in physical fighting with other students. Team Members also reported perceiving students as moderately or mildly dealing with alcohol or drug related issues. Harassment and bullying were perceived as a severe to moderate problem among students. Other barriers reported were vandalism and theft.

Team Member perceptions of students supported prior findings on School Connectedness. Based on Team Members' perceptions, students demonstrated extrinsic behaviors which acted as barriers to School Connectedness related to school protocols and staff relationships. Students were perceived to have few intrinsic issues related to School Connectedness, including overall health and mental capacity. Although students were perceived as demonstrating extrinsic behaviors related to barriers of School Connectedness, such as missing assignments or being disruptive, they were also perceived to harbor intrinsic elements (healthy, alert, rested) which foster School Connectedness.

As Figure 1 reveals, Team Members perceived fewer barriers to School Connectedness related to school environment than student-related-barriers. When asked about their own teaching and behaviors, Team Members indicated their actions fostered School Connectedness. Results not only uncovered current perceptions Team Members held regarding students, but also indicated actions to resolve School Connectedness should focus on the teacher-student relationship. With Team Member perceptions identified, the study moved to Step 2 of the CCTP.

Step 2: Discuss Current Perceptions of Students

At the first Team Meeting, dinner-home-visit protocols, safety protocols, and current perceptions of students were discussed. Team Members engaged in a discussion led by the researcher-facilitator regarding perceptions of junior high school students in general, and then their specific students. Responses were recorded on a poster-size sheet of paper for Team Members to view. Team Members identified junior high school students in general as “squirrely, sweet, hormonal, inquisitive, having pride, doing well, being monsters, carrying what their peers think, and having high, unrealistic, expectations.” Perceptions of their specific students included, “coming from broken homes, affected by deaths, having baggage, multi-cultural, rural, transient, having a gang mentality as well as having a pack mentality.” These perceptions were similar to findings on the *Teacher School Climate Survey*.

After the initial perceptions discussion, the dinner-home-visit protocol was shared with Team Members. The protocol included how to solicit dinner-home-visits from student's families, how to conduct a dinner-home-visit, and how to stay safe when entering the homes of virtual strangers. After the meeting, Team Members read a script to their class describing *The 100 Dinners Project*, and distributed Parent Information Packets containing a parent/guardian letter describing the program and voluntary signup information. Ten families were randomly selected from the volunteers for each Team Member.

Step 3: Create Conceptual Conflict with Current Conceptions: Dinner-Home-Visits:

The conceptual conflict or critical situation proposed by this study was a new version of the traditional home-visit. Home visits are the practice of a teacher visiting student homes. The ‘home visit’ provides interactions between teacher, parent, and student which increases communication and may provide information about the student and their family (Ginsberg, 2007). The dinner-home-visit added the sharing of a family meal, as traditional

home visits are semi-structured parent-teacher conferences. Addition of a meal potentially increased opportunities for unstructured social interaction to discover family Funds of Knowledge. This increase in family information, in addition to the Team Member being in an unfamiliar setting, created a situation for dinner-home-visits to be a vehicle to reshape teacher perceptions of students. In addition to the 10 dinner-home-visits each Team Member participated in, they completed a written narrative Reflection of each dinner-home-visit. The Reflections had no structure; Team Members were instructed to record the dinner-home-visit, and their thoughts and feelings.

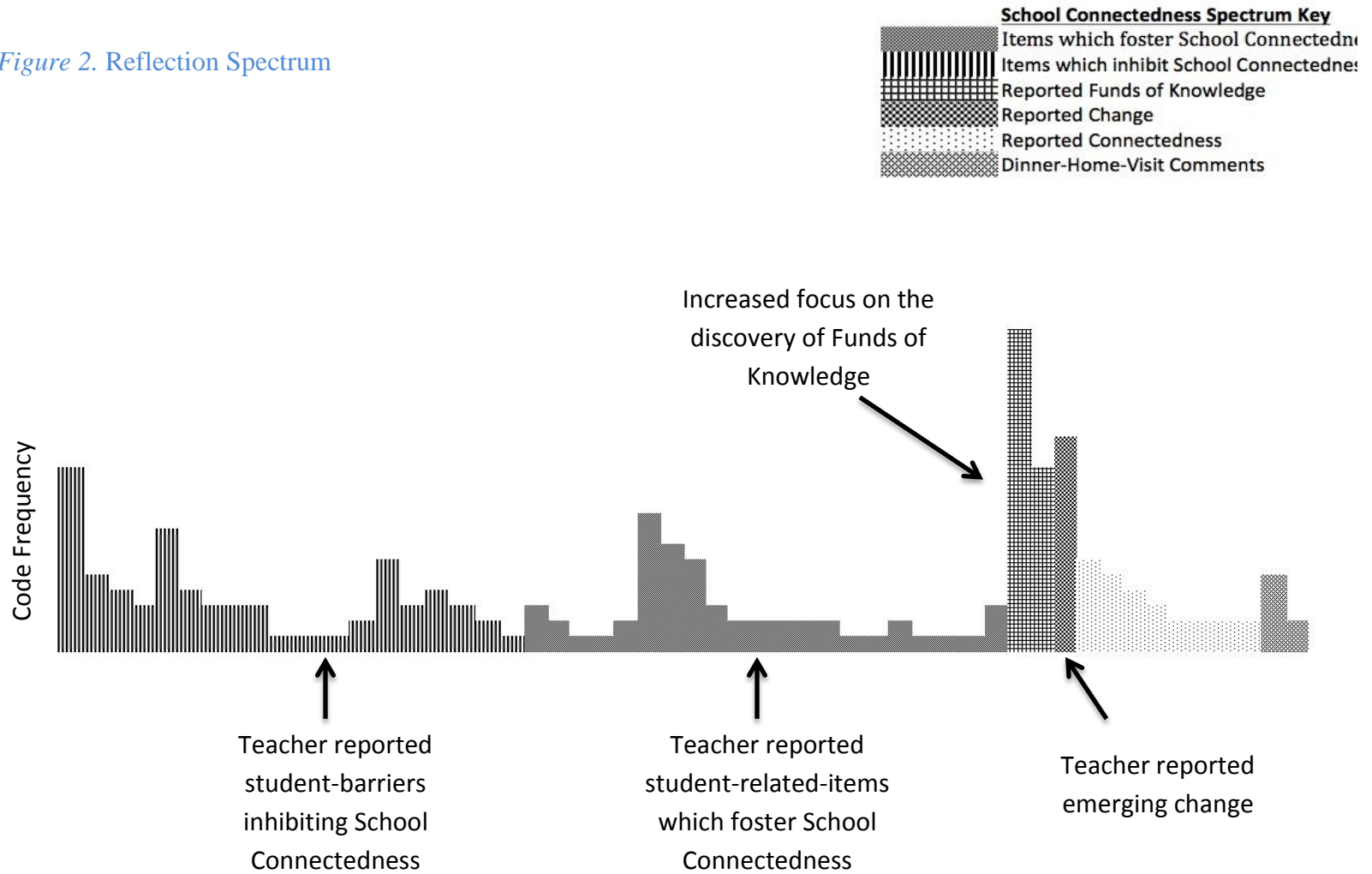
The written Reflections were collected throughout the study and analyzed using Ryan and Bernard's (2003) four category approach when inducing themes from qualitative data. These categories include: word analysis; scrutiny of large text blocks; analysis of linguistic features; and, physical text manipulation. Emergent key themes identified were similar to themes from the *Teacher School Climate Survey*. Themes related to items which either fostered or inhibited School Connectedness emerged from the Reflections. Other identified themes included discovery of funds of knowledge, evidence of change in perceptions, evidence of emerging connectedness, and descriptions of dinner-home-visits.

To ensure reliability of identified themes and codes, an external coder coded a random 20 percent sample of the written Reflections. The external coder was selected based on their educational expertise and educational practitioner experience. The researcher and external coder met for approximately two hours to discuss the study and task. The external coder and researcher achieved an 81 percent agreement in identified codes. The 19 percent discrepancy was attributed to codes with low frequencies.

Team Member Reflections supported findings from the *Teacher School Climate Survey* and revealed similar descriptions of student-related-barriers affecting School Connectedness, as well as descriptions which fostered School Connectedness. Figure 2: Reflection Spectrum

identifies the reported barriers and items which foster School Connectedness, as well as a focus on discussions of funds of knowledge, an emergence of change in teacher perceptions, increased connectedness, and identification of dinner-home-visits as a critical situation.

Figure 2. Reflection Spectrum



Reflections indicated intrinsic student-related behaviors which fostered School Connectedness included students being bright, smart, amazing, excellent, role models, hardworking, and helpful. One Team Member described a student as, “productive and has a positive attitude with her class work and tries her best.” Team Members described students as an, “excellent student that loves to learn,” “naturally smart and a natural born leader,” and “amazing and unusually mature—a student any teacher loves to teach.” Two Reflections noted attributes which fostered School Connectedness and offered insight into a student behavioral barrier. One Team Member described a student as, “motivated, hardworking student, but the area she needs to work on is speaking in class during presentations. She becomes very nervous, turns red, and refuses to make eye contact.” Similarly, another Team Member described one of their students as, “a well-mannered and respectful student for the most part. She is capable of doing better work, if she could just focus more. She gets along well with other classmates, but often she’s distracted by her friends.”

Student-related barriers inhibiting School Connectedness were similar to those identified on the survey, and related to extrinsic student behaviors. Team Members attributed poor grades to a lack of organization and focus resulting in missing assignments. One Team Member explained a student, “completes his homework and forgets it at home in his backpack, or under his bed.” Another Team Member shared, “his backpack is like a huge filing cabinet without any folders, and he carries it around everywhere.” Additionally, a Team Member noted a student, “is struggling with not only organization but time management.” Team Members also attributed poor grades to a lack of focus by describing a student as, “losing focus due to distractions in the class.” Laziness was also reported, “(student name omitted) admitted that she can do the work but she is lazy.”

Reflections also uncovered similar extrinsic peer issues as identified on the survey such as bullying, fighting, and being disruptive. One Team Member described the peer issue as, “the student population at (school name omitted) tend to bring excellent students down due to

disruptions, fights, and lack of academic interest for some students.” One Team Member reported an experience amongst a student’s peers. “In talking with dad I learned that (student name omitted) has had a difficult time with being harassed at school.” Another Team Member shared the influence of student peers, “The mother, who went to high school in Alta Loma, has noticed that (student name omitted) is attempting to adapt to (school name omitted) by sagging his pants like everybody else. The behavior of sagging the pants illustrates how the environment, or school culture influence students to go in the wrong way in terms of perception.” Another Team Member shared a story of peer influence on perceptions:

Recently, one of my students fell from the wall climber during P.E. One of my students told me that she broke her back and that she was possibly paralyzed. I was disturbed by the news. The next day in class, I heard a student making fun of the student that fell. She was laughing and saying that she was twitching on the floor and that she couldn’t move. It is these type of remarks and lack of sympathy among students that ruin the school culture.

Team Members also discovered difficulties with peers and the local community. A Team Member described an after school situation in which, “an adult African-American man walked up to him, punched him in the face, took the iPod and left.” Team Members also discussed other difficult issues occurring outside of school associated with student-related barriers to School Connectedness.

A difficult issue described by all Team Members was separation from family members. One Team Member stated, “I also inquired if (student name omitted) had any siblings and she said that she had a brother and sister that live in Los Angeles. They don’t really see each other because of the distance but they do meet up during the summer and some holidays.” Another Team Member described similar issues of sibling separation, “(student name omitted) has many half brothers and sisters but they never come to see her and therefore are not close.”

In addition to family separations, Team Members described loss of family members. One Team Member reported a student's, "father had died of a drug overdose and his mother was also a drug addict and a manic depressant/bipolar. (Student name omitted) was also little when his father died but he was present when his mother overdosed accidentally on her medication." Another Team Member similarly shared, "her grandfather was like an open book and explained to us that his wife had passed away due to lung cancer and the girls' father was taken in a car accident." In addition, Team Members noted other family related difficulties. One Team Member reported, "(student name omitted) shared with us a friend of hers was getting ready to undergo a massive surgery; a double lung transplant." The same Team Member went on to describe, "This opened the conversation to mom sharing with us that she also has health problems. Mom's arteries are shutting down, and can't afford medical insurance to have her condition checked regularly."

Team Members also discussed health issues affecting students. "Grandma told us that (student's name omitted) mother had been a drug addict and was a heavy user while she was pregnant so (student name omitted) is a FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) baby." Another Team Member described, "(student name omitted) is anemic which causes her to become very sleepy and not want to do anything in class. Her mom has vitamins and iron medication for her but expressed to us that she will often not take it or spit it out."

Team Members' style of recording family and student difficulties was matter-of-fact, and included parallels between these difficulties and student behaviors identified as barriers to School Connectedness. Reflections offered insights and reasons for the previous survey responses and indicated Team Members were beginning to uncover reasons for barriers previously identified as disruptive, defiant, or lacking focus. Team Members' reporting demonstrated their continual gathering of information as they began to reshape and form new perceptions.

Though Team Members shared stories of student difficulties and family hardship, they

also included details of how families had overcome and persevered. This demonstrated Team Members were involved in the third step of the CCTP in which conceptual conflict created an environment to challenge earlier perceptions and become cognizant of the actual issues affecting their students' lives, as well as, family strengths and resources termed funds of knowledge.

Discovery of Funds of Knowledge:

Reflections revealed a focus (the most frequently mentioned code, discussed by all Team Members a total of 135 times) on discovery of funds of knowledge or new information of family backgrounds, talents, and resources. Discovery of Funds of Knowledge was referenced more frequently than barriers, fostering, or change.

Team Members wrote about discovery of Funds of Knowledge through references to family traditions, culture, ethnicity, hopes, dreams, occupations, and food. A large amount of Funds of Knowledge (See Figure 2: Reflection Spectrum) were shared during the dinner portion of the dinner-home-visit. One Team Member described learning his student had an interest in becoming a Highway Patrol officer after attending a 4-year university. Another Team Member reflected, "(student name omitted) showed me a fabulous collection of drawings he did for science. He thinks he might like to be an architect or engineer, or maybe a Navel Special Forces officer." Parent occupations were also discussed, "(student name omitted) father works at a juvenile detention," and, "that Mr. (family last name omitted) was employed at the airport on the former George AFB."

Team Members' discovered hidden resources and interests of students. "I didn't know about her twin and was totally shocked that I haven't seen him at (school name omitted). I asked him several questions to find out if they two have the same or similar likes. They don't look alike, she's tall and he's short, and they're future occupations are totally different too. He wants to be a policeman and she wants to be professional singer." Another Team Member described, "during the summer they are very involved in reading programs at the city library." Another Team Member described learning a

parent was actively “involved with many programs that support female empowerment like the Latina Summit and other programs like ELAC and DELAC.”

Team Members also identified ethnic and cultural Funds of Knowledge. “The father met me at the door. I thought he was from Jamaica, but he’s from Africa. I think he said Nigeria.” During a different dinner-home-visit, a Team Member learned his student’s family was from Egypt but the student was, “from London, and moved to America when she was really young.”

Other Team Members reported learning about students’ Funds of Knowledge through the food served. The meal itself provided a conversation starter of the origin of the dish and the family, and also provided an opportunity for Team Members to connect with families by sharing their own backgrounds and origins. In many Reflections, Team Members described their appreciation for delicious foods which, when shared with the family, was perceived as a validation and appreciation for family and culture.

I was expecting spaghetti and instead was served pupusas. I didn’t realize that (student’s name omitted) mom was from El Salvador and that it was their favorite. I love pupusas and hadn’t had some in several years. They also served a popular soda from El Salvador called “Colachampane.” I had seen it before when I taught in Los Angeles about 6 years ago. For desert we had homemade brownies and then another popular Salvadorian treat, “quesadillas.” I was not aware that it was a type of bread with a nice glaze and sesame seeds on top. We also had Salvadorian coffee made from corn.

A Team Member asked to be taught about certain aspects of the meal. “I asked some questions about Mexican cooking, especially about tomatillos, and they showed me one and explained how they add to the Mexican flavors. I enjoyed the foray into the cooking of that culture.” Team Members’ interests in foods and desire to learn more demonstrated an appreciation for the family and their culture not replicable in other home-school interactions.

In addition to acquiring Funds of Knowledge from students and their families,

Team Members felt inclined to share their own Funds of Knowledge which created connections to their own personal backgrounds and the backgrounds of their students. One Team Member described, “We ate pozole; a personal favorite of mine, and Mom made it just like my mom makes it without the pig’s feet.” Team Members identified other commonalities among themselves and their students over the meal. One Team Member recognized the meal as one he had enjoyed at his favorite eatery, “Mr. (name omitted) owned some restaurants in town by the name of (name omitted). Both of (student name omitted) parents worked for years at the restaurants. I was happy to tell them that my wife and I frequently dined at the restaurant, it was one of our favorites and we were disappointed when it closed.”

In addition to food playing a role in acquiring Funds of Knowledge, the meal helped to relax and provide an opportunity social interaction, allowing for numerous topics to be shared. Team Members reported attaining new knowledge on topics of interest from Funds of Knowledge, for example,

I learned that part of (parent name omitted) business is making mouth pieces for many professional athletes, including (professional athlete name omitted) and other professional mixed martial artists. (Parent name omitted) and his brother work for a dental office in (city name omitted) making mouth pieces. As a side business (parent name omitted) and his brother make special mouth pieces for athletes around the country. I was able to see pictures of the girls with some of the athletes. As I was leaving I was able to see some of (parent name omitted) sports memorabilia which was very impressive.

Other forms of Funds of Knowledge uncovered by Team Members included information on special interests or hobbies. A Team Member observed, “We then moved our conversation to the backyard to see the two dogs and four cats. The (name omitted) are definitely animal lovers.” Another Team Member described,

(Student name omitted) started playing baseball one year ago, and has become a star—accepting the coaching tips, bringing no bad habits, but lots of good work ethic, to the team...He loves to draw and plays the trumpet. He took the ASES beading program and showed me beautiful designer necklaces he made for his mom, who is also a “beader.”

Reflections also included descriptions of discovering Funds of Knowledge through student and family pride in sharing special interests or prized possessions. One Team Member described, “each of the kids’ rooms is decorated specifically for that child. (students name omitted) room is decorated with the Laker’s with a giant picture of Kobe Bryant. Before leaving (student name omitted) and his dad had to show me their quads and wide assortment of fishing poles.” The Team Member also shared, “the last stop in the tour was showing me their Bulley dogs.” Another Team Member described, “the large living room had only a bench and it was explained to me that it is Samoan tradition to leave the living room bare so that relatives can come over, sit on the Samoan fatwa mats, and eat dinner all together.” Team Members discussed how such interest and artifacts can be useful in creating and supporting classroom instructional activities.

Descriptions of Funds of Knowledge permeated each Reflection. Not only did Team Members report information they learned, they did so with intricacies which indicated Funds of Knowledge’s deep impact. To have such recall of specific events is attributed to Team Members’ new found interest in their students and families and transition from Step 3 in the CCTP (conceptual conflict) to Step 4 when Team Members begin to restructure or change their perceptions resulting in greater connectedness with students and families.

Change: Each Team Member self-reported instances of change throughout their 10 Reflections. Change among Team Members included changes in perceptions of students, families, and Funds of Knowledge. The change translated into new behaviors in Team Members.

Reflections of change regarding how they perceived their students were mentioned by

all Team Members. “After coming to their home, I had a completely different understanding of my student. The mother stated that after meeting me, she has a much better impression of (school name omitted).” Another Team Member reported, “I learned a lot about my student and his family, things I couldn’t have learned only through my class interactions.”

Team Members also noted changes in perceptions they held regarding their student’s families. One Team Member shared surprise when an assumption regarding a student’s family was proven false. The Team Member thought the parents would be “traditional Mexican parents that don’t speak English very well.” But to his, “surprise, the mother and father speak English and Spanish fluently,” and were “a very structured family.” The same Team Member stated, “I am beginning to see the impact that teachers have in the community and the desire to success that parents have for their children.” The Team Member’s change in perception triggered the question, “How can I improve their ability to think critically in the 21st century?” at the end of the Reflection to indicate a change in perception.

Due to their dinner-home-visit experiences, Team Members began to view students as individuals rather than as a mass of students. “I am beginning to see them as three-dimensional people in their own setting. In literature, we always emphasize how the setting plays an important factor in a story for characters and events to develop. Similarly, the home serves as a place for (student name omitted) to develop into his own person with the influence of his mother and the neighborhood, (city name omitted).” Another Team Member reflected, “this program gave me the opportunity to get to know (student name omitted) and other students on a more personal level.” Team Members mentioned an increased sense of community and need for other resources to support students outside of the classroom.

A Team Member shared, “I learned that student motivation is based on a team effort in the family.” Another Team Member indicated, “I’m beginning to see the pressure the students get from the parent’s side. It is that type of parental involvement that is necessary for student success.” Team Members also attributed

their change in perceptions directly to the dinner-home-visits instead of other information sources, such as assignments or current communication methods.

One Team Member shared, “in my travels, through this project, I have really got to know my families. I learn more about them, which I like.” Another Team Member wrote about reading of a particular family situation in an assignment and the impact the same story had in person, “I know the overview of their story from the “My Life Story” (student name omitted) turned in, but I learned so much more tonight.”

Reflection formats themselves also demonstrated the change process. Though no Reflection format was provided, each followed a similar pattern of first describing extrinsic and intrinsic behaviors and attributes of parents and students, followed by descriptions of the meal which often included acquiring Funds of Knowledge. The final section of the Reflections summarized learning about their students and families and how their own perceptions had changed or altered. This pattern mirrors the CCTP and assisted in demonstrating the applicability of the CCTP to reshaping teacher perceptions of students.

As demonstrated by the reflections, Team Members actively entered the final step (restructuring and building new perceptions) of the CCTP. Reflections demonstrated their ability to recognize and verbalize their change in perceptions of students, and changes in their own behaviors. Reflections also revealed increased connectedness.

Connectedness: Team Member responses revealed they themselves, as well as students and parents, were exhibiting behaviors to increase School Connectedness. This was indicated through students sharing personal belongings and information with the Team Member, bonding with the family, wanting another family visit, sharing concern for the student, and reporting to now “know” the student.

Team Members exhibited behaviors of increased School Connectedness by wanting to prolong or return for another visit, “I could have talked for hours with this family.” One Team Member shared, “as the dinner came to an end, it

was hard to leave. It gives me hope to see families who are raising their children in acceptance, motivating them with love, and disciplining in such positive ways.” Another Team Member described, “As the evening drew to a close, we both expressed hope that this wouldn’t be the last dinner we would eat together.” Another Team Member reported, “she told me I was welcome any time; she asked me to stop by whenever I wanted to. When we said goodbye, a tear almost budded in my eye at the prick of her loneliness I felt mirrored in my own heart.” Team Members also discussed bonding behaviors shared with family members. A Team Member described, “while we were eating, the four-year-old son of the daughter’s friend, who was wearing braces on both legs, joined us. There were not enough chairs so I held him on one leg and set his plate near mine.”

Team Members demonstrated increased connectedness with the family through discussion of similar heritages. One Team Member shared, “we both come from first generation parents. His parents are from Mexico, just like mine.” Another Team Member made connections with indicating, “we established some common ground. We both have parents that are first generation, sisters that still live at home, and parents that are part of our lives.” Another Team Member formed connections based on growing up in the same area describing, “I learned in our discussion that we know many of the same people and had many laughs.” The Team Member added, “The (family name omitted) reside in my old stomping ground.” Another Team Member shared, “(student’s name omitted) grandmother spoke of the days when (city name omitted) was not as populated. This I could relate to, and I shared that I had lived here in (city name omitted) some 40 years ago and still remember when there were maybe 4 houses on a street.”

Team Members also connected based on similar religious backgrounds. A Team Member noted, “they have the same religious beliefs as I do, so we had many things in common.” Another Team Member connected with the family due to similar parenting styles sharing, “(student’s name omitted) mom makes the kids not getting good grades do chores, while the kids getting “A’s” don’t have to; my parents fed us

only bread, milk, and apples if we got less than “A’s” or “B’s.” Another Team Member described similarities in financial situations while growing by indicating, “We have similar farm/ranch backgrounds—limited money, but plenty of life’s necessities, growing our own food, enjoying the quietness of our surroundings, and enjoying our families.”

Signs of increased connectedness consisted of Team Member descriptions of changes in their behaviors or teaching styles based on their new knowledge. One Team Member described, “Ongoing incidents of another student tormenting him in the class came out. They were passing notes around him and he won’t pass the notes so they have written mean words on his jacket, taken his belongings, and said mean things to him. He named names and I am going to fix this problem immediately.” Team Members also noted instances of connecting on issues unrelated to education.

She asked my advice about fixing things, parenting decisions, some worries she had about the boys finding good careers, and whether some of her dreams are really attainable for someone with no education. I felt like a temporary stand-in for her life partner-- just someone with whom to bounce back and forth her ideas and to reassure her how special and amazing she is.

Reflections demonstrated Team Members were actively in the process of reshaping their perceptions of students. During the conceptual conflict period of the CCTP, Team Members underwent a process of moving from focusing on extrinsic student and family factors (missing assignments, limited finances) to a focus on intrinsic student and parent related factors (Funds of Knowledge, and actual student and family attributes) which foster School Connectedness. These changes in perceptions and increases in School Connectedness were attributed to Team Member Reflection data regarding dinner-home-visits.

Dinner-Home-Visits as a Critical Situation/Catalyst for Change

The change catalyst, dinner-home-visits, was discussed throughout the Reflections. Dinner-home-visits are a new form of home-school communication. Reflections demonstrated the meal’s role in increasing connectedness between Team Members and families. One Team Member described,

After the dinner, we sat down and had some cookies as a dessert. The mother encouraged us to have some fruit. I guess all mothers want everyone to eat. I could only assume that food plays a vital role in (student name omitted) household. It brings the family together around the table with such large displays of different foods. It was an excellent evening and I was able to meet some very nice people that really care about their children.

Another Team Member discussed the impact of sharing a meal with a students’ family by sharing, “the style of eating was gracious, meaning that the food was really the backup to the fine conversation. Slow, small bites punctuated family stories told by them and me.” Another Team Member also mentioned the meal with a description of the family, “how delicious it all was, was surpassed only by how exquisite the company.”

Another Team Member also blended the description of the meal and family attributes describing,

Dinner was family favorites punctuated with family stories—spaghetti disguised as rotellini because one daughter doesn’t like spaghetti, green salad with olives and bacon bits added because of the way it calls them to travel the Mediterranean, homemade bread sticks, a favorite of the eldest son, and cheesecake, a family favorite. Stories of the annual river rafting vacations, with their attendant capsizes and rescues, brought out how much (student name omitted) loves the outdoors, and how the whole family loves spending time with family and friends.

Introduction of dinner-home-visits as a new form of home-school communication provided Team Members with the opportunity to witness often unseen customs and traditions which foster School Connectedness. The meal introduced an element of reciprocation of goodwill and sharing to form new perceptions of students and families through an experience perceived as culturally bonding throughout the world: eating. As meals are infinitely customizable based on culture, tradition, and experiences, meals send deep messages while satisfying the basic human need of nourishment.

During the time Team Members participated in dinner-home-visits, a second team meeting occurred one month after the first Team Meeting. Meeting time was spent describing dinner-home-visits already completed. Transcriptions revealed Team Members utilization of “amazing” and “interesting” to describe their dinner-home-visit experiences. The researcher-facilitator did not structure the discussion; however, evidence of changes to teacher perceptions of students began to emerge.

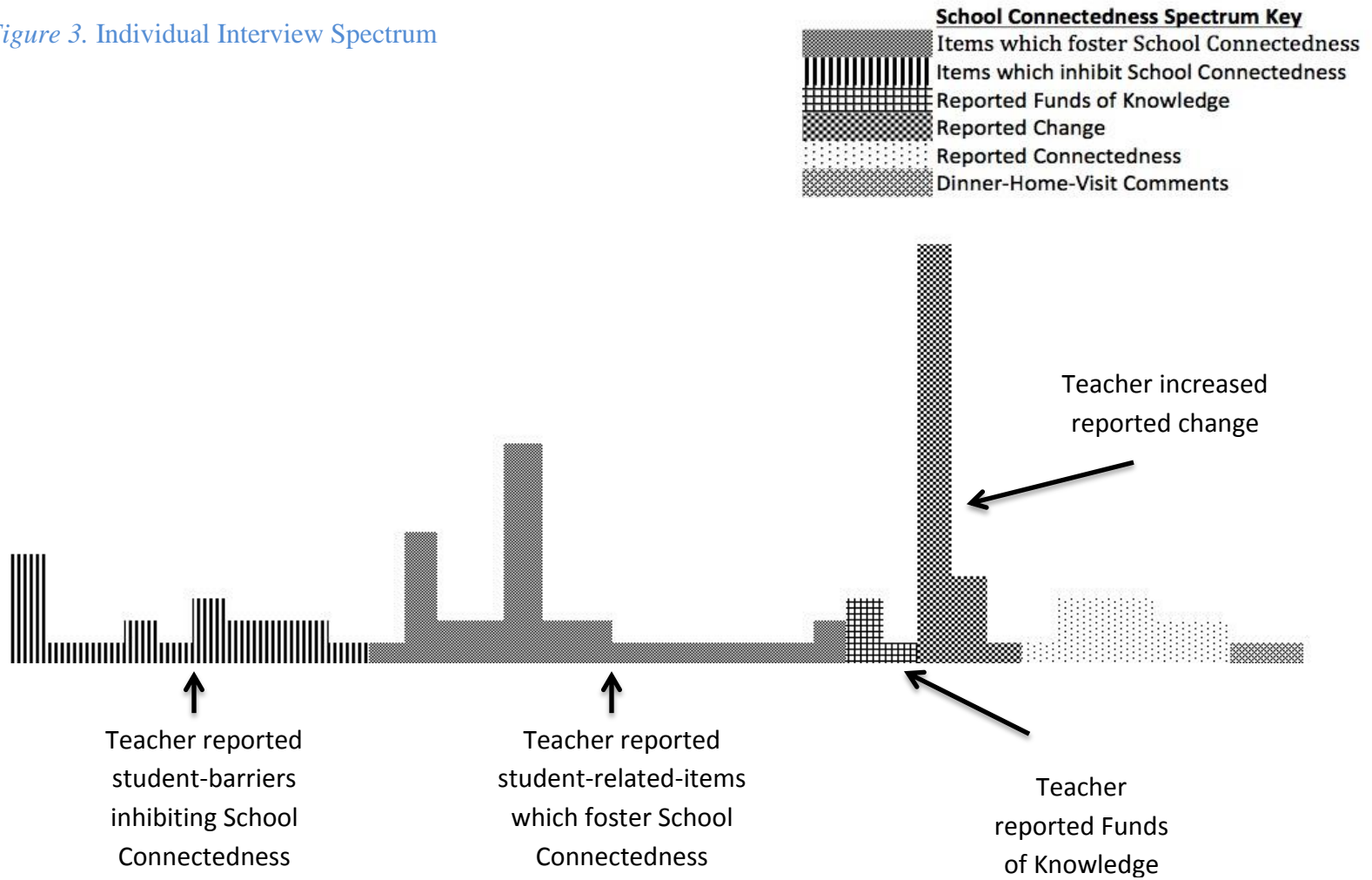
Step 4: Encourage and Guide Conceptual Restructuring to Build New Conceptions: Final Team Meeting and Individual Interviews

The final team member meeting took place approximately three months after the first Team Meeting, at which time the majority of Team Members had completed their dinner-home-visits. The researcher-facilitator led a discussion regarding any changes in the initial perceptions Team Members held regarding their students that changed as a result of dinner-home-visits. When asked to describe their students after the completion of the dinner-home-visits, Team Members reported, “charming, brats, family-oriented, really cute, followers, polite and respectful, quicker to respond to discipline, and not as defiant.” Also discussed, were possible changes to curriculum, pedagogy, or forms of communication to align with the student population. Team Members were very receptive to integrating Funds of Knowledge and newly acquired student attributes into instruction. These descriptions indicated a

change in perceptions which were further explored in Individual Interviews.

Individual Interviews were coded utilizing a grounded theory approach. Key themes and codes earlier identified through analysis of the Reflections were used to code the Individual Interview transcriptions. Figure 3: Individual Interview Spectrum demonstrates Individual Interview code distribution.

Figure 3. Individual Interview Spectrum



As demonstrated in Figure 3: Individual Interview Spectrum, Individual Interviews reported a substantial drop in barriers inhibiting School Connectedness in areas related to students, parents, and teacher behaviors. Completion of the CCTP yielded a change in Team Member perceptions of students away from student-related barriers towards their actual attributes. Interview responses focused on issues of change and items fostering School Connectedness. This shift in Team Member focus demonstrated successful completion of the change protocol.

A reported change, which was supported the Reflections findings, was an emphasis on intrinsic student attributes versus a focus on extrinsic student behaviors. A Team Member shared initially viewing a student by, “their outer, their exterior,” but due to the dinner-home-visit now views students on “a deeper level.” One Team Member summarized their experience as, “I’m glad to have been part of it (*100 Dinners Project*) because, you know, if I wasn’t, my – my opinion would still have been the same, and you know, it just – it makes you look really ignorant, after the fact.” This shift was important as a focus on intrinsic attributes assists teachers in developing long-term goals and expectations for students rather than utilizing coping behaviors to solve issues in the short term.

A new theme which emerged was a focus on the presence and role of extended family. Team Members discussed this most frequently during their Interviews. One Team Member shared, “the sample that I’ve done for the home visits, the majority aren’t raised by mom and dad. I definitely have a new insight, the traditional home, home life is not, not common.” Other Team Members discussed discovery of family dynamics which differed from the traditional family. One Team Member added, “there were several, several people with grandma, grandpa, actually not really grandpa, just grandma and maybe a sister or an aunt or someone else.” Having discovered new family dynamics, Team Members reinforced this focus. A Team Member stated, “her grandpa just was amazing – amazing, how in touch he was with the school system, and you know, how much he wanted to support it and make sure that his girls

had everything they needed. You don’t find that very often. You know, it was – he was great.”

Consistent with the Reflections, Team Members discussed families being welcoming, generous, friendly, living in a nice home, being concerned over academic progress of their child, hardworking, and wanting more for their child than they had. All Team Members discussed the supportiveness of parents. Most comments were similar to, “they’re (parents) more supportive than what I might had thought.” As Team Members completed the CCTP, it was expected they would report a decreased number of parent-related-barriers as they were now cognizant of actual student attributes and demonstrated increased feelings of connectedness.

Change was also present in Team Member responses regarding their own behaviors. Few discussed issues which acted as barriers to School Connectedness. Half of the Team Members reported similar behaviors as reported in the Reflections, which acted to foster School Connectedness through sharing sympathy for the student or family.

Though previously the highest frequency codes in the Reflections, Individual Interviews revealed a significant decrease in discussions of Funds of Knowledge. Team Member completion of the CCTP is demonstrated in their lack of discussion of Funds of Knowledge based on Team Members having synthesized such information and finding their new perceptions to be fruitful, intelligible, and plausible. Only four Team Members mentioned information they learned about student and family resources and knowledge once. Rather than simply describing Funds of Knowledge, Team Members discussed attributes such as pride related to specific resources. One Team Member stated, “If you go in the home and they’re proud of education, they’re proud of their success, they’re proud that they’re a dog owner.” Team Members rather focused on how they themselves had changed their thinking and practices related to students.

Team Members discussed personal change in higher frequency than other codes. A Team Member summarized the newly acquired information and their change stating, “It’s completely different than what I realized.” One Team Member attributed learning new

information regarding their students and families to students being willing to “indulge or come forward with” information when teachers were in their home versus at school.

Team Members also discussed changes to their classroom and instructional protocols and procedures. One Team Member noted changes to,

The way the homework is set up. Like now what I do is I’ll give an assignment and then you know either finish it at home for homework or there’s a part to it that gets given to them. Now I might just have a well-scripted homework like assignment which would require them to do like one assignment per night. And then it’s all turned in on Friday. So it might be a little more structured in that sense.

Team Members described changing their behaviors by being, “a better listener and more conscious of how I am as a listener,” and being more “consistent.” Another Team Member described “not being so picky” about small details that may be difficult for families to comply with due to family difficulties and separations uncovered during the dinner-home-visits. Similarly another Team Member discussed being,

A little more patient because I understand better that, no matter how they are in the classroom. Naturally you think, oh they’re acting this way because, you know, because the way their parents are. And uh, I’ve learned that’s not necessarily true because parents are very supportive. So I think I’m more patient.

Other reported changes in Team Member behaviors indicated they now have higher expectations for their students after attending dinner-home-visits and witnessing examples of parental support, “I’ve learned, you know, just by their parent’s actions, it’s okay to be harder on them.” The Team Member added, “Because the parents are no-nonsense.” Changes in expectations, as well as increased connectedness, were also present when a Team Member stated, “I’m more conscientious about

the grouping that I put that student in. I know them better, and I’ve talked to their parents, and I know what their parents want.” Team Members also discussed changes in their behaviors which altered how they will handle a potential disruptive student in the future. One Team Member mentioned, “for example, if they’re acting out, I might, you know, instead of saying, “Oh,” you know, “they just come from a family who doesn’t care,” you know, I – I may question, “Okay, what’s going on at home? You know, why are you acting this way, you know, and – and do your parents know that you’re acting this way?”

Team Members also reported changes to their future communication behaviors with parents. One Team Member described himself as, “more apt to call the parents you know, better communication.”

Interviews revealed increases in School Connectedness paralleled the Reflections. Responses revealed Team Members or their students and parents were now exhibiting behaviors related to being connected due to their dinner-home-visit interaction. Team Members also reflected on reasons they were not previously connected to the student. “I really like to get to know the families because it does make things different. It makes it more personal. They see me different. I see them different.” Another Team Member shared, “I know who the parents are ... I feel a little bit more, more relaxed because we’ve built a rapport, we’ve built that connect.” Similarly a Team Member said, “I know what their families are about.” Another Team Member shared, “you’re building that bond because you know for the most part they’re only hearing what the children are saying and sometimes, you know there are other children and neighbor’s children are also saying about that teacher but this is their experience.” A Team Member described feelings of increased Connectedness stating “I have a good connection with her (mom).” Lastly, a different Team Member stated, “It (*100 Dinners Project*) really does change the connection. I look at them, and I see their whole background.” Increases in Connectedness translated into increases in School Connectedness through statements as, “when

they come and tell me something, especially the kids I went to their dinners, I back them up.”

Interview responses differed from responses on the *Teacher School Climate Survey* and the Reflections due to changes in perception. Team Members now held regarding their students, their students’ families, and the resources and skills (Funds of Knowledge) identified. Individual Interviews focused on changes Team Members underwent, demonstrating successful completion of the CCTP. Experiencing the dinner-home-visit critical situation resulted in perceptions formation based on actual student attributes. Team Members were now primed to integrate Funds of Knowledge into their curriculum to continue to increase connectedness. One Team Member discussed future integration of Funds of Knowledge stating, “I would use more about their interest in sports and interest in games.”

In addressing the research questions, Team Members self-reported change in their perceptions of students, student families, student Funds of Knowledge, and change to their own behaviors. Changes were most often reported during the final step in the CCTP. Secondly, Team Member perceptions were reshaped to reflect actual student attributes. Student perceptions were now based on individual student needs and resources. Team Members reported increases in overall Connectedness which increased School Connectedness. Team Members reported behavioral changes (e.g., being more patient) and plans to change behaviors (e.g., increasing communication with parents) which increase School Connectedness. Finally, the CCTP was effective in reshaping teacher perceptions of students.

Dinner-home-visits served as a critical situation and a catalyst for perceptual change. Dinner-home-visits allowed for unstructured social interaction between teacher, student, and family to increase opportunities to learn more about the family through conversation, and allowed for food to represent families’ cultures. All participants noted the meal’s role in stimulating conversation and portraying important information about the family. Team Members described the dinner-home-visit experience as “rewarding,” “an eye opening experience,” and being “pleasantly surprised.”

Conclusions and Recommendations Overview

Opportunities, such as the *100 Dinners Project*, allowed for teachers to gain insights into students’ lives. Team Member participants directly attributed study participation to increased knowledge of actual student attributes and the reshaping of their perceptions toward their students. “I learned a lot about my student and his family, things I couldn’t have learned only through my class interactions with my student.” The *100 Dinners Project* allowed for enough interaction to reshape teacher perceptions of their students via the CCTP.

Although, the *100 Dinners Project* did not uncover the role Teacher Socialization played in the formation of student perceptions, Teacher Socialization may incorporate similar change catalysts to increase School Connectedness and to shape accurate perceptions of students. New teacher candidates, identified as being driven to belong to the group providing new information (Solomon, 1997), may be driven by these new perceptions. Just as teacher candidates may assimilate into accepting a School Climate driven by low levels of School Connectedness, they too can assimilate to a School Climate with high levels of School Connectedness.

Contrary to previous findings, support was not found for the influence of the Media (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) as a source of information to form teachers’ perceptions of students. Team Members did not indicate newspapers, social media, or television news had influenced their perceptions.

Recommendations

Future research may include the CCTP in situations related to reshaping teachers’ perceptions of students, and in educational situations where change is required. The CCTP’s effectiveness of reshaping Team Members’ perceptions may also be effective in reshaping perceptions related to educational issues, such as new curriculum or administration. To address budget concerns of implementing a change project, not all staff may need to participate in order to create change at a

school site. Use of the CCTP may be successful if a group of change agents influence other staff members.

It is recommended Educational Leaders use student and parent surveys to measure perceptions of School Climate to identify inconsistencies between perceptions of these groups and teachers' perceptions. The *California School Climate Survey* (CSCS) has two accompanying surveys, the *California Healthy Kids Survey* and the *California Parent Survey*, to measure student and parent perceptions of similar constructs. Knowledge of the perceptions of these three groups will provide a comprehensive assessment of School Climate and identify actual or perceived barriers to School Connectedness.

Educational Leaders should create an accountability protocol addressing School Climate to hold school sites accountable for maintaining adequate levels of School Connectedness. Accountability protocols may be aligned with a school district's Strategic Plan. Under the Strategic Plan, an Action Committee may be created to monitor and report on School Connectedness. Protocols should be put in place to identify activities to increase School Connectedness. Activities to increase School Connectedness must be customized to each school site even among school districts with similar student and community demographics. Many factors must be included in the customization of School Connectedness activities. These factors include staff comfort level with community outreach activities, grade level, safety concerns, immediate need, and available resources.

Other forms of critical situations may be employed in addition to dinner-home-visits. Options include hosting a school site potluck dinner and invite multiple families to attend and visit with teachers. Other suggestions include incorporation of fundraisers, already occurring in schools, to endorse a certain restaurant and receive a percentage of sales on a designated night. Teachers may be present at these functions for social interaction with students and families. School sites may consider identifying parents willing to serve as School Ambassadors, willing to open their homes to host staff meetings and allow teachers, possibly

uncomfortable with the individual dinner setting, to interact with students and families outside of the classroom. Finally, educators may increase interaction with students and families by collecting information regarding community, sporting, or other outside school activities students are a part of. Educators may coordinate visits to these events in order to capture student interests and have the potential to increase interaction with students and families outside of school.

In designing critical change situations, districts and schools should designate funds to cover activity costs. Many Team Members discussed the limited finances of families and wanting to contribute to the meal themselves. Additionally, legislation, such as the Nell Soto Parent Involvement Program (1999,) to assist schools with these types of activities should be funded.

Limitations

The greatest study limitation was teacher participant sample size. While six Team Members allowed for close contact with the researcher throughout the study, generalizability of results are limited. Another limitation may be a self-selection bias for teacher and family participants. Team Members received a stipend for participating and may have been interested in School Connectedness. It was possible parents willing participate had higher performing students. Though it was a concern that families of students with poor grades might not participate, this was not the case as students had a variety of academic achievement and student behaviors. Family volunteers may have been limited due to the financial burden preparing a meal for a teacher.

A final limitation involved the dinner-home-visits occurring close to the end of the school year. Team Members frequently mentioned wishing they had more time to implement changes to instructional practices they were motivated to enact due to their participation. "It is too bad we could not have done this sooner so we could try to prevent students from slipping through the cracks." Findings may have indicated higher levels of change if Team Members had enough time to

implement their new knowledge into the curriculum.

Conclusion

The *100 Dinners Project* contributed to increasing School Connectedness and aligned School Connectedness to the concept of it taking a village to raise a child. A comprehensive education requires a bond between school, parents, and community. Team Members discussed the bonds created with their students and student families. One Team Member indicated a continuing new bond, “When I walked out the house, the family left the door open. I think it was a gesture to show that I’m welcomed at their home anytime.” Another Team Member wrote, “The one thing that should be valued the most is a good education alongside with good people that support one another.”

The concept of a village requires those within the village to venture out to discover their surroundings and other inhabitants. This venturing was described as becoming “more human” to students. One Team Member summarized the dinner-home-visit experience as, “an opportunity to see the student in their home environment with their families and expectations.”

The time is now to make a change in our academic structure to reflect a village-concept in education which celebrates students’ whole life, beyond what is found in the classroom. One Team Member described the importance of individuals working together with the need to figure “out the balance” of communication and interaction between home-school. Parents, the community, and teachers are ready to come together. As one Team Member wrote,

I learned from this visit that our parents want the schools to be more open, and he appreciates the fact that there are caring people who want to come and make these visits to connect with the community. This was another topic that came up that really meant a lot to him; the lack of community in our schools and neighborhoods. He reflected on his youth when you knew your neighbor and kids played together. He wishes things could be more like that again.

The *100 Dinners Project* demonstrated it is possible to increase School Connectedness, which results in open and connected schools. Joining home-school resources to create the “village” can, as one Team Member stated, create “a map, like a road to success.” Along this road of success, one Team Member summarized the effect of this study best by explaining parents, students, and teachers now, “know each other as friends, as well as educational partners.”

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