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The Context

Whatever contributes to understanding also contributes to reconstruction.

—Willard Waller (1965)

Purpose of the Research

Analysts have noted a cyclical pattern of major reform movements. They erupt every decade or so, then recede to the background leaving the larger educational picture only slightly altered and producing nominal changes in educational practice (Murphy, 1990). A major reason for this problem is the neglect of the phenomenology of change. Failure to understand how people experience change in contrast to how it was intended is at the “heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms” (Fullan, 1991). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) concur:

Change is complicated because beliefs, lifestyles, and behavior come into conflict. People who try to change education, be it in a particular classroom or for the whole system, seldom understand how people involved in the changes think. Consequently, they are unable to accurately anticipate how the participants will react. Since it is the people in the setting who must live with the change, it is their definitions of the situation that are crucial if change is going to work. (P. 200)

Fullan (1991) elucidates that people react to new experiences by attaching their own construction of reality to them regardless of the meaning others assign them. Thus, the implementation of educational change is never fully envisioned until the people in the particular situations attempt to spell them out in use:

In short, one of the basic reasons why planning fails is that planners or decision-makers of change are unaware of the situations that potential implementers are facing. They introduce change without providing the means to identify and confront the situational constraints and without attempting to understand the values, ideas, and experiences of those who are essential for implementing any changes. (P. 96)

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) explain the critical role teachers play in the change process.

Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define it and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. . . . For teachers, what goes on inside the classroom is closely related to what goes on outside it. The quality, range and flexibility of teachers' classroom work are closely tied up with their professional growth—with the way that they develop as people and as professionals. (P. ix)

In response to calls for research that will enable educators to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of educational change for teachers, we designed the study reported in this text to describe and interpret how five secondary teachers, Gary, John, Lew, Martha, and Tanya, defined and made meaning of the change process that

they were involved with. The following questions guided our study: What did these teachers experience? How did the teachers understand these experiences? How did their interaction with each other as a team contribute to their understanding of these experiences?

Institutional Setting

The research took place in a small, privately endowed residential school for boys and girls in the central portion of a mid-Atlantic state. Founded in 1909 by a business magnate and his wife and later fully endowed by them, the school provides education and care for students from disadvantaged families. Criteria used to judge disadvantaged children are as follows:

1. They are the “poorest”; that is, the family income is at or below the poverty level defined by the United States government.
2. They are “most alone”; that is, they have one or no parent, they have parents who are incarcerated or incapacitated or incapable of caring for them, or they have been abused or abandoned.
3. They are the “youngest”; that is, they are most apt to benefit through longevity in the program.

Following the Deed of Trust established by the founders, the school initially recruits students from the tristate area in the Mid-Atlantic, followed by recruitment of students across the United States. Currently, children from thirty-six states are represented in the school population. Committed to diversity in the racial, cultural, and gender makeup of the student body, the school includes minorities (56 percent), many of African and Hispanic descent. Females, who comprise 46.7 percent of the population, have been admitted since the 1977–78 school year. The high school, which houses grades nine through twelve, is made up of approximately five hundred students, fifty teachers, one assistant principal, one principal, and numerous support personnel. In addition to the senior high school, there is one elementary school, which houses preschool through fifth grades, and one middle school, which includes grades six through eight.

Adhering to the Deed of Trust, the school encourages early enrollment of children, beginning at age four, and does not accept

children sixteen or older. An emphasis is placed on providing skills for job placement after graduation. In addition, the school contributes \$5,000 per year for tuition and other expenses as an incentive for those students who wish to attend college.

Because of a concern by the Board of Directors and alumni that the school was moving away from the original intent of the founders' mission—to prepare students for the world of work—the school instituted a strategic plan to emphasize the vocational aspect of the school, as well as to continue preparing interested students for college study. The strategic plan called for a schedule that would give freshmen and sophomores opportunities to explore the following career pathways in the vocational education program: agricultural and environmental education, automotive systems, business and finance, communications technology, construction, health occupations, manufacturing/computer-aided drafting and design, and visual and performing arts. Freshmen were to spend the first semester rotating through all the career pathways in order to sample what each one offered in potential careers. For the second semester, freshmen were to select their three areas of interest for further exploration. Sophomores were to devote one 85-minute block of time every other day exclusively to the one career pathway of their choice.

In order to facilitate this initiative, the ninth- and tenth-grade teachers were informed in the fall of the previous year that they would be involved in a major restructuring program that would be put into effect the following school year. Three components comprised the restructuring: teaming, interdisciplinary teaching, and block scheduling. Both the freshmen and sophomore classes would be divided into two groups with approximately sixty-five students and four core subject teachers of English, mathematics, science, and social studies on each team. In order to accommodate the career cluster of the sophomores, a block schedule was created that divided the former eight-period day (with 45-minute periods) into two four-period days with periods lasting 85 minutes. The school also moved to a six-day schedule cycle. The teachers were to plan an interdisciplinary curriculum for the core subjects and were supposed to devote their planning period on odd numbered schedule days to interdisciplinary team meetings.

At the insistence of the foreign language teachers who feared their positions might be eliminated, administrators included a for-

eign language teacher as a fifth member on each of the four teams. The ninth- and tenth-grade teachers were told to form their own interdisciplinary teams and were given ten release days during the school year and one hundred paid hours during the summer hiatus to plan for the new curriculum.

We chose to study this particular setting because we believed—at the beginning of the study—that this setting represented a potential best-case scenario for successful restructuring. Several variables led us to this conclusion. First, the school had an enormous endowment that resulted in tremendous monetary resources. The school has the financial resources to do just about whatever it desires. Therefore, lack of funding would not frustrate implementation efforts. Second, this was a private school that was not subject to many state curriculum guidelines and constraints. Even though all of the teachers were properly certificated, the school was under no obligation to live up to state curriculum guidelines. Thus, the school was free to experiment with different types of curriculum and scheduling configurations. Third, this was a residential boarding school with minimal parental involvement in governance. Therefore, there would be no community or parental pressure groups to throw up obstacles to planned restructuring initiatives. Fourth, the small class size, averaging sixteen or seventeen students per class, allowed teachers greater flexibility and room for experimentation. Finally, the central office administrators informed us that the school had a site-based, shared decision-making model that had been used to make the decision to undertake the restructuring initiative. Thus, we believed that teachers had significant input into the decision-making process and were “on board.” Though the context failed to live up to its advance billing, these were our reasons for selecting this particular school.

The Teachers

The five teachers in the study come from various backgrounds. Our purpose is to present background information that we believe will help the reader understand some of the actions, interactions, and reactions that occurred throughout the study. Although we did not probe into the detailed life history of the teachers, many times they mentioned their personal lives in relationship to an issue being

discussed or during a reflective moment. Our hope is that incorporating this background affords the reader the opportunity to gain insight into the teachers and to add to the rich description of the context.

Lew

Lew, the social studies teacher and team leader, is an African-American (the only minority teacher on the team). In his early forties, he has been teaching freshmen at the school for eighteen years. Besides teaching, he coaches boys' varsity basketball. He arrives at school at 6:30 A.M. and stays until early evening, much later during basketball season. In addition to the ninth-grade teaming, he teaches a class called "Law and Youth," which he created for upperclassmen to examine legal issues that directly affect young people. His wife is a middle school teacher in the same school system, and he has a teenage daughter who attends a public school nearby.

He is a very popular teacher among students of all races and professes that he enjoys his interactions with his students more than any other aspect of his work. He grew up in the inner city and seems to be able to use his firsthand knowledge of tough neighborhoods to understand his students and relate to them. Students call him "hip." Current and former students can always be found in his room during their free time either assisting Lew in his clerical work or just talking with him. He is at ease talking about historical periods or rap music. When asked by a fellow teacher if he was familiar with a rapper whose name now eludes us, Lew quickly gave a short biography of the rapper and noted some song titles. When the teacher said jokingly that he was impressed, Lew responded, "What do you mean? Of course I know him. It's my job to know this stuff. We have to know what the kids are listening to. We have to know where they're coming from."

He balances well his position as teacher and adviser. He is very serious in terms of student learning and achievement and is quick to chide a student who is not meeting expectations that have been set. One particular vignette illustrates this side of Lew's personality. The day after report cards had been issued for the first time

during the school year, Lew noticed that some of the students seemed disappointed that their grades were not higher. His hunch was that they felt betrayed by him. They thought he was a caring teacher who would give them high marks because he liked them. As usual, Lew preferred to address the issue head on rather than to skirt it. Lew expressed his feelings like this:

I can see that some of you are disappointed by your grades. You thought that I would give you higher grades because I like you. Well, you should know that I might love you like a son or a daughter, but it won't make any difference when it comes to your grades. You'll get what you deserve. That's what you can expect from me, from employers and the world, what you deserve. No matter how much I like you or you like me, you have to earn your grades. (Field Notes)

This demeanor, however, does not offend the students, who are aware of his vulnerable side. For example, approximately two weeks before school was to begin for the school year, a recent graduate drowned in a swimming accident in her home state. Lew was instrumental in arranging a memorial service on campus at the start of the school year. A poster that Lew made with a picture of the girl in cap and gown, along with other pictures of her, still hangs on his wall with a caption in large letters, "We will always love you, LaToya."

Lew is a self-proclaimed perfectionist, always anticipating possible problems before they occur. For example, when the team of teachers chose to present their Jurassic Park unit at the regional Council of Teachers of Mathematics Conference, Lew insisted that they meet to practice their individual presentations even though the others felt it was not necessary. Lew also demanded that every detail be exposed and inspected before taking students on a field trip so that they would not be met with any "surprises."

Lew began interdisciplinary teaming with Tanya, the English teacher, three years prior to the mandate to expand the teaming to science, math, and foreign languages. When the mandate for freshman English and social studies teaming was made, Lew approached Tanya, a second-year English teacher, to team with him. Tanya agreed and the two decided to develop a curriculum following Lew's

chronological presentation of history from pre-Civil War to the 1950s. Lew expressed success and happiness with the way he and Tanya had been teaming, stating that he was convinced the only way to team is to follow history chronologically, something he learned at a conference many years before.

By the time the study was completed, Lew had decided to give up the “Law and Youth” class in order to commit himself 100 percent to the ninth-grade teaming. He also resigned from basketball coaching in order to pursue a master’s degree in American Studies. He did accept the position of coadviser of the senior class and taught remedial school during the summer.

Tanya

Tanya, the English teacher, is in her sixth year of teaching. Now in her late twenties, she came to the school directly from college graduation with her husband, who was pursuing a medical degree at a nearby teaching hospital. During her first two years, she taught literature to upperclassmen. Besides currently teaching freshman English, she coaches the cheerleaders and advises the school newspaper.

She seems very wise and experienced for her years and contributes this maturity to her teaming with Lew. She believes that Lew has taught her to worry about those things that she can control and to fight for those things she believes in, especially if it affects the students. She has stated that she is sure that other faculty and staff are probably surprised at how she has become more outspoken and self-assured since she first arrived. Tanya is a very outgoing individual who has congenial relationships with a large number of colleagues both within the English department and outside of it.

Tanya has found interdisciplinary teaming with Lew fairly easy even though she admits that she had to relinquish some content that she really enjoyed teaching. She believes that the discipline of English allows enough leeway to team with anyone using any theme or unit. She believes that she and Lew have worked very hard over the last several years to put together a quality model of English and social studies teaming and believes the other teachers will have to go through the first year of adjustment as she and Lew had done three years ago.

Tanya's relationship with the students, on the surface, seems more professional than personal. She focuses on student achievement and outcomes and does not seem to become so involved in their personal lives as some of the other teachers. Though she sometimes hides her caring from students, it is evident by watching Tanya that she cares about students deeply. She is the "behind-the-scenes" person who is responsible for all the details that must be completed for their projects and activities to be successful. She is the one, for example, who gets the food for the team parties and orders the supplies for the Ticket Incentive Center (TIC-it) program. She is the one who is willing to add an activity or delete one in order to meet time constraints or team objectives.

The students, too, affect her decisions. For example, she was considering resigning from the position of adviser for the school newspaper at the end of the school year because it was so time-consuming and she felt it was not a quality product in terms of its appearance (typesetting, printing, etc.). However, a senior sent her an e-mail message about how much he enjoyed the newspaper and thanked her for the time that she spent working with the students. This one e-mail message affected her greatly. She decided that if she was only influencing one person, it was enough for her to continue. In addition, she agreed to coadvise the senior class with Lew the next school year.

Of all the teachers, Tanya seems to have the best understanding of models of interdisciplinary teaching and teaming. She seems to be the one who questioned the most in terms of how they were teaming and if there were a better way. All her reflection and understanding may be because she was completing her master's degree in curriculum and instruction during the time of the study, and she utilized her studies to look at interdisciplinary teaming. She was aware of the multiple models of interdisciplinary curriculum that were available in the literature and often asked the administrators to clarify what they had in mind when they talked about moving to an interdisciplinary model.

Although Tanya had talked about beginning the American Studies master's program with Lew after she completed the other degree, she decided not to pursue it. She often talked to us about pursuing a doctoral degree in education at some point in her life, and she talked about her mother who was in the midst of completing a Ph.D. in counseling psychology. She knows that her teaching

tenure at the school will probably be short lived because her husband, who is completing a fellowship in internal medicine, wants to move back home to the western part of the state.

John

John has been teaching science at the school for 14 years and chairing the Science Department for four years. In addition, John is chair of the Chemical Hygiene/Safety Committee and is responsible for educating all faculty in safety precautions. Prior to his teaching at this school, he taught in a public school in the central part of the state and also worked as a civilian for the United States Navy. He has always taught environmental science and used to teach a photography course, which he describes as a lab science. He was born and raised and still lives in a town about twenty miles from the school. In his midforties, he is single.

John had an interest in working with Lew and Tanya prior to the mandate of interdisciplinary teaming. He had approached Lew to work together with his "Law and Youth" class, specifically in terms of forensics when Lew was teaching criminal law. Because of time constraints, however, Lew and John never really actively pursued the teaming. John also knew Tanya because the two of them had worked together on some of the theater productions at the school. Because of this previous desire to work together and his role as freshman science teacher, John volunteered to join Lew and Tanya's team.

John maintains a professional rather than personal relationship with the students, and many students did not feel so close to him as they did to some of the other teachers. John has a very dry sense of humor. He often told students that he knew that they were aware that science was by far the most important subject that they could possibly study and that they would like to spend all day in science class. He also talked quite regularly and fondly about his imaginary dog, Einstein. Many students, failing to understand his dry humor, vowed that Einstein really did exist and asserted that John really did believe that they would like to spend all day in science. John's caring for the students seems to take a more academic, rational approach than a nurturing one; yet John has a very caring side to him that is more evident in one-to-one dealings than in a large group setting. He reminds one of the parent who may not

openly demonstrate his affection for his children but is the most generous and caring in times of need.

We saw John personally make a handful of his students his “mission,” and by the end of the year, they had established a great rapport with him. Although he preferred to keep his altruism private, he shared a moving story with us. In the early spring, we offered to take John to the airport after school. He was flying to St. Louis to attend the National Science Teachers’ Association annual conference. When we entered John’s room after school to get him, Adam, a student from the Apex team, and an eleventh-grade student were in his room. They were checking the weather in St. Louis on Netscape. Before John left, he asked the boys if they needed a soda or anything. In the car we remarked to John about the progress that he had made with Adam. We told him we remembered in the beginning of the year when John used to chide Adam that he needed more interests than music. John said Adam asked John if he could go to the school’s open house (held on a weekend) even though his parents were not coming. John picked up Adam at his student home the day of open house, and they went to Burger King’s drive through, one of John’s usual stops for coffee on the way to school. He bought Adam a carton of orange juice, which cost one dollar. John made a joke to Adam about the cost, saying that he paid for the convenience of not getting out of the car. Adam, that same day, told Tanya that John spent all his money for a croissant and orange juice. Tanya joked that John had lots of money and Adam should order an expensive lunch if John offered to take him. We were not sure why John shared that story, but we were very touched by it.

During the study, John was completing course work for both a master’s degree in education and a certificate for the secondary school principalship. He became very interested in “Systemic Change” and “Continuous Quality Improvement” throughout his course work and often talked in terms of the “big picture.” He was also active with the National Science Teachers’ Association and often spoke of his alignment with those who advocate for science standards. When an opening for supervising student teachers for a university in partnership with the school became available for the following school year, John took the position. Therefore, although he is still employed by the school and housed in the same building, he is no longer a member of the team.

Gary

Gary, who is in his early forties, has been teaching mathematics at the school for eleven years. Prior to this position, he taught junior high and senior high math for six years in public schools in this state and two years in a private school in the west. He has taught the following subjects: basic math, pre-algebra, Algebra I, Algebra II, trigonometry, geometry, and Algebra III. He also previously chaired the Math Department for two years and was responsible for instituting, writing, and implementing math competency tests that are still administered at the end of each grade in the high school to ascertain if a student is ready for the next level of math. He also coaches boys' varsity track in the spring. He holds a master's degree in education.

Gary was not a member of the team when it first formed. Instead, Marty, a math teacher with 30 years of experience, was placed on the team. Although Marty did not want to be on the team, he was certified in elementary education, not secondary mathematics, and did not feel comfortable teaching higher-level math courses. Thus, he was confined to teaching ninth-grade math. Because he needed to remain at the ninth-grade level, Marty was involuntarily placed on Team Apex. The result of this involuntary placement was unhappiness both on his part and that of the team. A summer of "behind-closed-door politicking" with the principal by Lew resulted in Marty's eventual removal from the team.

A few weeks prior to the start of the school year, Gary replaced Marty on the Apex team. Because of his late entrance onto the team, Gary was not involved in some of the initial deliberations that occurred. He was, however, familiar with the restructuring initiative from his teaching experience in Colorado, where he was part of an interdisciplinary team for one year in the middle school and was involved in block scheduling in the high school.

Gary did not really know the teachers on the team except for John, whom he knew from previously chairing departments together. Gary, however, seemed very easygoing in terms of trying to do what he could to accommodate a team that had already formulated themes prior to his involvement. He had technology skills that proved beneficial for some of the projects that were assigned. He is a no-nonsense kind of teacher whose calm manner seems respected by his students. His caring is most evident in the way he takes time to explain to students why they need to know something

and to listen to their concerns and opinions. Students seem to really appreciate his calm, easygoing manner and his day-to-day consistency.

Gary had many incidents, both positive and negative, occur during the course of the study. He ran for department chair and lost by the vote of the high school principal, who had to break the tie vote. This was especially disappointing to him because he had been asked to run for the position by several of his colleagues. He also felt that the Math Department was not being attended to and allowed to move forward. Gary's eight-year-old daughter was diagnosed with diabetes, which is being controlled through insulin injection but still caused much worry and concern. His wife has just completed her studies for the degree of nurse practitioner, enabling the family to relocate if they want.

Martha

Martha, who is in her mid-forties, has been teaching Spanish and French for four years at this school. She has taught levels I and II of Spanish and all four levels of French. Prior to teaching here, she taught seven years in public schools in neighboring states and three years at a school for the blind in a metropolitan area. She also took a few years off before starting her current job to raise her children and earn a master's degree.

A large part of who Martha is involves her younger son who is autistic. Having had a very difficult time becoming pregnant, she was thrilled with the birth of her first son and surprised and thrilled with the birth of her second. She realized early that her second son had severe problems and finally found solace from a doctor in Oregon, who told her that she had to find a school with inclusion, that her son needed to be mainstreamed as soon as possible. One year prior to this meeting, on a lark, she had sent a résumé to the school where she now teaches. Ironically, two weeks after her trip to Oregon, the school called with a position. Martha knew of a nearby school district that was beginning an inclusion program. She and her husband decided that he had to quit his job, and they moved to the district that had begun full inclusion.

Martha's concern for the well being of children supersedes every other aspect of her work. We believe that she cares so genuinely for

each and every student simply by her nature, but this nurturance is more intense because of her profound experience with her son. She is a high-energy teacher who may appear scattered to someone of a different nature. She is one of those people who see the glass half full, not half empty.

Martha and the other foreign language teachers advocated for their inclusion on teams that were originally designed to include the four core areas of English, math, science, and social studies. Her department feared that foreign languages might be dropped if they did not belong to a team, and this fear became the impetus for their push to join a team. Martha knew Tanya prior to the teaming and asked Tanya if she could join their team, which is what eventually occurred. Martha vacillated from the belief that interdisciplinary teaming would be easy to the belief that it would be difficult.

Martha plans to stay at this school for the remainder of her teaching career. She serves as a confidante for many students. At the end of the school year, she invited a student who had nowhere to stay after graduation to live with her and her family until college in the fall. She proceeded to help the girl receive a good financial aid package from the college of her choice, and her husband secured a part-time summer job for her where he works. When Martha retires, she and her husband plan to become houseparents at this same boarding school.

Team Apex

By the time school began in late August, these five teachers had become the core of the Apex team. Since they did not know each other well prior to the teaming, they spent much of their preparation time the previous school year and summer in team building activities. They discussed many possible names for their team and eventually chose Apex, using the acronym to represent what the team stood for: accountability, pride, exploration, and excellence.

They adopted the motto, The view from the top is worth the climb, and conducted a contest in the beginning of the school year for students to devise a symbol to represent Apex. The symbol that was chosen was the word Apex written to form a mountain peak.

All team students and teachers received T-shirts that included the following: the team name and the words the letters represented (accountability, pride, exploration, and excellence); the symbol; the motto; and the year of their graduation.

The teachers decided that the most expedient model for interdisciplinary teaming was the one that Lew and Tanya had devised for the English/social studies teaming. They also decided to deviate from this model in order to begin the year with the theme of Jurassic Park. This theme was initiated by John, the science teacher, who had attended a workshop on teaching Jurassic Park as an interdisciplinary unit at a science conference. Throughout the remainder of the year, the teachers integrated other units: Wild West, Immigration, World War I, World War II/Holocaust, and the Fifties.

We began “living” with the teachers on August 21, 1995, their first day back to school, which was an in-service day. Prior to that time, we had met with them twice before. The first time was on March 15, in order to discuss the research project with them. At this meeting they agreed to participate in the study, saying that they had stated from the beginning they wished they could somehow document their experience. They saw their participation in the research study as a good opportunity to have their experience recorded. The second time was on April 5, when one author joined them to visit a high school that was already involved in block scheduling.

When we met with them on August 21, we were struck by how they had blossomed from a tentative group of teachers into a confident team. At this time, we were introduced to Gary, who had replaced the original math teacher sometime over the summer. From talking to them, we got the sense that the majority of their teaching would not be interdisciplinary but would somehow relate to a central theme.

The first day of school with the students, August 22, began with a team meeting. The teachers met with the team in the auditorium following the typical “welcome back” program conducted by the administration. All five teachers, wearing Apex T-shirts, stood on the auditorium floor, eye level with the students. Lew, the team leader, welcomed the students to the high school and to the team. All the teachers talked briefly about their subject areas and how their disciplines related to the team. They spent the afternoon

in abbreviated periods with each teacher individually. The teachers also had a team meeting to discuss their reactions to the day. Team Apex, conceived in the spring and developed over the summer was delivered this day, and the remainder of the year would be spent adjusting to its birth and monitoring and nurturing its growth.

School Setting

The school, built in 1934, is a huge, two-story brick building that sits high over a four-lane highway. It truly appears like a “castle on a hill” with its stature and old elegance. Upon entering the school from the main doors, one is in the middle of an impressive rotunda with high ceilings. Directly ahead lies the partly visible open staircase that leads to the second floor of the school. The hallways are wide, and the thick mahogany doors and built-in glass and wooden bookcases add a stately appearance. The classrooms are bright because the building retains the large window areas of old school structures. Realizing that most windows are downsized during the first phase of a building renovation, we were particularly struck by their height and width, as well as the large windowsills and old-fashioned pull-down shades.

All the Apex teachers, except for John, were in proximity to each other on the second floor. John remained on the first floor with the other science teachers since the rooms were equipped for laboratory experiments and the science teachers often shared equipment. The science room was very traditional. The back half of the classroom was set up with long tables for labs, as well as shelving around the two sides and back of the room. The front half of the room held armchair student desks, and the teacher’s desk and lab table sat in the front of the room. There was little space to walk between the front of the teacher’s desk and lab table and student desks. The front half of the room was tight so that there was more space for the lab section in the back of the room. There were also two very large closets in the classroom that were big enough to actually be offices. There was much evidence that a science teacher inhabited the room: there were rockets that former students had built and launched, charts of the elements, weather information, and two computers and a television.

Leaving John's room one walks a few short steps down the hall and takes a set of stairs up to the second floor where the rest of the teachers from Team Apex reside. Upon leaving the stairway one is immediately greeted by a huge banner proclaiming, Welcome to Team Apex. The hallway between the Team Apex rooms was constantly adorned by student work. Bulletin boards and display cases were used throughout the year to display student projects such as political cartoons, caricatures, poems, dinosaurs, graphs, and posters. Lew's room, which contained a water source, seemed like the size of two rooms. He placed his desk and six computer and individual study carousels on the right side near the back of the room. This side of the room also contained two regular-size closets. The student tables were in the middle of the room, set up to form a horseshoe. Approximately six students sat at one table. When Lew was unhappy with student behavior, he would move all the chairs into straight rows, and everyone would face front toward him. On the left side of the room were reference books, a stereo system, and the television. Lew's entire room was filled with motivational sayings, student work, historical facts, and team building messages. His penchant for collecting globes was obvious as they could be found in every size and shape throughout the entire classroom. He also displayed gifts and cards that had been given to him by students and other teachers.

Martha's and Gary's rooms were similar. They contained tables instead of individual student desks. Both were rectangular in shape. Martha's room was decorated with lots of Spanish and French posters, and she had a table-size puzzle of the Eiffel Tower and a Spanish villa set up at all times so that students could put the puzzles together when they were finished with their required work. Both Gary and Martha had their desks placed to the side of the room.

Tanya's room was a rectangle also, but it contained a side room that the team often used for meetings. There were also a refrigerator and microwave in there for the team teachers to use. The chalkboard in this side room still contained the timeline that the team created, during the summer, showing when the interdisciplinary units were to be taught. Tanya's desk and computer work area were set up behind all the student desks. Tanya taught in the front of the room, using a podium and a high stool. She kept a written

monthly calendar on the side chalkboard so that students were aware of all their assignments and activities for the month. She displayed posters of famous writers, as well as posters that contained definitions of literary terms.

All the rooms had telephones, television, and at least one personal computer. All the teachers also had e-mail and seemed to use it as their preferred method of communicating with those outside the team. They also had access to the Internet both on their classroom computers and in the computer lab, which was also on the second floor. The computer lab was shared with the other ninth-grade team. On the first day of school, all the teachers had their rooms decorated for Jurassic Park. Each student locker had a dinosaur placed on it, and all the teachers had dinosaur decorations in their classrooms.

The school itself seemed very quiet. One reason was that there were no bells. The students were dismissed by the teacher and walked out of classrooms rather than dashing out at the sound of the bell. Also, because four of the five team teachers were in proximity, the students did not have far to walk to their next class. Thus, classes began very quickly, much sooner than the usual four-minute period that most schools allow for passing classes. The students also were given much freedom in terms of bathroom privileges and hall privileges. Perhaps with this freedom came a responsibility and maturity.

The only loud part of the school was the cafeteria. Although teachers, administrators, and students tended to eat at separate tables from each other, they mingled in a friendly, casual, but respectful manner that seemed to pervade the school. The cafeteria was a wide-open space with poor acoustics and could get rather loud at times. There was a microphone in there at all times so that announcements could be made.

The building itself was inviting and warm in its old stately way. It lacked the institutional “feel” of more recently built schools. Instead, the corridors and rooms seemed to bear the history and tradition of respect for knowledge and the promising future that education could bring. Perhaps this perceived belief played a major factor in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and discipline. We felt comfortable there immediately.