

**Exploring the Impact of Principal Leadership and School Mission on the Moral  
Dimensions of Teaching: Evidence from Teachers' Classrooms**

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## **Introduction**

For this paper, I return to Highlands Academy and Jordan Elementary to continue an investigation of the relationship between school context (as defined by principal leadership and school mission) and teacher conduct (delimited to the moral dimensions of teaching, specifically their method and manner). As envisioned, understanding the potential connection(s) entails a three-pronged analysis. The first step would be to establish congruence between principals and teachers around the school mission and its implementation. Once congruence was established, the second step would be to analyze the ways that a teacher's conduct (as evidenced by their method and manner) is affected by the stated mission. The last step would be to use student voices to validate and/or further explicate the relationship among principal leadership, school mission, and teacher conduct.

Results from the first analysis were presented as a part of the "Manner in Teaching" symposium at last year's annual meeting. Based on these findings, it became apparent that not only does congruence exist at the two schools, but principals' and teachers' views of the school mission play a significant role in the day-to-day workings at both Highlands Academy and Jordan Elementary. This year, I offer the results from the second phase of the analysis: how principal leadership and school mission affect teacher classroom conduct, namely their method and manner. To begin, each principal's perspective on teacher conduct is presented, followed by an examination of what teachers said in their interviews about their classroom conduct and teaching. However, the primary analysis – presented in case study form – centers around videotapes of teachers' classrooms to determine to what extent a teacher's conduct is influenced by the congruence around the school mission and its implementation.

### **A Cursory Look at the School Context and Teacher Conduct Literature**

#### School Context

One facet of school context, and the major focus of this paper, is the school mission. Many schools are organized around a mission, or an underlying purpose or goal that a school is striving toward. As defined by a number of researchers in the fields of education (Herman, 1989) and business (Bryson, 1988; Deshpande & Parasurama, 1986; Kaufman, 1988):

The mission statement is a simply worded, easily understood focus statement of no more than one page. Although writing a mission statement is often a time-

consuming process due to the difficulties in arriving at the specific wording and of reaching consensus on the mission statement, it is a crucial step in the strategic planning process. The statement is crucial because it serves as a guide for all that follows. In other words, all strategic goals, objectives, and action plans should support this mission, and they certainly cannot conflict with it in any way. (Herman, 1989)

It is my contention that the mission acts as a guiding principle for what occurs on a day-to-day basis in any school. Moreover, like Herman (1989), I argue that it is the principal who yields the most influence over (a) what the mission will be and (b) how the mission is implemented, as researchers have found that the way a principal organizes the school around a particular mission is critical to the success of its educational programs (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996).

In general, studying school mission is not a new phenomenon in the literature. As noted by Wrye (1988), “much of the literature on public school effectiveness written in the past few years states that an effective school, among other things, needs to have a defined and clearly understood mission” (p. 24). Researchers have studied how a school’s mission impacts everything from minority students (see Peabody Journal of Education, 1989), to curricular decisions (Glasser, 1992), school reform efforts (Fruchter, 1989; Lewis, 1989; Slavin, 1989), at-risk students (Bryk & Thum, 1989), and everything else in-between. It is important to note here that in each instance, school mission is the primary independent variable and the studies investigated its effect(s) on the various dependent variables. Results from these studies showed that the way that schools are organized around a mission have a tremendous impact on the participants in the educational enterprise.

The second aspect of school context used in the analysis presented in this paper is principal leadership. Usually the principal, as leader of the school, has a tremendous influence on the school’s mission. From a theoretical standpoint, the literature has much to say about this, with most of the articles appearing in the bulletin of the National Association for Secondary School Principals. A number of empirical studies found that principals in effective, urban elementary schools impact schools directly through organizational beliefs as they develop a clear school mission, including the maintenance of high standards for teachers and students (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986a; 1986b). Other studies examine principal influence in terms of curriculum, faculty and staff hirings, student tracking, and student engagement and achievement (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Armenta &

Reno, 1997; Brown & Irby, 1998; Delaney, 1997; Garubo & Rothstein, 1998; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Heck, 1998; Johnson, 1996; McCarthy, 1998; McEwan, 1998; Murray, 1996).

In this paper, however, I discuss that in spite of individual differences between the principals at Highlands Academy and Jordan Elementary – in terms of race, socio-economic status, and gender – they are actually quite similar in terms of the way they “principal” and the power each has within their school buildings. In essence, through their leadership skills, they have created environments where they control much of what happens in the building and the classrooms within, as well as a measurable amount of influence over teachers and students.

### Teacher Conduct

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies where the researcher observes teacher conduct and qualitatively analyzes its effects on the students in the classroom. Examples include Barr and Dreeben (1983), Carroll (1963a; 1985), Jackson (1968), and Smyth (1985). In these studies, researchers report substantive effects of teacher conduct on a particular student outcome, adding to our understanding that teachers *do* indeed make a difference. In fact, qualitative researchers have found some success observing teachers in various settings and analyzing their conduct (Green, Harker, & Golden, 1987, LeCompte & Ginsburg, 1987, Kyle, 1987). A number of studies (see, for example, Goodlad, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983; Metz, 1992; Powell, 1990), have also examined the school’s contextual effects on teacher conduct using qualitative methodology.

For the purposes of this paper, I will build on previous work by examining facets of teacher conduct that have not previously been studied, especially in relation to school context. Specifically, I am interested in teacher conduct as it pertains to the ways that they foster moral agency in students. The literature around the idea of fostering moral agency is often couched in articles and books that focus on the moral dimensions of teaching. Examples include Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik (1990), Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen (1993), and Devries and Zan (1994), to name a few. It has been noted (for example, see Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 1999) that teaching is a moral activity. The rationale behind this belief is stated by Hansen (1999):

Studies suggest that teaching is inherently a moral endeavor. Moral matters do not have to be imported into the classroom as if teaching were itself devoid of moral significance. According to the literature, it is not the introduction of an externally defined set of conditions, issues, or actions that determines whether teaching is or is not moral in meaning. Rather, the activity of teaching is itself

saturated with moral significance, and it is so in ways that illuminate both the beneficial and the harmful influence teachers can have on students. (pp. 1-2)

In thinking about how I might account for the ways that teachers foster moral agency, I draw upon the work of Fenstermacher (1999a, 1999b, 1992, 1980), who defines teaching as method and manner. Both of these sub-constructs are related to one another and refer not to a specific behavior or action such as sitting still or not eavesdropping or keeping your hands to yourself, but are “pieces” that make up a teacher’s conduct – with respect to fostering moral agency – in the classroom. Briefly, method refers to the techniques a teacher uses to engage students in learning, in an effort to garner student understanding of a particular topic or mastery of a physical skill. Manner, on the other hand, can be described by examining the characteristics of a teacher that is evidentiary of having noble dispositions (i.e., an aspect of teacher conduct that is part of his or her own disposition).

### **Data and Methods**

The qualitative analysis presented in the next section utilizes data taken from interviews and videotapes of teachers, as well as principal interviews from two schools participating in a study of teacher manner (see Fenstermacher, 1992 for a discussion of manner; see Richardson and Fenstermacher, 1998 for a discussion of the study). Funded by the Spencer Foundation, the purpose of the project is to examine “whether and with what means teachers can undertake the reflective study of their own manner, attending to it in ways that permit its thoughtful connection to instructional method and to their intended results for student learning” (Richardson & Fenstermacher, 1997, p. 3).

#### Data Collection

In the summer of 1997, the co-principal investigators contacted a number of elementary schools with teachers who would be interested in participating in the study. They began with the Riverton School District, looking at schools with diverse student populations that were not already over-committed to other activities. Believing that Afrocentric academies would be an ideal place to study teacher manner, the investigators also contacted schools in the Lake City School District. Eventually, two schools were selected on the basis of interest on the part of the school, the nature of the interest, and an innate sense that working in a particular school would be valuable and productive. This was followed-up with “help wanted” bulletins to various

schools describing the study and requesting teacher participation. We ended up with seven teachers in Highlands Academy and four teachers in Jordan Elementary.<sup>1</sup>

The seven teachers at Highlands Academy all volunteered to participate on the project and are African-American, with three males and four females. They represent a variety of levels and subject matters: we have one kindergarten and one first grade teacher, as well as a number of studies teacher, and a computer teacher. The four teachers at Jordan Elementary volunteered to participate in this study with strong encouragement from the principal to participate in the study. All are White females, and they teach in multi-age classrooms ranging from first through fifth grade. One of the teachers also works with the special education students as there are number of students in the classroom who require extra assistance. Experience among all of the teachers in this study range from 3.5 years to 30 years.

Also included among the participants are the principals at both schools. Dr. Wilson, the principal at Highlands Academy, is a well-known proponent and pioneer of the Black all-male schools movement. He has been a teacher and administrator for over thirty years and is the founder of Highlands Academy. Unfortunately, during data collection, he was on medical leave due to health concerns. The vice-principal, Ms. Dixon, assumed the principal duties at Highlands Academy and is the person whom I interviewed for this particular study. The principal at Jordan Elementary, Ms. Boston, has been in education for almost twenty-five years. Trained as both a special education teacher for emotionally impaired students and an elementary teacher, she spent seven years in the classroom, seven years in staff development, and the rest in administration.

All of the teachers were initially interviewed by project staff to get an idea of their background, the goals they have for themselves as teachers, and for their students. One of the objectives of this interview was to give teachers a chance to express their ideas about teaching and learning, before introducing some of the larger concepts that we were interested in studying, such as teacher manner and school context. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. I conducted a similar initial interview with Ms. Dixon at Highlands Academy and Ms. Boston at Jordan Elementary, trying to gain a sense of their job, their goals for the school (including

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<sup>1</sup> Riverton School District, Lake City School District, Highlands Academy, and Jordan Elementary are pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of the participants working with us on the Manner Project.

teachers and students), their role in the day-to-day functioning of the school and teaching and learning, and their beliefs about (a) students, (b) professional development, (c) moral education, and (d) parental involvement.

After digesting information gleaned from the initial interviews, members of the project staff met with the teachers as a group in each of the schools to engage them in a dialogue around the nature of the inquiry: their thoughts about manner, style, and virtue as they relate to classroom teaching and their particular school environments. With this information in hand, we video taped each of the participating teachers in their classrooms for two to five hours.

Once we captured each teacher on videotape, a second round of one-on-one teacher interviews took place, where a member of the project staff engaged the teacher in observing a videotape of their classroom together, and commenting on particular features related to their manner. These interviews were transcribed and added to our growing collection of data. A coding system was developed for these teacher interviews, as well as school-level and classroom observations. Subsequent group meetings were audio-taped as well. All analyses presented here, with the exception of the principal interviews, utilize this coding system through the use of the qualitative data analysis system Ethnograph. Field notes at the school-level were maintained at each of the schools, and intermittent conversational interviews with the principals were conducted; some were audio-taped and transcribed.

### Methods of Analysis

The research design chosen to explore the how principal leadership and school mission influence the moral dimensions of teaching is the multiple case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This design is based on the rationale that understanding complex organizations such as schools requires long-term and close-up examination of practice within bounded social settings. It is important to note that the decision to do more than one case study was not made with the intent to compare the two schools comparatively. The rationale for drawing multiple case studies was that one case provides an interpretive context for the others. As Smith, et al. (1994) note:

A case study researcher typically immerses [himself] in a single site and tries to understand everything there is to know about it. Holistic understanding, however, sometimes produces holistic fallacy. Things unobserved in that setting are often not considered as salient; observed phenomena and events may be mistakenly seen as causal. Seeing two case studies in parallel can alert the...researchers of features taken for granted or overlooked in one. (p. 5)

For example, in Highlands Academy, the influence of Afrocentrism may be so pervasive that an observer spending extensive time in the school may take it for granted. However, when both Highlands Academy and Jordan Elementary are studied, the importance of the factor in understanding the way that school leadership impacts upon the teacher becomes obvious.

In piecing the case studies together, I reviewed audio-tapes and transcriptions of interviews with the both principals, as well as each of the teachers that participated in the study. I also read over observation and context notes that emerged from each classroom visit. The bulk of the analysis came from watching videotapes of teachers classrooms. To organize the analysis, five general categories were used while watching the videotapes: (1) constructing classroom communities, (2) didactic instruction and/or curriculum, (3) setting an environment, task, or activity for students to learn a virtue, (4) visual displays with moral content, and (5) spontaneous interjections of moral commentary into on-going activity. These particular features were chosen from three different sources that include Fenstermacher (1999), Richardson and Fallona (1999), and Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen (1993), as they represent how a teachers' conduct is (a) influenced by school mission and principal leadership and (b) influential in the moral development of students.<sup>2</sup> Using a hermeneutic approach, wherein actions are mediated and defined from the actor's point of view (Erickson, 1986), I set out to explore how principal leadership and school mission influenced teacher conduct in the classroom.

### **Case Study #1: Dr. Wilson, Afrocentricity, and the Impact on Teacher Conduct**

#### What the Principal Says

It is clear that Dr. Wilson's Afrocentric mission permeates throughout all of Highlands Academy. Beginning with him, it filters down through his Assistant Principal to the teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. As a result, congruence between principal and teacher around the mission is both paramount and prerequisite to the school's success. Ensuring this congruence begins during the interview process, where prospective teachers are asked a battery of questions such as (taken from Interview with Ms. Dixon, 7/2/98):

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<sup>2</sup> In the process of putting together a proposal for another iteration of The Teacher Manner Project, a list of categories of moral activity in teaching was generated. This list included categories from Fenstermacher (1999), Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen (1993); Richardson & Fallona (1999), and Tom (1984). Given the underlying purpose of this paper, and with guidance from the co-principal investigators, these five categories were selected as most relevant and useful.

- (1) How do you feel about having an African-centered curriculum? How would you be able to implement this African-centered curriculum along with whatever subject you have to teach?
- (2) How do you feel about uniforms because our students wear uniforms?
- (3) How do you feel about an all-boys class because some of our classes are all boys?
- (4) How do you feel about attendance? Where did you used to work and what was your attendance record there? Because you know, in order to teach, as far as I'm concerned, you set an example for the students. You want the students to be here everyday, but if you're not going to be here everyday, that's not a good example.

She goes on to say that:

when I have interviews with potential staff members, the first thing I do is show them our brochure, you know, which indicates what our pledge is, our mission, you know, everything about us. So, you look at this and you kind of read over this and before we even get involved into this interview where you have to go step-by-step, make up your mind do you want to be involved in all of these things because it's demanding. You know, it takes a lot of your time and you have to be dedicated and committed to it. You can't just say that I'm working to get a paycheck because that's not what this is about. (Interview with Ms. Dixon, 7/2/98)

It seems clear from this description of the interview process that only a select few will meet all the qualifications and expectations to work at Highlands Academy. The process advances in a flow-chart fashion: Ms. Dixon → team interview (union representative, representative from the local school community organization, custodian, plus one other member of the school) → Dr. Wilson. If the potential employee does not pass Ms. Dixon, then prospective teacher is notified "to begin looking for work elsewhere" (Interview with Ms. Dixon, 7/2/98). Teachers are hired *only* if they successfully complete each part of the interview process, meeting the expectations of six different people, some of whom come from different parts of the school system, but all of whom are interested in the success of each student. Therefore, from the outset, teachers (and

their classroom conduct) begin their tenure at Highlands Academy “in line” with the school’s mission.

### What the Teachers Say

The teachers participating in this study all report feeling the same way, as was discussed in the previous paper: they are on a mission to educate young African-Americans and help them succeed not only academically, but socially, and more generally, in life. In this particular analysis, teachers all appear to be “on the same page” with regard to what should be taught, and in some cases, the ways to help ensure that students are “getting the message.” And, where do the *teachers* receive their guidance regarding how to do this? From the ever-present views of Dr. Wilson and Ms. Dixon. As Shawn says in his interview:

That’s always been a philosophy of Dr. Wilson is that he would like to provide the same thing that they have out there, if not better...[and] there’s an agreement [of what should be taught]. But I guess I need to modify that into there’s an understanding of what will be taught here and how it will be taught because of Dr. Wilson’s lead. I don’t think everyone agrees with it. But, again, most of what an Academy – some may disagree with me – I attribute it to Dr. Wilson because he has been a believer from day one that this is an African-centered Academy. We believe in teaching certain goals and certain methods. If you do not agree with that, then this is not the place for you...he has been the monarch of what goes on here at the Academy. And if you don’t agree with his philosophy, he is quick to tell you...find somewhere else to go because he refuses to further the mis-education of our children. He says it’s not going to happen. (Interview with Shawn, 1/16/98)

Sister Souljah expands on this statement in her interview:

And even in terms of our administration, our principal, Dr. Wilson, has some sort of an underdog philosophy himself where he feels like those who are the worst or those people who are discipline problems...like I have no problem with those who never made it in other schools coming to Highlands Academy because it’s a challenge for us to turn that kid around. And in some cases, I think we’ve done that. It doesn’t always work. You won’t have 100%, but the sense that every child can learn, no child is unteachable, everybody has the capacity to do

something to excel...if not in all areas, at least somewhere. And administration has given the concept that you need to work with your students, you need to put the time in, and they don't want us to be just one-dimensional. I think the goal is to make us...continue to make us family even when we try to go back to the norm, which you see out there. The goal still brings it back full circle. (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/21/97)

As does Cheryl in her interview:

But, you know, when like I say, and from the administration, from top-down in terms of this building, you know, there are just certain things Dr. Wilson has certain expectations that this is what this school is all about. I mean, in during your interview process, definitely you're in line in terms of what this school is about, what he wants the children to leave here knowing, what he wants for the children [and] either you agree to that philosophy or you don't. And you're made part of the family, or [not]. (Interview with Cheryl, 11/21/97)

As can be inferred from these statements, Dr. Wilson has offered a standard that all teachers at Highlands Academy must meet. Living up to these expectations is something that teachers are duty-bound to in their every day experiences both in and out of the classroom. While one may assume that such high expectations have a significant impact on their method and manner, it does so only to a certain extent.

In spite of the top-down nature of the leadership that is prevalent at Highlands Academy, it is clear that teachers are able to develop their own teaching method and manner. The *quid pro quo* is that a teacher's method and manner must stay within the parameters previously set by both Dr. Wilson and Ms. Dixon. For example, most of the teachers view themselves as role models for their students. As Shawn and Sister Souljah discuss in their interviews:

What would I like to be? (Sigh) An example. An example/role model, I suppose...I'm continually showing them that I like what I do. It's just giving them that attention. I'm here from 7:30-8:00 in the morning to 7:30-8:00 at night, you know? I don't put any kid out, you know?...And again it all goes back, I think to...see you care and they're drawn to you. My aims and goal as a teacher is to never stop learning and enjoy what I learn to such a degree that my kids see

it and they share in my enthusiasm. And I think as long as I'm able to accomplish that goal year after year and download that to my kids, that I fulfill my purpose. Because in downloading that enthusiasm, they'll see the importance, they'll see the significance, and hopefully, if not the same area, transfer all of those qualities to whatever it is in life that they decide to do. (Interview with Shawn, 1/16/98)

I would love to be a role model. I would love to be – and I think I am in a sense without trying to – people...you know, your students spend a lot of time with you. All of this time...even more time oftentimes than they do with their parents...their own family. And they look up to you. They emulate you. Things that you do, they're trying to do. I want them to remember the things I continually stressed as being important. You know, I want them to go away from social studies knowing my Rule Number One...to love your Black self. (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/21/97)

It is clear from these excerpts that both Shawn and Sister Souljah are role models *within certain boundaries*. Like them, each of the teachers participating in the study was able to articulate their own goals and desires for each of their students, but with caveats along the way. As Sister Souljah says in her interview:

I think it [teaching method] is individual. And it has to be based on people's training and people's own personalities...I think it's more of an agreement about what to teach because it's laid down...the curriculum or where you should be for your particular grade level and things that we have to have...or we have to give the students for tests. It's all uniform. Pretty much everybody should be doing the same thing. (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/21/97)

Cheryl agrees with Sister Souljah when she says, "I mean, there is an agreement of what to teach, but your methodology may be different" (Interview with Cheryl, 11/21/97), while Nandi takes a more staunch stance to the possible reasons behind having uniformity in each classroom:

In any Afrocentric situation, in ANY situation where you're trying to work on certain ideals that you want the entire student body to embrace, then we all have to be on one chord, we have to all be teaching basically the same kinds of things

in the same kinds of ways...and [that is] certainly happening here. (Interview with Nandi, 11/13/97)

And Coach takes the discussion one step further when he talks about the kind of curricular uniformity that exists:

Exactly...here, we design our own textbooks. We decide what books we want to teach from and they are positive African-American nature compared to someone else or somebody else trying to make a book multicultural...And so I truly feel it's time to get away from that same old bullshit and try something new. Now, even if the something new don't work, that's better than keep doing the same old traditional things that we KNOW will fail. (Interview with Coach, 10/7/97)

As these quotes indicate, teachers are constrained somewhat by both (a) the Afrocentric school mission and (b) curricular decisions based on the mission that were handed down primarily by Dr. Wilson. However, these quotes also show that each teacher is free to develop their own method and manner to implement said curriculum and build upon the Afrocentric nature of the school. Perhaps Baba X states it best in his interview, "Yes, [we share pedagogies]<sup>3</sup>, but we don't share methodologies...even though there is pedagogical agreement and mission agreement, there is not a methodological agreement. How to make that happen isn't something that has been jelled" (Interview with Baba X, 11/13/97).

That said, there is one area that *all* teachers are on the same page and share similar method and manner: behavioral issues. As one talks with all of the teachers in the study, it is very clear that there are certain standards of behavior that students must adhere to, and that each teacher at Highlands Academy is there to ensure proper enforcement:

I think there's a pretty good understanding of [how students should behave]. I think that we [the teachers] are all in unison, you know, when we say that we want the discipline enforced...I think everyone's on the same accord. We even back each other up in that sense... (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/21/97)

However, there are teachers who perceive the situation quite differently, as the ways that

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<sup>3</sup> As Baba X states in his interview, "Pedagogy is the Africanness of basis of being grounded in your own people" (Interview with Baba X, 11/13/97). In other words, it is who you are and where you come from that makes up your pedagogy. This is very different from the way in which I have chosen to define teacher pedagogy in terms of method and manner.

behavior is enforced is somewhat like the way the curriculum is implemented: teachers are free to develop their own method and manner and this can create some problems. In other words, while all teachers believe that there are certain standards for behavior at Highlands Academy, the methods used to enforce the rules vary from teacher to teacher:

Correct. Yeah. Correct. [There is agreement among teachers about what behaviors are acceptable.] Although even here in terms of...our uniqueness just always be like that...what's acceptable. And kids would go from one teacher's room and come to my room and know that the rules have changed. And not only know that, but act accordingly to the terms without nothing being said...The problem here is systems across the board. A lot of teachers until now say the kids can to this and that and that presents a problem. And then even in certain classrooms. Umm...a kid could make the same violation but one kid is treated differently than the other. And kids...kids know unfair treatment better than we do... (Interview with Coach, 10/7/97)

Sister Souljah also feels that there is some work to be done in the area of behavior, when she says, "Okay, the nature of Highlands Academy is very, very family-like...It's disciplined, but it needs some work in that area. Umm...I'm not all for a boot camp sort of concept, but... But I feel there are places, or things that we still could do. Or places we could go." (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/21/97).

Having presented what teachers said in their interviews about their method and manner, as it is influenced by the school mission and principal leadership, the next section presents a discussion around teacher videotapes. The underlying purpose here is to see if the congruence between conduct and context presented in the previous paper is exemplified in teachers' day-to-day interactions with students.

### What the Teachers Do

When watching videotapes of the teachers in their classrooms, one begins to get a clearer sense of what the teachers are talking about in their interviews when discussing the influence that Dr. Wilson and Ms. Dixson have at Highlands Academy. From the Kindergarten class, all the way through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, teachers have designed their classrooms, their methods, and their manner to fit the expectations set for them.

Visual displays and constructing classroom communities. As one walks into any of the classrooms that we videotaped, the first thing that an observer would notice is the physical layout of the room. In all but two of the classrooms, teachers had desks arranged in a way that would foster a positive classroom community. The desks were facing each other, so students could see each one another's faces, as opposed to the back of their heads. The second thing an observer would notice is the visual displays around the room. Each classroom videotaped has at least one visual display with moral content on the wall. Most popular among the teachers in this study were pictures of prominent African-Americans, such as Nat Turner, Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, and of course Malcolm X. In addition to these pictures were posted a list of the Nguzo Saba,<sup>4</sup> reminding students of the principles that they should be striving for in their everyday lives. Teachers also had bulletin boards designed exclusively to "show off" student work, posters of the African continent, as well as African flags hanging above their doors or on their desks. These visual displays with moral content provide a constant reminder to the students about (1) where they are – Highlands Academy, (2) where they came from – their Black ancestors who "paved the way" for them, and (3) where they can go – using these visual displays as motivation to become whatever they want to be in the future.

Activities, tasks, and didactic instruction. Another way that the teachers are influenced in their classrooms is that the activities they design implicitly teach students a virtue. One such activity includes a recitation of the school pledge every morning prior to the daily announcements. This pledge<sup>5</sup> provides the basis for what is to follow during the school day. For example, in Baba X's classroom, following the pledge, he has his students stand in a circle, hold hands, and perform what is called Harambe. This "ritual" pays homage to all ancestors that came before, including Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. After paying respects to the ancestors, each student is required to say who they are thankful for or who they love, and after doing so, the entire group lifts up their hands and says, "Harambe." Once each student has had an opportunity to pay respects, the entire group says "Harambe" seven times,

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<sup>4</sup> These African-centered principles include: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith).

<sup>5</sup> The Highlands Academy pledge is as follows: "We at Highlands Academy will strive for excellence in our quest to be the best. We'll rise above every challenge with our heads held high. We'll always keep the faith when others say die. March on til' victory is ours. AMANDELA!!"

followed by a rendition of “Lift Every Voice.” Another example is in Nandi’s classroom, where each morning, on the chalkboard, she has a section devoted to the “Fruit of the Spirit.” Under this she will put a different daily devotional, like “Love and you shall be loved” and “Love understands and love waits.” She then has her students write these ten times each in their notebooks. She also has students read these statements aloud as a class, adding a comment that “that’s a real poignant message and a needed message for all of you. As you grow older you need to take that in and understand it as best as you can” (Videotape of Nandi, 2/18/98, 1:23:15).

Another activity that Cheryl used was to have students “Write a paragraph about the stresses of being a student. Write three constructive ways to deal with the stress.” This activity calls on students to look inside themselves, draw on their experiences, and find ways to deal with the stresses of life in a constructive way. Students shared their ideas with one another as a group. Shawn also used directed activities such as debates around topics such as lying, responsibility, and consequences of actions – all couched in relevant current events topics occurring in Lake City – to teach them the importance of having an informed opinion, as well as “opening up your mind to possibilities to make educated decisions on how to handle different situations” (Videotape of Shawn, 2/19/98, 1:18:10).

Spontaneous interjection. Perhaps the largest amount of evidence of how mission and leadership shape conduct comes in the form of spontaneous interjections of moral commentary into an on-going activity. These comments tend to focus on turning these students into scholars, preparing them for life in Black America, and helping them to succeed on multiple levels; all are part of the underlying mission set forth and espoused by Dr. Watson and Ms. Dixon.

Many interjections occur when a student shouts out an answer or tries to give a student who is “on the spot” the answer. This kind of talk occurs as early as Kindergarten, as Kai says, “Did I call on you? Is your name [Mary]? You didn’t give her a chance to think” (Videotape of Kai, 1/28/98, :03) and “You cannot copy...think of your own word. He used his brain, you use yours. You’re only cheating yourself” (Videotape of Kai, 1/28/98, 26:45). Baba X says something similar when he makes comments such as “...your trying to sneak in the back door for free” or “don’t give her the fish” or “it’s her brain, give her a chance to think and answer the question” (Videotape of Baba X, 1/27/98, 14:42/17:22/48:55).

Other interjections usually come in the form of either praise or reprimand around an incident or a behavior that a student engaged in. In praising students, Kai makes comments such

as, “I like the way [name of student] is working” or “I like the way [name of student] came in quietly” (Videotape of Kai, 1/28/98, 16:20/1:18:40). Baba X tells his students, “I’m glad to see you put your best foot forward” or “You’re growing up...I’m so proud of you” (Videotape of Baba X, 1/27/98, 33:40/1:14:10). This kind of praise extends all the way to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, where Nandi tells one student, “You’re really, really growing, Marla. You are really growing. You are beginning to write and let Marla come through. I’m very pleased” (Videotape of Nandi, 2/19/98, 34:30). However, for all the praise that teachers give their students, they also are quick to reprimand. For example, Kai says, “That’s not a nice thing to say, especially if you don’t mean it” (Videotape of Kai, 1/28/98, 4:26), while Baba X says “You broke it...you did it on purpose. I used to do it and that’s how I know you are fibbin’...don’t try it again; I know that game” (Videotape of Baba X, 1/27/98, 1:08:17). Even in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Cheryl has to reprimand her students when she says, “...the questions I’m being asked indicate to me that you’re not reading carefully and that many of you didn’t study [for this quiz]” (Videotape of Cheryl, 2/18/98, 1:10:00). Nandi does as well, “What is it that I’m not getting across that [you’re] not understanding?...Many of you are listening, but not *hearing* what I’m saying” (Videotape of Nandi, 2/19/98, 7:40).

Beyond praise and reprimand, many of the teachers at Highlands Academy interject with guidance and/or advice. Nandi tells her students, “You need to have the self-motivation to do without having limits placed upon you...it’s ne-cess-ary for Black folk to do their best *all* the time in this society” (Videotape of Nandi, 2/19/98, 39:04). She also tells them, “Character building comes from experiences, whether they be good or bad. Whatever happens in your life helps to build your character. And that’s why we want you to put forth your best effort because it builds you up to be the kind of person and student we want you to be” (Videotape of Nandi, 2/19/98, 41:45). Sister Souljah also provides words of wisdom to her students, “It’s okay to have fun during winter break – I know I’m going to – but you must stay focused. Procrastination is an enemy of scholars. Do not put off tomorrow what you can do today” (Videotape of Sister Souljah, 2/18/98, 49:00).

### Summary

The excerpts from the videotapes that were presented here begin to paint a better understanding of how teachers are indeed influenced by the context that surrounds them at

Highlands Academy. All that they do and say in their classrooms is focused on the Afrocentric mission of the school and the expectations set for them by both Dr. Wilson and Ms. Dixon.

At first glance, Highlands Academy has a regimented system. Starting with the interview process to become a teacher at the school to the uniformity among teachers regarding academics and behavior, there are certain standards and rules that every member of the Academy must follow, teachers and students alike. In spite of this, teachers are given some freedom to develop a method and manner that they feel comfortable with and that works for them as they try to meet the standards set forth by Dr. Wilson.

The bottom line is that teachers want their students to succeed. Every child that walks through the doors ought to “graduate” from Highlands Academy with the tools needed to succeed at the next level and in life. Dr. Wilson accomplishes this through the Afrocentric mission that guides the school. And teachers embrace this mission whole-heartedly, shaping their method and manner to help fulfill their roles in the enterprise:

And I’m a firm believer in the only way you’re going to understand where you’re going is to learn where you came from. Learn the foundations of whatever you’re dealing with and that will better help you plot a future for other situations.

(Interview with Shawn, 1/16/98)

However, even with the rigorous application and interview process at Highlands Academy, a few teachers may “slip through the cracks” and have some difficulty adjusting to the expectations and norms at the school. For example, as Ms. Dixon described in one of her interviews:

...We’ve had a couple of new teachers that come into our building and that’s where I’ve had to spend a lot of time with them is on classroom management. Don’t you dare try to continue a lesson and three kids are over there doing whatever they want and four are over here doing whatever they want. And yet you think this is such a great lesson...I mean, I’ve walked in on a couple of classes and it’s like, ‘Oh, no! I mean, nobody really didn’t tell you that you don’t continue with your lesson. You say ‘STOP.’ You know, we’re going to stop everything until everybody’s focused.’” (Interview with Ms. Dixon, 7/2/98)

As one might infer, everything at Highlands Academy has to be done a certain way, under certain expectations and guidelines, including classroom management. Observations of the

seven classrooms that we studied at Highlands Academy find students seated in orderly rows, facing each other or the teacher, and the teacher is always the center of attention.

Nevertheless, what occurs within the building must be having its intended positive effect because, “a lot of people are impressed when they come into this school. Particularly visitors from outside the city, like we may have people from Pittsburgh or what have you come and see and they’re just like, “Wow! We really like [what you’re doing here]” (Interview with Sister Souljah, 11/13/97).

Perhaps Baba X puts it best when he says:

We are here to upgrade the standard of excellence in African-American students. We are here to elevate the young child from the scholar that he is to the working productive citizen that we hope him to be, because after all, education is designed to take an infant and make him into a productive citizen in 12 years or less.

(Interview with Baba X, 11/13/97)

And Dr. Wilson, along with the teachers, has found a formula that works. It may not work for every teacher or every school, but judging by the success documented in the previous paper, it must be working.

## **Case Study #2: Ms. Boston, T.E.A.M., and the Impact on Teacher Conduct**

### What the Principal Says, What the Teachers Say

Like Highlands Academy, where teachers are expected to tailor their method and manner to fit the mission “prescribed” by Dr. Wilson, teachers at Jordan Elementary face a similar situation. Recall from the previous paper that a fair amount of congruence exists between Ms. Boston and the four teachers participating in this study regarding the school mission (T.E.A.M.) and its implementation. In fact, each of the teachers we interviewed mentioned how Ms. Boston came in and turned the school around:

appropriately demand[ing] that kids will, you know, behave appropriately, things will not be tolerated, you know?...And there’s always issues and stuff, you know, they do, but to build a team within Jordan Elementary so we’re working together. So, we see them as all our kids. But I think that’s what she worked towards and I think a lot of teachers do feel like that. (Interview with Hannah, 10/3/97)

Congruence, however, does not always translate into what would be deemed “appropriate” conduct on the part of teachers. This would inevitably lead to the question of whether teacher conduct is constrained as a result of the T.E.A.M. mission and the way(s) that Ms. Boston has implemented it.

Ms. Boston stated in her second interview:

[What’s] really important to me is that every person feel included. And that’s my responsibility. That’s nobody else’s responsibility but mine and I set the tone for that. I’m the one who sets the tone of this building. When you walk in this building, it’s a reflection of me...AND everybody else, but me mostly. Because things are the way they are because of things that I feel are important. (Interview with Ms. Boston, 4/22/98)

It is clear from both this statement, and others made in previous interviews, that Ms. Boston has certain ideas regarding the ways that *her* school should be organized, as well as methods she feels teachers should use in exploring material with students. She also has “appropriately demanded” that teachers use certain methods and programs. For example, she chose a particular reading and mathematics program that she wanted teachers to use. These programs require teachers to present material using specific methods; methods teachers may not be comfortable or facile with. However, because the request is coming from “up above,” teachers may not have much of a choice in the matter. As a result, the question remains as to how a teacher’s method and manner is impacted by Ms. Boston’s “control” over certain aspects of the school.

As one examines the data regarding the perceived relationship between principal leadership and teacher conduct at Jordan Elementary, there are five “themes” that emerge. They include: (1) changing pedagogy, (2) having a presence, (3) how things should be, (4) teaching through the life skills, and (5) teach however you want, but teach what I say. While these themes may not make much sense at the moment, it is hoped that the evidence presented in the following sections will help shed some light around what is meant. These themes are used to organize the remainder of this case study.

Theme #1: Changing pedagogy. In her very first interview, Ms. Boston made a very important observation regarding teachers; one that guides the way she views her colleagues:

Teachers are pretty private people, I think, in that when you enter into their domain, um, sometimes it’s...it can be viewed as being a time when they need to

change what might be a typical, a normal behavior because it's one of the most isolating, I think, professions that a person can be in. That you have the, um, opportunity to walk into a room with four doors, shut the door, be with 25 other people, be in total control all day long...So, I mean, one of the things that we struggle with and that, uh, I try real hard is to get people to open the door and to realize that there has to be that kind of sharing...We have teachers on other levels of that continuum, ya know, some are still pretty much to themselves, and although they're wonderful team players, they are more productive as individuals." (Interview with Ms. Boston, 3/26/98)

In this one brief statement, Ms. Boston's leadership style is quite apparent, and the implications for teacher method and manner are clear. Ms. Boston is trying to change the ways that teachers conduct their classrooms by bringing them out more into the T.E.A.M. environment. While she says that it is okay for teachers to be on different levels of the teaching scale, she also makes it quite clear that she wants teachers to be more open with their work, to be willing to share with others, and basically share her idea that good ideas emerge from collaboration. As a result, there are teaming situations at the school, and multiple grade levels in each classroom that *require* collaboration among teachers.

This raises the question as to whether teachers that come to work for Ms. Boston at Jordan Elementary are prepared to enter this kind of environment. It is possible that not all teachers – especially the “old timers” – feel comfortable sharing their ideas. They might view what they do in their classrooms as “intellectual property,” to be implemented by nobody else but themselves, and certainly not to be disseminated to an entire faculty. Moreover, novice teachers may not be as comfortable being under the watchful eye of a teaming teacher, especially when they are trying to develop their own method and manner.

As far as the four teachers participating in this study (two teams of two), this does not appear to be the case. They have managed to work together to find a way that will accommodate the other's style. For example, Darlene and Margaret spent hours “sit[ting] out on a deck...plan[ning]” (Interview with Margaret, 10/21/97). In the end, they divvied up most of what needs to be covered, with Darlene focusing on mathematics, Margaret on science, and both doing reading. In addition, Margaret notes that sharing vital information about students and the various methods that can be used to reach the diverse population that exists at the school are

important for success. Similarly, Letti and Hannah spent a lot of time planning and finding ways to individualize student learning. As Hannah states in her interview, it is something they both enjoy as “[things are] better now teaming with Letti because then we are all in this...so, I think probably since we’ve been teaming that’s a more positive...it’s what we believe in and that’s what we’re doing” (Interview with Hannah, 10/3/97).

Perhaps one of the reasons why there is little dissonance between what Ms. Boston wants and what the teachers do is very much in sync with regard to the goals for the students. Darlene puts it best as she says:

It’s always been my hope to turn children into...or to help them grow toward independent learners who enjoyed learning so that they have that intrinsic pride...the other thing I like to do is make sure that every child in the room feels responsible for the learning for everybody else. Not that they have to teach them, but that they have to set up an environment and be a part of a community that allows children to be comfortable in making the mistakes you have to make when you take the risks you have to take. (Interview with Darlene, 10/20/97)

Her statement is representative of what all the teachers at Jordan Elementary want: students who are self-reliant, excited about learning, good decision makers, and follow the life skills as a guideline for life. Because they all share the same goals and Ms. Boston allows teachers some latitude, they do not necessarily have to change their method and manner. But therein lies the catch: *they all share the same goals*. The question remains as to what happens when teachers do not share the same goals as the principal in terms of what is best for the school and the student? Perhaps Letti alludes to the solution in her interview:

She [Ms. Boston] came in and we had organized staff meetings, we had agendas, we had books like this that told us all of the procedures for the year, everything had an order, everything had a procedure...everyone knew what was going on, we were all on the same page...we all loved Ms. Boston in different ways and for different reasons. Some people really found it too harsh because they were used to the relaxed...and they felt it was, you know, babysitting coming in...but people like it or don’t on different levels. And I think some people probably thought it was like an invasion because they’d been here for so long, done things their own

way, and it was all of a sudden [a really big adjustment]. (Interview with Letti, 10/24/97)

She goes on to note that:

Our behavior is expected to be a certain way. I mean, we...there are certain things that...she will definitely let you know if you are doing something that she feels is not professional or, as a staff, if we are doing something that she feels isn't in the best interest of the kids. (Interview with Letti, 10/24/97)

Given this, the logical consequence would be that the teacher(s) would be placed in an unenviable position of adjusting his or her method and manner to fit Ms. Boston's expectations or find a more suitable school to work.

An interesting issue that emerged from the data is that it might not be the principal who is the instigator for changes in method and manner, but the teachers themselves. Darlene discussed this briefly in her interview:

And we had a huge fight last year in our building about new teachers wanting to try something new and they asked me what I thought and I told them, 'I'm finally 47. I can say what I think and I can stick with it and I'm not going to back down just because you're not going to like me.' And boy did they not like me! It was real hard. They were pushing me to move away from Project Read, which was beginning to make a world of difference for our kids. And one day a week the teacher would teach that and then three days a week the kids would be fruit basket upset and the kids who seemed to learn in this way would go to you and get something different and the kids that...and then these kids would be getting some Project Read but from somebody else...that's one of the problems. We keep getting new people in and they fight what we know from experience and there's nothing you can do but back off and let them... (Interview with Darlene, 6/20/98)

Likewise, Hannah noted in her interview that:

I think the problem Letti and I face...is we tend to be very...we jump into things and we...I don't think that's real positive...I think some teachers are 'That's great! Wonderful! We love it!'...[but] we're the ones who are going to question some things sometimes and I know that kind of builds a problem [with other teachers]. (Interview with Hannah, 10/3/97)

Based on these two quotes, it appears that the problems that occur at Jordan Elementary are not necessarily a direct result of Ms. Boston, but internal conflict among novice and veteran teachers or the enthusiastic, “gung-ho” teachers and those who are not so eager to try new things.

Theme #2: Having a presence. Ms. Boston has set some fairly strict goals for herself as the principal:

I’m in and out of every room almost every day. My goal is every room every day. Do I do it? I’d say I do it probably nine days out of every ten that I’m able to do that...When I first came, that was very threatening, that I’d walk in the room and people would stop teaching and look at me. And I would say, ‘No I don’t want anything.’ I mean if I...now it’s to the point where if I don’t come in, they wonder what’s wrong, because I try to check in, I give an eye contact to the teacher so that if he or she needs me, that could be a time where they could let me know they need to see me later...it allows me to get a sense of what’s going on. It’s very helpful in my role as being, um, just another person here and, that’s what I want to be considered, uh, just a part of the team, and that it allows me to get a sense of what’s happening.” (Interview with Ms. Boston, 3/26/98)

After a period of transition, where teachers needed time to get used to her style of “principaling,” Ms. Boston says that now, when she does not come to visit, teachers wonder what is wrong. Going into every room every day is clearly not something that the teachers were used to, but did not have much of a choice except get used to it, because this is how it was going to be with Ms. Boston. It is unclear, however, from the teachers we spoke to, whether this had a significant impact on their conduct. However, one might speculate that as a teacher, seeing your principal notches the anxiety up a little (and for some, a lot) and both method and manner may change as a result.

Theme #3: How things should be. It is clear that Ms. Boston thinks very highly of her faculty and staff, as she says:

This is a very high functioning, well functioning staff. It is amazing the talent and the abilities that these people have as individuals. And, my goal when I came here was to say let’s take all these individuals and put us all together. And I think that the...the progress we’ve made is that, there isn’t isolation anymore. I don’t think there’s a person on this staff that would tell you they didn’t have somebody

or some buddies that they could speak to if they needed some assistance...And, um, I think that's been a tremendous difference in the four years that [I've been here]. (Interview with Ms. Boston, 3/26/98)

Again, here is an example of the goals that Ms. Boston set out for the school and if teachers did not like it, they left. Rather than change their method and manner, these teachers decided to find a place that better fit them. Ms. Boston's goal(s) may have impacted the teachers there in that they were faced with a dilemma: change the way I approach teaching or be unhappy and unsuccessful at Jordan Elementary. While evidence regarding this may be scarce, teachers (such as Margaret) were skeptical at first, but later bought into it. As she said on two different occasions:

It's the hardest working staff I've ever been with. The hardest working group of people I've ever been with regardless of jobs I've had. It takes its toll on people, and just like a family, you get short with each other where I don't think in other professional areas you would have that problem. But because we've got such a connection, it's okay to snap at you this morning. And then go back and say I'm really sorry...I think the kids benefit then from that because there's communication happening between teachers...AMONG teachers. We're able to intimately talk about students, curriculum, learning styles. That normally wouldn't happen. (Interview with Margaret, 10/21/97)

I think that I have the luxury of working in a building where there is a common thread, uh, and hands down I'd say every single staff member has high expectations for these students...It's expected no matter where they go: the lunchroom, coming in, classroom, music. There is also a common thread about expectations. You don't use put downs. You don't say mean things. You don't manipulate or hurt people. I mean, it's just basic. (Interview with Margaret, 3/19/98)

But, the question remains: should teachers really have to "buy into" any system? The common sense answer would be "no." However, if a teacher wants to keep his or her job, the answer might very well be "yes." Like at Highlands Academy, teachers at Jordan Elementary have been placed in a position where Ms. Boston, with her leadership style and vision, has made an

emphatic statement that “this is how it is going to be.” And, for those who did not like it, they either had to change their method and manner or leave.

Theme #4: Teaching through the Life Skills. Life skills are an integral part of the curriculum at Jordan Elementary. Each of the four teachers we talked to, in addition to Ms. Boston, emphasize the importance of teaching the life skills every day, in every subject:

Many teachers on the staff, and I couldn't tell you a number, have done training through a couple of things, integrated thematic instruction and through multiple intelligences and different ways that kids learn and different ways that you can work with kids. Well, Susan Kovalic talks about these life skills that kids need. And we talk about what are those things? I mean, what does it mean to have integrity? What does it mean to be competent? What does it mean? What does it look like? What does it sound like?...As smart as you might be, as dumb as you might be, whatever it is, if you're gonna survive in this world, there's certain things that are gonna have to be a part of you, and you have to learn these things...Now some teachers don't do anything with it. They really don't, and that's their choice. It's not something the whole building has adopted to say, this is the way we're gonna do it. But more kids than not...they get the language so they do hear and they see it, and if they don't get it this year, they'll get it the next year.” However, she goes on to say that teachers not doing life skills, “might be doing the same things, but they're not labeling it those names. I think in order for kids to behave as well as they behave and to get along with each other as long as they...as well as they do overall, there has to be something going on in each room. It may not...not all teachers are comfortable with the exact same thing. And there's advantages to having everybody use the same language...So they may not use the same words but they're teaching the basic theme.” (Interview with Ms. Boston, 3/26/98)

It appears that teachers are given some leeway, in that they do not necessarily have to do the Life Skills. But, it *is* clear that teachers should be doing something very related in their classrooms. In other words, the language does not have to be the same, but theme does. Most teachers probably tend to cover this kind of material regardless, through their everyday interactions with students, but a special emphasis has been made by Ms. Boston that mandates that these kinds of

discussions/topics take place in each classroom. Teachers uncomfortable with this kind of talk do not have much of a choice; it's something that each student should be receiving.

Teachers seem to agree on this point. As Margaret says:

I think what we've been working with in the lifelong guides and life skills really exemplify what we wish all people could have because I don't feel that they are gender specific traits or ethnic specific traits...And we tell the kids, 'these are for life!' And these are life. (Interview with Margaret, 10/21/97)

Darlene "seconds" this in her interview:

We taught all of those [life skills] at the beginning of the year, but they are not all learned. So, what we're doing is focusing on two each week. Umm...in our community circle which is the way we end our day, the last half-hour of the day with all 40 students and all four adults working together toward a common goal of which involves the building of community. We chose two of the life skills that they want to focus on this week and we brainstormed, 'What does it feel like?' And, what are they?...And then we can better focus on that now that we have a better understanding of what it is. (Interview with Darlene, 10/20/97)

It is clear that the life skills are a critical part of the curriculum at Jordan Elementary. Teachers have embraced this as an important, and critical, part of what should be taking place in their classrooms and make a conscious effort to explicitly teach this every day.

Theme #5: Teach however you want, but teach what I say. Ms. Boston is not out to purposely try to change a teacher's method and manner. She says that:

What I try to do is allow people to do almost anything and encourage them to do almost anything...I think that with teachers, what I try to do is say, 'however you want to teach the curriculum.'...[but] if they're not covering the curriculum as prescribed by the [Riverton] Public Schools, which means if they're not fulfilling what kids need to know or have exposure to at any given grade level, then I think that's my responsibility to be sure that happens. How you teach it, in some ways is mandated by the district. There's certain textbooks, there's certain books that they need...But even if somebody wanted to substitute that, I would be open to that. For example, we adopted a new math program. And if in everyday math, the way they teach geometry is not as good as you think it is in the program, then

I would feel comfortable with someone saying to me, ‘Do you mind if I just pull this out and put this in?’ Absolutely. If it’s a better way to teach it and you feel more comfortable with it, odds are kids are gonna learn it better. But, it’s rare, I mean, teachers know that that’s their responsibility and, and I don’t have anyone on staff that does not fulfill that responsibility. I’ve had it before, and had to deal with it, but at this point...I mean, when I first came on board we’ve lost teachers since I’ve come, believe me. They don’t...I mean, if you don’t want to deal with my style and my expectations then I think you need to leave. (Interview with Ms. Boston, 3/26/98)

However, there are certain things that are expected of teachers: a prescribed curriculum (mostly by the district), as well as Life Skills, new Math program, and new Reading (ITI), all endorsed heavily by Ms. Boston. It is the case that all teachers are required to work within some guidelines, regardless of where and what they teach. However, it is clear at Jordan Elementary that you will also have to work within the boundaries and expectations set forth by Ms. Boston.

Some teachers did have some difficulty adjusting; Margaret and Darlene especially. First with reading:

...and I’ve had some real...I’ve had real difficult discussion sometimes with other[s]...where they say ‘I teach whole language and I teach it to my whole class.’ Okay, that’s how YOU teach, but that’s not how these kids learn. You might have small group of kids who read...who learn to read that way. But you need to be able to pull a linguistics way of teaching, you need to be able to know how to teach through a phonetic way of teaching. (Interview with Margaret, 10/21/97)

Then with mathematics:

It’s called Everyday Mathematics and Darlene and I had piloted for three years a different program for the district that we really loved and we saw the kids using it and talking math. And so, I admit my nose was out of joint when they went with the other program that was more expensive in consumables and I thought, ‘Wait a second, we have no money! How can you guys do this?! (Interview with Margaret, 10/21/97)

As soon as they gave us Math Their Way, it became Math Her Way, Math Your Way, Math This Way. And when they came to me it was Math Anyway because I had kids with all kinds of skills and they weren't all the same. (Interview with Darlene, 6/30/98)

While the programs that have been implemented (primarily by Ms. Boston) may not sit well with all of the teachers, it is something that many of them have been forced into using. In a time where state tests are becoming the gauge by which teachers and principals are judged, it seems as though the principal has the upper-hand in what kinds of programs might be best suited for his or her school, regardless of how teachers might be affected by them.

### What the Teachers Do

As is the case at Highlands Academy, the relationship between conduct and context is best understood through viewing videotapes of the teachers in their classrooms. Within each of the four teachers' classrooms, there is consistent evidence pointing to the influence that Ms. Boston has had on their thinking and approaches toward teaching, as all of them have designed their classrooms, methods, and manner to fit the expectations set for them.

Visual displays and constructing classroom communities. As one walks into any of the classrooms that we videotaped, the first thing that an observer would notice is the physical layout of the room. In all of the classrooms, teachers had desks arranged in a way that would foster a positive classroom community. The desks were organized in clusters of four, with two desks on one side facing two desks on the other. This kind of set-up allows for students to collaborate, share ideas, work through problems together, and most importantly, learn the values of responsibility, respect, and resourceful. In fact, in Margaret's classroom, she calls each cluster a "pride," adding another dimension to the idea of having pride in one's work and one's group.

The second thing an observer would notice is the visual displays around the room. Each classroom videotaped has posters, one for each of the lifeskills. These posters have a bold heading listing the lifeskill at the top of the page, a definition of what the skill is at the bottom, and sandwiched in-between is a picture that represents the particular skill. The pictures are colored in by the students, laminated, and posted around the room as a constant reminder of the importance of incorporating each skill into one's life. In addition to these posters, Margaret has dedicated an entire chalkboard to the idea of community. On this board, she has placed in the center the word "community." Around it, in web fashion, she has placed the different kinds of

communities students find themselves in on a daily basis, such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade community. She goes even further by including the kinds of necessary skills needed to function in each community, such as the lifelong guidelines/lifeskills.

Teachers also had bulletin boards designed exclusively to “show off” student work, such as Darlene, who has a bulletin board labeled “Personal Best.” On this board are pieces by each student; pieces that the students feel represent their best work. Visual displays such as those discussed provide a constant reminder to the students about the importance of the lifeskills in their everyday experiences at Jordan Elementary.

Activities, tasks, and didactic instruction. Another way that the teachers are influenced in their classrooms is that the activities they design implicitly teach students a virtue. While students at Jordan Elementary do not have morning rituals similar to those at Highlands Academy, their days are filled with the kinds of tasks and instruction that implicitly teach them not only content, but also the lifeskills.

For example, Margaret works with small groups of five-to-six students around a semi-circle table, teaching grammar, spelling, and reading. While she is working with this small group of students, the others are working on projects under the supervision of student teachers, teaching assistants, and parent volunteers. In one particular lesson, she was teaching the students words that had the “qua” sound in them, such as squander and quality. Instead of just having the students memorize the word, or repeat the sounds back to her like automatons, Margaret provided them with a way to understand the word and its meaning by couching the definition in the form a lifeskill. For example, for quality, she says:

Quality means doing your personal best. When you turn in papers, I’ll say, “Wow! This is best quality work!” But sometimes, you turn work in and I’ll ask, “Is this your personal best?” And you’ll say no. I could’ve asked you instead whether this was your best quality work. So, quality really means doing your personal best. (Videotape of Margaret, 1/22/98, 56:10)

Likewise, for the word squander, she relates a story of spending all your money in one place. Rather than end the discussion there, she interjects with a question, “When you squander your money on toys and junks, are you being responsible?” This brings students back to the lifeskills.

Darlene does similar activities in her classroom, one of the most salient to the discussion here is the community circle. The episode that was videotaped occurred at the end of a school

day, right before students were dismissed to go home. To begin, Darlene had all the students sit around her in a semi-circle. She then began the discussion by talking about some of the concerns that she had heard from other teachers regarding this particular group of students. Darlene asked questions as to what the source of these problems might be and how they, as a group, could come up with ways to alleviate them. The students brainstormed, making sure they did not put anyone down in the process. After some guided discussion, Darlene and the students had devised a way to ensure that the kinds of concerns other teachers were talking about would dissipate. These kinds of tasks, built in to the day-to-day activities, help students to begin to see the moral consequences of their actions.

Spontaneous interjection. Perhaps the largest amount of evidence of how mission and leadership shape conduct comes in the form of spontaneous interjections of moral commentary into an on-going activity. These comments tend to focus on the lifelong guidelines/lifeskills, doing your personal best, and the “three B’s”; all are part of the underlying mission set forth and espoused by Ms. Boston.

Many interjections occur when a student begins to stray and goes off-task. For example, Margaret reminds students with simple comments such as, “Remember, we talked about being on-task?” or “I need you to pay attention” (Videotape of Margaret, 1/22/98, 49:10). Darlene makes similar remarks, “You have to stay focused; don’t let [others] get you off-task. Stay on-task, honey, you’re falling behind” (Videotape of Darlene, 2/4/98, 16:05). These statements are used not only to help students get back on-track, but as subtle reminders that their responsibility in the classroom is to stay focused and learn.

Other interjections usually come in the form of either praise or reprimand around an incident or a behavior that a student engaged in. In praising students, the teachers are quick to point out examples of positive behavior. One of the most common remarks among all four teachers was, “I love how everyone at this table is working so quietly” or “I like how [name of student] is sitting nicely, ready to learn” (For example, see Videotape of Hannah, 1/20/98, 11:11). Because much of the learning that does take place at Jordan Elementary takes place in small groups, teachers are often found roaming around the room, providing assistance. Therefore, when the noise level begins to get a little out-of-hand, or they find students straying, they will quickly “call out” those students who are setting positive examples for the rest of the class. However, for all the praise that teachers give their students, they also are quick to

reprimand. For example, Margaret responds to one student's complaining by saying, "A little less talkin' about it and you'll get it done" (Videotape of Margaret, 1/22/98, 1:10:30)! Hannah remarks to a student, "Can you be real quiet because we're trying to work on a problem and I could really use your support" (Videotape of Hannah, 1/20/98, 29:10). She says to another, "At this point, I think you need to be managed. You're not doing your personal best and I think you need to be managed" (Videotape of Hannah, 10/13/98, 31:25). Darlene interjects with comments like, "When you make a mistake like that, are you really looking [at the problem] or only sort of looking?" and when the student gets it correct, she says, "See what happens when you *really* look" (Videotape of Darlene, 2/4/98, 1:01:45)?!

Beyond praise and reprimand, many of the teachers at Jordan Elementary interject with guidance and/or advice. Usually, this is in the form of doing one's personal best. As part of her lessons with the small reading groups, Margaret asks each student to "show me, using your fingers, how many stamps you should get [in your portfolios] today. Were you doing your personal best and were you on-time today" (Videotape of Margaret, 1/22/98, 1:04:25). When a student is unable to put up two fingers and receive the maximum amount of stamps, she addresses him or her individually, asking what that person could have done better so that next time they can get two stamps. She, along with the other teachers, can also be found pulling students aside in the middle of a class to talk with them about behavioral/attitudinal issues. All four teachers have instances in their videotapes where they have done just that. In each case, the teachers posed similar questions, such as "How can we help with that?" or "What can you do to improve?" or "Is that an example of how you do your personal best? How can you do this?" Very rarely do they say, "I suggest you..." Rather, the teachers rely on the student to come up with the answer(s) and find ways to improve.

### Summary

The circumstances surrounding teachers at Jordan Elementary are somewhat similar to those that the faculty at Highlands Academy face. Much of what they do in their classrooms is based on Ms. Boston's clearly defined mission and her leadership style. On becoming principal and "appropriately demanding" specific changes in the core curriculum, including the incorporating the lifeskills, and having a daily presence in each teacher's classroom, the teachers were faced with some difficult decisions regarding their method and manner. Many left. But, for those that stayed and were willing to make some changes, they were able to find success

under the new system, helping to turn Jordan Elementary into a school that students and teachers could proudly say they attend and work.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conclusions**

One of the most important things to note in this paper is that there are only eleven teachers in this particular study (seven at Highlands Academy and four at Jordan Elementary). While they may represent their respective schools, what they say, how they view their jobs, their schools, and their principal is not necessarily a reflection of how the *entire* faculty feels. As a result, what has been documented in both of these case studies is not, and can not, be taken as “gospel” but rather as one particular view of how a principal’s leadership style can affect a representative sample of teachers’ method and manner.

In this paper, it has been shown that a principal’s leadership style does have an effect on a teacher’s method and manner. At Highlands Academy, teachers are subjected to a very strict set of rules and standards. In essence, they have a very specific role, as delineated by the principal. Teachers are to teach with an Afrocentric emphasis, using Afrocentric materials, inculcating Afrocentric virtues (such as the Nguzo Saba). While they are given some latitude in developing their own method and manner to accomplish this, the fact that they are given such tight boundaries may have an effect on the way that they approach their jobs.

Similarly, at Jordan Elementary, teachers are under the guidance of Ms. Boston. She has stepped in, turned the school on its head with her T.E.A.M. mission and no-nonsense leadership style. She mandated certain curricular decisions on top of what teachers were already subjected to by the district, but was willing to let teachers find ways to adjust their method and manner to implement them. The difference here is that Ms. Boston’s constant presence in the school may have had a stronger effect than even she could have anticipated. While her intentions were to let teachers know that she cared, some may have viewed her daily visits as a way to “check up” on them and make sure they were following what she wanted them to do. While none of the four teachers in this study felt this way, it is conceivable that other teachers may have felt that way. In the end, teachers who were unwilling or unable to adapt left, while those who stayed either (a)

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<sup>6</sup> Beginning with the 1999-2000 school year, many changes took place at Jordan Elementary, including the hiring of a new principal. After a number of years as principal at Jordan, Ms. Boston decided to move on to focus on other professional goals. Moreover, both Hannah and Darlene began the school year at new schools. With the many

had method and manner that were in line with what Ms. Boston was after or (b) bought into the system and changed their method and manner to fit Ms. Boston's style.

In both cases, however, teachers were given somewhat of an ultimatum: my way or the highway. At Highlands Academy, teachers knew this up-front, even before they stepped through the door, while at Jordan Elementary, it took a while before Ms. Boston was able to secure teachers who were willing to commit themselves to her cause. But now, she, too ensures that teachers that want to be a member of her T.E.A.M. meet certain expectations are aware of what they are getting into.

Understanding that (a) there is congruence between teachers and principals around the school mission and its implementation and (b) principals at both schools allow teachers to develop a method and manner comfortable to them, within strict parameters, one begins to wonder what effect this has on the students. Using student voices to help validate and explicate the relationship between conduct and context that has been discussed thus far would be the third and final analysis around the importance of congruence between school context and teacher conduct in classrooms.

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changes taking place at Jordan Elementary, it would be most interesting to see how the new principal and her mission/leadership style has impacted teacher conduct.

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