AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY OF LEADERSHIP IN A HIGH PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

To my mother and loving family …
To appreciate is to live – Let’s rock, baby!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has been a long one, but worthwhile in every way. Spanning over 3 decades in education I have seen many changes in school environments, in both public and the private sectors, and have learned a great deal about what is possible in working with students and educators in the school environment. There is no greater reward than working with students and staff that can make a difference in education and in the lives of their students. So much of what we have learned over the years gives us our focus and direction for how we live our lives. Education has been my life for the past 33 years of personal commitment and the past 50 years in my family’s commitment. There are two special women that have impacted my life in different ways, but in the same profession. My wife was an educator in the Derby school system for 33 years at the middle and high school levels impacting hundreds of students through her teaching and coaching and always being positive with every situation that I can remember. She did not know the theory of appreciative inquiry, but inadvertently lived it with each day in her classroom. She found the best in her students and athletes and made the most of their abilities each day. She was forced to retire because of a physical disability or I know that she would still be passing her knowledge and caring on to her students in her classes today. She loved teaching and loved her students and I will always be thankful for being a part of her career and taking a part of what was important to her and passing it on through my career and contacts with people in education. She exemplified what is right about education and working with students, parents and community. I know that she misses her students and her friends in education because that is what she loved. I have heard a friend say many times that “people don’t care how much you know, until you show them how much you care.” I have had this influence for nearly half of my life. There is still a great deal of caring and passion in her influence.
I would also like to take time to thank my mom for being such a dedicated educator and role model for me in my life. She was a 7th grade teacher for 35 years in the Derby school system. She graduated from high school with honors in 1942 from Torrington High School in Torrington, Wyoming, but did not have the opportunity to go to college because of the war and having to move with parents and work to support family. She did not start college until 1962. I was a sixth grade student, 12 years old at the time, when she started her bachelor’s program at Sacred Heart College, now Newman University. She graduated in three years with honors in 1965. She began her teaching career at the age of 40 and continued teaching until she retired at the age of 75. Throughout her career she encouraged me to seek education and one of her wishes was for me to pursue my doctorate degree in education. I have always loved the university atmosphere and the challenges of seeking higher level thinking skills, but the opportunity never presented itself, but then after nearly a 30 year absence from university education and my ’79 graduation from Colorado State University with my M.Ed. in educational administration, I got the opportunity to return to Wichita State University to begin work toward my district level certification. While in this program, the pursuit became reality and entered the doctorate program for my advanced degree in Educational Leadership. Without these two women’s encouragement and support, this endeavor would never have happened. Well worth the 30 year wait.

I would also like to thank Dr. Jean Patterson for her guidance and commitment to take on my project mid-stream after Dr. Ray Calabrese accepted a position at The Ohio State University. This was a blow for me and brought me to question completing the journey. I had explored several ideas relating to the AI theoretical perspective, but none solid enough to get the idea into something concrete enough to make it happen. Jean came to my rescue. She waited for me to make a commitment to working on the project. After several meetings and my refocus we were
off and running. I will be forever grateful for her prompt revisions and ideas to bring this project to fruition. Her comments and direction led me to explore areas that were obvious but to look at them in ways that I had not seen. In her own way she used the AI perspective on me citing examples of my writing that she considered good when I really did not have an idea if they were good, bad, or indifferent. She is the ultimate mentor and I hope to have the opportunity to write with her in the future.

I have to say, although Dr. Calabrese left WSU, his impact on my life and beliefs remain a constant in my everyday life. I will always remember “P night” and “let’s crank it up” each week in class. What would a Wednesday afternoon in the basement of Hubbard Hall be without experiencing the appreciative vein in Ray? The infamous “Dr. C”, always the optimist, and always searching for the potential in all of us, made a difference in my life and I’m sure in yours for those that had the opportunity to work closely with him. Thank you for challenging me to think outside of the box. Our cohort began with a solid professorial staff; Dr. Jean Patterson, Dr. Ray Calabrese, Dr. Ian Gibson, and Dr. Randy Turk. Over the next two years we saw changes in the department with Ian leaving for home in Australia, Randy retired and moved to Missouri, and Ray moved on to Ohio. Jean is the remaining glue for our cohort and we all have had wonderful experiences with her through our case study work and dissertation process. I personally want to thank the entire staff for their belief in me to see me through this project and to let me work through the writing and brain cramps and getting me to think about making a difference in what I do. Their leadership has gotten me to graduation and beyond. As I can reflect now, this journey has been a long one, but fruitful and budding each day. The thoughts ahead for me are all focused on what impact that I can have on others in making education better for our students.
I would also like to thank the members of my cohort – lucky 13 for their guidance and support as I struggled to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Working with cohorts 12 and 14 were different experiences and I probably realize that with cohort 12 we were asking all of the questions that probably seemed silly to them because of everything that we saw them going through in their second year in the program. I was always impressed with their knowledge of the processes and their work ethic in the doctoral program. The time I spent with them went very quickly and I remember in our pledge year in the program seeing what they went through for comps and for selection of their dissertation chairperson. Almost a scary situation, but then as the second year student we all saw changes in the program so our experiences changed and I say for our benefit in the learning process. The experience changed after our cohort completed course work and I know that the program continues to evolve to provide the best practices for students in educational leadership.

In cohort 13 I felt a little outnumbered being the only male in a cohort of 7. Pretty good odds and I can say that the girls were all wonderful to be with and all very caring people. I cannot say how much that I look up to each of them for their contributions to my learning and their commitment to their districts and improving education. Our discussions in class were always what made our classes special and our mutual respect for learning a bonus. I want to thank Danielle for getting me back on track and motivated to finish. From cohort 12, Dr. Cameron Carlson encouraged me to get involved in advanced studies and assisted me in getting my desktop organized. Kind of a joke for those of you that know Cameron. I could not have done this without your support … Jan, Erica, Diane, Danielle, Crystal, and Charlene. You are the best!

I would also like to thank my school superintendent, Mr. Charles Edmonds and the Board of Education from USD 265 for allowing me to pursue my advanced degree at WSU and
allowing me to miss Wednesday afternoons to attend class. Many days after class I returned to my office to complete work that needed to be done in the manner that is expected at our level and in our district. Their commitment to me is worth more of my time and effort to make Goddard the best.

In conclusion I would like to thank my family, especially my wife, Barb, for her patience over the years to bring this journey to completion. She has been my strength for the past 33 years as my wife and a friend for 43 years. We have shared it all and I appreciate her and could never repay her for her selfless acts of sacrifice during this time. Thank you one and all. We made it.
ABSTRACT

This research project involved the members of the leadership team at Hobart High School, a large 5A school in central Kansas. The leadership team was made up of the principal, assistant principals and teacher leaders and sought to reveal their positive experiences at the school. The study utilized an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective to seek the positive core of the school culture and reasons for their successes. HHS had economic and ethnic factors working against a successful school and a successful student body, but the school had reached the academic standard of AYP for three years consecutively. This study sought to look at the culture of the school and through the experiences of the leadership team this study provided evidence to enhance the body of research about AI and the effects of the power of positive relationships on the successes in schools. These effects include the inclusion of the students, parents, community, staff and administration associated with the school in the changes, both physical and mental, that have taken place at HHS through the construction of a positive school culture.
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CHAPTER 1

Background to the Study

Accountability has become an integral component of school administrators and teachers’ work, and the academic achievement of all students is the driving force of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, commonly referred to as NCLB ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002). NCLB requires that students at all levels perform at 100% proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014. The individual state is responsible for defining the parameters of the scores for what constitutes student proficiency. Schools have annual benchmarks and testing goals along with continuous improvement for all students, which comprise the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) component of NCLB (The Education Trust, 2004). States are expected to set high standards for student improvement in accordance with federal and state guidelines.

Under the umbrella of NCLB, however, AYP standards differ from state to state, with some states having more rigorous standards than others (Key, 1997). Factors all states are required to use to determine levels of performance are the participation rate of high school students and their demonstration of continuous school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Student groups or subgroups identified by race or ethnicity, special education, or non-English speaking are also part of the focus of NCLB to educate all students and provide opportunities for them to be successful (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Student groups can make a significant difference in whether schools meet the standards of NCLB. The levels of performance by the school population, including defined subgroups, are recorded by the state departments of education for each state in the building report card (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). Although the measure for each state may differ; similar levels of
performance and expectations exist from school to school and state to state (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

In the state of Kansas, high schools report AYP data to the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) through a web site in the form of a principal’s building report card (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). The principal’s building report card is an aggregate of AYP components including graduation rate, attendance rate, school violence rate, and percentage of students passing advanced math and science courses. Stakeholders have the opportunity to compare how the district and individual schools have performed on state assessments, which puts pressure on school leaders to demonstrate positive results.

Research Problem

Educational leaders are accountable for the terms of NCLB, (Ervay, 2006), which requires closure of the achievement gap for all students to achieve academic proficiency ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002). In contemporary educational contexts, school leadership includes more than the traditionally defined administrative roles, but has been expanded to include counselors and teacher leaders, that is, department heads and academic coaches. Principals no longer work in isolation, but collaborate with a leadership team comprised of assistant principals, counselors, and teacher leaders (Mayo, 2002).

State assessment scores determine the level of achievement and are the primary measure used to determine whether a school has made AYP. Some school leaders have found ways to promote high standards at their schools (Gates Foundation, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003). They have the ongoing task of promoting achievement for all students and building a positive learning culture (Gruenert, 2005). Doing so creates higher expectations, which in turn puts more pressure on educational leaders to have their schools perform at high levels (Chubb, 2005).
During the past decade, research has demonstrated that leadership and school culture both play a role in the success of schools (Dumay, 2009; Gruenert, 2005). Little empirical research, however, has been conducted on the effect of leadership and school culture on a school’s AYP status. Nationwide, schools making AYP and gains in academic achievement have some similar characteristics. They have shown a clear and shared focus, shared values and norms, high standards, high expectations, effective school leadership, and a positive learning environment (Bergeson, 2007; Bushe, 1995; Cherney, 2003). These schools used AYP indicators to promote academic achievement. The success of these high performing schools may be due to a number of factors including effective school leadership. These schools might also have a school culture that is different from schools that do not meet AYP.

Large public high schools with a diverse student body tend to have more difficulty reaching proficiency standards than smaller, more homogeneous high schools. Groups such as special education, ELL or English Language Learners, economically disadvantaged, or ethnic/racial groups have a direct effect on the consistency with which schools meet the state’s proficiency qualifying standards (Linn, 2003). Schools with any of these subgroups or a combination of these subgroups have displayed a tendency of failing to meet the standards of AYP (Andrews & Soder, 1987; The Education Trust, 2004). This trend is also evident in Kansas, where this study was conducted, which classifies its public high schools by size.

Public high schools in Kansas are divided into six classifications according to size: 1A through 6A. The high schools designated 6A-5A represents the 64 largest student populations of the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) member schools in a given school year. The 32 schools in the 6A classification during the 2008-2009 school year ranged in enrollment from 1467 to 2239 students (Kansas State High School Activities Association, 2009).
In the 2008-2009 school year, 13 of those high schools did not meet AYP standards (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b), which is approximately 41% of all 6A high schools (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009a). The 32 5A schools ranged in size from 704 to 1356 and this division had 8 schools that did not meet the standards of AYP for the 2008-2009 school year (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b; Kansas State High School Activities Association, 2009), which is 25% of the state’s 5A high schools. Consistent with national trends, many of the 6A-5A schools in Kansas have not shown consistency from year to year in reaching academic standards earmarked by AYP guidelines, often due to the variable performance of student subgroups. In the state of Kansas, 20 or more students comprise a subgroup (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009a).

The study took place in a purposively selected 5A high school in Kansas that had shown consistency in meeting AYP over the past 3 years. Additional criteria used to select the school were: (a) it had specifically met AYP for the 2009-2010 school year, (b) it contained two subgroups in its AYP data report, and (c) it had the highest percentage of minority students of all the 6A or 5A schools that met AYP during the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, the high school had a stable school leadership team, more specifically the principal, who had been in the leadership position for a minimum of two years.

Purpose of the Study

Describing the school culture through the highlight experiences of school leaders in a 6A-5A Kansas high school was the focus of my research. My overarching question was: how does school leadership and culture affect a 6A-5A high school in Kansas that has met AYP? Within the context of this overarching question, I sought to describe the positive core of experiences of school leaders in a purposively selected 6A-5A high school in Kansas that met AYP during the
2008-2009 academic year. This study also examined the relationship between leadership, school culture, and student academic achievement.

*Research Questions*

The following overarching question guided my study. How does school leadership and culture affect one high performing Kansas 6A-5A high school? From the overarching question, the following research questions directed my study:

1. How does the leadership team of a high performing 6A-5A high school describe their positive core of experiences within the school?

2. How do teacher leaders in a high performing 6A-5A high school describe their positive core of experiences within the school?

3. How do the leadership team and teacher leaders in a high performing 6A-5A high school describe the relationship between leadership, school culture, and student academic achievement?

*Significance of the Study*

Extensive research on NCLB and AYP exists; however, there is a need to describe and report how school leadership and culture affect schools that have met AYP. The direct benefit to schools will be to (a) provide a blueprint for schools and school leaders for positive direction in the school, (b) focus on positive leadership for school, and (c) accentuate the components of the school environment and culture that provide advantages for students as it relates to meeting AYP. The culture and leadership data from my study provides information for school districts to use in the formation of successful models for meeting the standards for the components of AYP and NCLB.
My study contributes to the body of literature relating to the effects of leadership on school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999), drawing upon an expanded definition of leadership that includes teachers and others in leadership roles. This research provides a qualitative description for leadership and school culture and how those elements affect student academic success in meeting AYP.

Overview of Methodology

I used a qualitative case study design, with a constructionist epistemology, and an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) theoretical research perspective to describe the positive core of experiences of school leaders from a Kansas 6A-5A high school that met AYP for the 2009-2010 academic school year (Yin, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) allows for rich descriptions of positive core values relating to the school and what works best in the school to promote academic success (Hammond, 1998). The study applied AI focused questions to elicit positive core experiences of school leaders. The AI theoretical research perspective revealed a positive orientation to organizational review finding rich descriptions to what gave an organization life and what worked effectively to promote a successful school culture.

AI constructed semi-structured interviews and focus groups of school leaders’ peak experiences were used to identify the positive core values, strengths, traditions, assets and achievements of the school culture. The rich descriptions of leaders at the Kansas 6A-5A high school highlighted conditions that contributed to the positive culture of a large, academically successful or high performing, high school.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 of my dissertation contained the background of the study, problem statement, the purpose of the study, overview of the methodology, research questions, assumptions, and
delimitations. Chapter 2 provides an explanation of my conceptual and theoretical frameworks, literature review, and synthesis of empirical research. Chapter 3 describes the research design, units of analysis, the methods for data collection, and procedures for data analysis. Chapter 4 includes findings from data that were collected and analyzed during the course of the study through interviews, focus groups, and document review. Chapter 5 contains conclusions and implications relating to the analysis of the collected data from Hobart High School.
CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Chapter 2 is comprised of the theoretical framework, historical context of educational accountability policy, and a review of the empirical literature on the role of leadership in developing a culture that promotes academic success in comprehensive high schools.

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Culture and Appreciative Inquiry

Organizational culture and appreciative inquiry served as the theoretical framework for this study. Salient elements of the theory of organizational culture combined with appreciative inquiry concepts were used to analyze the positive core experiences of leaders of a high performing high school. This study aspired to determine what kind of culture leaders of high performing high schools foster and how they go about shaping or changing school culture.

Organizational Culture

Theories of organizational culture have been applied to schools in order to explain how they operate (Cheng, 1993; Lynch, 2006). In general, an organization’s culture develops out of interactions among members of a group that have established shared traditions, values, and goals (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Members of the culture use these shared values and goals as a model for organizational problem solving over time. Patterns that have worked effectively are accepted and taught within the group and result in correct ways to act in the group in relation to problems acted upon (Schein, 1997). There are internal and external factors that interact with each other to form the school culture. School leaders influence the development of school culture through establishing shared values and goals, setting high expectations, and promoting a positive learning environment.
School culture contains multiple areas of identification or indicators, such as attitudes, beliefs, rituals, symbols, artifacts, and ceremonies (Van Der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, & Coetsee, 2005). School members act and behave according to these cultural indicators. School culture features that assist in creating a positive learning environment are a dedicated and supportive teaching staff, positive leadership, and a shared set of beliefs among the members (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Creating a positive school environment with high expectations is related to increased student achievement (Craig et al., 2005). School members, including teachers, counselors, and administrators who focus on shared values and goals create a positive school culture that encourages student achievement (Pasi, 2001).

Schein (1992, 1997) argued it is possible to analyze an organization’s culture on three levels; artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions. Schein’s theory allows for the analysis of not only the effects of leadership on the school’s culture, but provides a framework for describing the culture of a high performing high school and what makes it successful and high performing.

Schein further identified culture as a shared set of validated basic assumptions formulated as the group learns through problem solving, adaptation, and integration. These assumptions are then shared with other members of the group over time who are largely unaware of their existence (Schein, 1997). Organizational culture is also believed to be necessary for the preservation of a group (National Defense University, 2006). Membership and a sense of belonging to the culture through shared experiences and common learning assist in the perpetuation of the group or culture (Meek, 1988). Group involvement and membership is relevant to the educational setting in the formation of norms, beliefs and experiences fostering growth in the school (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993). The characteristics of the culture in the most
notable or recognizable parts include the language, rituals, and social structure. Organizational cultures exist, function, and grow wherever groups of people live or work. Likewise, schools exist, function, and grow. How culture grows and nurtures under the school’s leadership was the focus of this study. Those parts of the social structure that makes a school successful or high performing were sought.

Schein (1981, 1984, and 1985) identified three levels of culture in his work. Level 1 is defined as artifacts, which are the behavioral patterns of the culture that are visible, tangible, or audible and those parts of the culture that can be physically grasped. Level 2 is identified as espoused values and beliefs (Ott, 1989; Schein, 1997). Level 2 is a more difficult part of the culture to identify because the basis are the beliefs and values that give meaning to the artifacts and identifies what ought to be in the culture. The actions or behavior of the group are determined through underlying or stated values (National Defense University, 2006). These values are often implicit in the strategies, goals, or philosophies that determine actions of the cultural group. Level 3 is the basic underlying assumptions that drive the culture and provide the understanding of why actions or events in the culture occur (Schein, 1992). Each of these levels of culture as they apply to educational organizations is further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

**Level 1 Artifacts.** Artifacts of the school are the basic tools and observable parts of the culture that one sees and experiences. Some visible examples of this level of culture in schools are textbooks and documents, the school handbook, yearbooks, the school mascot, and other symbols that identify the school. Schools often reflect their accomplishments through visible symbols in trophy cases and wall decorations. Schools are an organization that possibly has the most identifiable and recognizable artifacts for anyone that enters that facility. Some schools take
pride in and proudly display their artifacts of recognition, such as trophies and banners of achievement. These readily identifiable artifacts define the successes in many high schools and are easily accessible to the students and community portraying their historical record of accomplishments attained through school competitions (Osher & Fleischman, 2005; Pasi, 2001). Whereas these artifacts accentuate the positive aspects of a school, there may be artifacts located in schools that are less positive, such as graffiti, bars on the windows, or metal detectors for students as they enter the building. These recognizable artifacts of the school identify and communicate those values and beliefs that are important to the members of the culture and to the culture itself (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Studies have shown that the meanings of artifacts in a school are dependent upon the underlying values and beliefs within the culture and these artifacts mean different things to different people (West, 1996). West’s study revealed that although two high schools in the Houston area were very similar in structure, one was high performing and the other was not. An analysis of the artifacts of the buildings revealed they too were very similar. The differences cited were in the espoused values of the culture and the underlying assumptions. A sign of the strength of leadership can also be tied to artifacts, which was the case in the study done to identify the ability of principals to establish culture through their use of artifacts and values (Berg, 2005; Temple, 1995).

*Level 2 Espoused values and beliefs.* Level 2 elements of culture are the actual and espoused beliefs that give meaning to the artifacts (Aiman-Smith, 2004). This belief system is the arrangement of traditions upheld in the school by members of the organization. This was illustrated in the study of alumni of a school who resisted change and upheld the existing system of beliefs. The case study involved a small community where new leadership threatened the
established traditions and beliefs, but the community, which was made up of many graduates of the school, opposed blanket changes in school structure and culture. The school’s culture was maintained because the community members believed in the traditions and norms that had been established over the life of the school and did not believe leadership’s proposed changes would be positive for the school (Donaldson, Lopez, & Scribner, 2003). Carrying on traditions and beliefs assist in developing the identity of the school (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993). Students and faculty are often impassioned about their school and the beliefs that make the school what it is (Pasi, 2001). These espoused values and beliefs are then taught to new members as they become a part of the school’s culture (Mitchell & Willower, 1992) and move to the level of tacit assumptions.

*Level 3: Basic Assumptions.* The level 3 indicators of a school’s culture are the underlying assumptions and beliefs of the group, but these are the most difficult to identify or describe (National Defense University, 2006). This is the deepest level of culture, as these assumptions and beliefs are formed from the values of the group and are tacit and taken-for-granted. The group or culture is a complex structure made up of subcultures. The complexity of the group is also influenced by which subculture is dominant, which adds to differences within and across subgroup cultural values (Ott, 1989).

Revealing facets of the school’s culture will provide a guide for leadership utilizing their peak experiences and what effects they have had on forming or maintaining the present high levels of performance within the school. When studying school culture the researcher must focus on those items or artifacts in the culture that have been created. Questions and further analysis of how and for whom they were created need to be explored and finally why they were created (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The recognizable artifacts or the stories that can be told are part of
the level of beliefs and values established in the culture passing by word of mouth from member to member, and generation to generation.

*Leadership and School Culture*

Schein (1992; 2003) looks at leaders as the managers of the culture or organization and their abilities due to the increases in globalization, competition, and differences in the workplace culture. Literature has shown similarities between the workplace and the educational environment that are leadership driven where productivity remains their factor of responsibility for evaluating and identifying a successful or high performing business or school either by production in the workplace or through test scores in the school (Gates Foundation, 2006; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Much like in business with management dealing with inconsistencies in productivity, many schools have been experiencing a fluctuation or inconsistency in academic achievement. Other schools have reached high levels of performance by analyzing data to improve achievement through effective leadership and collaboration (Schmoker, 2003b). Models of improvement have been implemented to counteract the trend of inconsistent achievement along with a continuous movement of legislative trends (Berg, 2005). Since the revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1994 with the Goals 2000 – Educate America Act the accountability of educators and school leaders has been placed firmly on the results of school testing (Austin, 1994; Elmore, 2002). Student performance has shifted from the affective domain in the school to the cognitive domain where school leaders are now accountable for all students test scores during their testing years in the high school environment.

The broader educational environment or culture is one of accountability for student performance. Creating an educational culture and accountability structure has become the mode of operation for school leaders in managing and maintaining a school as prescribed by federal
guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Daly & Chrispeels, 2005). Thus, more literature is focusing on the effects of NCLB on leadership and educational accountability in individual schools.

Researchers continue to search for the reasons for successful or high performing schools throughout public school systems and to find solutions for turning around low performing schools (Craig, et al., 2005; Dougherty, 2006). Schools are held accountable within their states according to test scores. The school’s environment and leadership effectiveness are measured in part by student achievement even though research shows more of an indirect effect than a direct one based on school leadership alone (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck, 1992). School leaders are also expected to develop community support, offer effective staff development, and provide an environment conducive for learning (Bergeson, 2007). Many segments of the school culture relate to the artifacts or visible aspects, but the true meaning of a leadership model is more than awards and symbolic references in the school. Successful leaders infuse their values and beliefs within the school to influence the staff and students in forming the underlying assumptions of the school culture. School leadership provides a catalytic energy needed to promote a positive school environment and culture (Cox, 1998; Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). Their efforts can make a difference in the membership of the school, whether they are staff or students. Schmoker (2003) contends that teachers can have the largest effect on student achievement but rarely have the opportunity to celebrate their successes and change their methods to improve instruction.

This examination of what is positive about instruction and learning makes the leader move from the norm and status quo. A technique of leadership to model in the school is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Through the lens of AI the administrator or school leader can seek out and capitalize on the positive core of the school (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).
Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) was used in this study as a theoretical perspective and as a research methodology (described in chapter 3). AI originated in David L. Cooperrider’s work that focused on studying the strengths of an organization rather than its weaknesses. AI is a form of action research that can inspire and unite groups into making systemic changes for the betterment of the culture (Cooperrider, et al., 2003). AI focuses on the positive core of the organization. Much of the research conducted using the AI approach to action research has been done in the workplace or in corporate organizations looking for alternative means to effect change (Strong, 1997). It is now being utilized in educational settings to enhance the positive core of educational experiences in the school’s development (Bloom, 2002; Bushe, 1995). Cooperrider and his colleagues asserted the intention of a human organization is based on the questions that seek responses to discover the positive core from the organization’s experiences (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000).

The changes being sought through AI affect the social structure or culture of the organization. These effects are analyzed from a positive perspective rather than a negative one in organizational development (Bushe, 1998). Part of this process reflects a heliotropic nature where changes move in the direction of positive influence and development takes place as a group affirms its beliefs (Bushe, 1998; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987b).

The AI theoretical research perspective is grounded in a constructionist epistemology, which is premised on the belief that knowledge is built one piece at a time, one story at a time, and one experience at a time. AI searches for successes, best practices, and peak experiences of participants (Cooperrider, et al., 2003). AI has been used in public and private organizations to identify what is good and what gives it life (Bushe, 1998; Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin,
Organizational development utilizing AI involves four phases or, 4D’s of the AI process; discovery, dream, design and destiny (Kinni, 2003). This study focused on the discovery and dream phases, or the best of what is and what could be were in looking at peak experiences of educational leaders in a high performing Kansas high school.

AI delivers an approach to organizational action research that is collaborative and leads in a positive direction. AI is based or grounded in five basic principles: (a) the constructionist principle where we construct our existence from what we say, think, and do in a human system; (b) the simultaneity principle where questioning and change happen at the same time in the change process; (c) the poetic principle where telling a story of the organization on a personal level creates what we appreciate and want to accept; (d) the anticipatory principle where we create our image of the future and creating a new culture; and (e) the positive principle assists us in motivation and good feeling when we look at change and forming positive images and a better culture (Cooperrider, et al., 2000). These principles allow participants to construct their reality, produce change by their actions, tell stories that identify the culture, create an image of the future, and offer hope and a positive outlook for the development and changes in culture (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). In this study the use of the constructionist principle is key to constructing and envisioning those peak experiences and characteristics of a high performing high school through the eyes of school leadership. AI speaks of the discovery stage of peak experiences and from our perspective we construct those peak experiences as characteristics of the school environment that make it high performing (Hester, 2009). Approaching organizational change through the AI perspective allows the researcher to seek the good and gain a clear understanding of what gives life to the participants and their culture (Cooperrider, 2001).
The AI theoretical research perspective assisted me in identifying the positive aspects of a school culture that contribute to sustaining an academically successful or high performing, large public high school. Discovering the peak experiences of school leaders from a large public high school through an AI theoretical research perspective have provided a rich description of school leadership that lead to identifying a culture that fostered an environment for academic success or high performance.

**Review of Research and Related Literature**

My search for empirical literature identified, clarified, summarized, and synthesized pertinent studies that reported a connection between the effects of school leadership and school culture on academic achievement through a theoretical framework of organizational culture viewed through the lens of an AI theoretical research perspective. This section also includes empirical research focusing on the context of accountability through educational policy as a component of the research problem. Other literature describes the effects of accountability policies and the direction of effective leadership from a historical perspective. A thorough database search was conducted using keywords of theoretical and empirical research with an emphasis on organizational culture relative to school leadership, culture, and academic achievement. I have organized my review of the empirical literature around some common themes that emerged from the search: a) accountability policy in historical context, b) research on leadership, including the principal, assistant principals, and teacher leaders; c) organizational culture linked with appreciative inquiry; and d) characteristics of a school culture in high performing schools.
Era of Education Accountability in Historical Context: From a Nation at Risk to NCLB

Educational leadership and educational accountability are concepts that have been the emphasis of federal initiatives since the release of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. The report charged that the product being produced in schools was inferior and people concerned about the U.S. economy and society wanted to upgrade the level of future employees for the workplace (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2009). These issues the government felt could be addressed by impacting four areas related to education: content, expectations, time, and teaching through more centralized or federal control (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). More federal control would create a standard set of goals and lead to more federal involvement in education.

In 1989, at the end of the decade, President George H. W. Bush led the first education summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia (New York State Educational Department, 2009). Although the general feeling among local education associations was that schools were essentially doing well in the late 70’s and early 80’s, schools’ approval ratings were dropping and a more centralized approach to educational control became the focus for the future (National Education Goals Panel, 1999). In the first Bush administration, the program of educational change was called America 2000. In 1993, President Bill Clinton adopted this plan during his administration and called it Goals 2000: The Educate America Act (New York State Educational Department, 2009). These efforts led the nation toward a focused set of national education standards for which state and local districts would be accountable.

Each of these presidential efforts for educational reform had common threads leading U.S. public education toward a common set of standards. In the original 1989 summit there were 6 goals proposed for the nation’s schools by President Bush in his State of the Union speech in
January of 1990 (Vinovskis, 1999). These six goals increased to eight when the National Governor’s Association released them. These goals as stated in the United States Department of Education document are reproduced below:

By the year 2000:

1) Every child in America will start school ready to learn,

2) The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%,

3) All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they will be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation’s modern economy,

4) The Nation’s teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century,

5) United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement,

6) Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

7) Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning, and
8) Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Austin, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

These guidelines set the goals and standards for school districts across the nation furthering educational accountability.

The transition to today’s standards of accountability established from President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has continued the discussion and expectations for accountability in the educational setting (Bush, 2002). NCLB concentrates on disaggregating achievement data by cohort group, curriculum reform to assist student learning, staff development to promote better methods of instruction, meeting testing standards yearly, and keeping up with current trends to stay in compliance with national standards (Chubb, 2005). Responding to federal accountability mandates requires leaders who can create and maintain a school culture that promotes teaching and learning to high standards (Erway, 2006; Key, 1997).

**Principal/Assistant Principal Leadership**

Principals are an integral part in establishing and maintaining organizational culture. Principals are key to the formation and maintenance of a high performing school environment for students and faculty (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Studies continue to show the importance of the school leader to the school improvement process and the development of a culture of learning. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 published studies and concluded that certain features of high performing schools can be tied to the principal’s leadership in the school. Robinson and her colleagues explored these studies to reveal that in these cases the effect of leadership on student achievement fell in five distinct categories: a) establishing goals and high expectations; b) allocating resources within the school; c) focusing
on instructional planning and curriculum; d) ensuring effective teacher learning and development; and e) providing a safe and orderly learning environment (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The authors recommended that school leadership work cooperatively with faculty to improve instruction and learning (Heck, 1992; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008). The administrator is critical in this study as well as others (Craig, et al., 2005; Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckennooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). Extending this premise to other studies further supports the finding that the principal is a key figure in the school environment with an important role that influences changes in the structure of the school (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). He or she is critical in conveying symbolism and identifying and forming the culture of the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a). The principals mentioned in studies played an important role in creating an academic environment through establishing a shared focus with high expectations and standards (Bergeson, 2007). Literature does not suggest that leadership has any direct effect, but more of an indirect one on academic achievement so the efforts of administration toward a more productive culture are steps for overall school improvement (Heck, 1992).

The effective school leader demonstrates distinct characteristics that relate directly to school improvement and to the character of the individual and his or her ability to lead. The principal is expected to be a person with integrity, fairness, and an ethical nature (Bergeson, 2007). The actions of the leader precipitate the strength of the organizational culture (Gruenert, 2005). The leader’s ability to improve the educational climate involve improving teacher efficiency, encouraging collegial relationships, encouraging student achievement, and promoting parent involvement in the school (Peterson, 1997). Assistant principals take on a similar role depending upon the principal’s model of leadership.
Assistant principals (AP) are leaders in the school, and by all accounts are an extension of the principal. Much of the literature regarding assistant principals perceptions of their position indicates this position is just a step before they become a principal, but research shows these perceptions vary from position to position (Cantwell, 1993). Cantwell’s study on perceptions of assistant principals’ roles identified the assistant principal as primarily a clerical or task related position rather than a true leadership position. The assistant principal’s roles were those of disciplinarian, supervisor, and catchall for those duties recognized in their job description. A group of 72 assistant principals took a survey to identify their involvement in a number of areas relating to the job. Areas of consideration for the study were defined in seven categories of assigned AP duties; a) clerical, b) curriculum, c) instructional supervision, d) organizational duties, e) parent/community relations, f) personal and social needs, and g) discipline. Some of the factors differentiating the responses involved the level and size of school they were associated with, the rate of student mobility or rate of students moving in and out of the district, the socioeconomic level of the student population, and students overall reading level. The results of the survey showed the perceptions of assistant principals differed from those of principals in one category as it related to time distribution. In the ideal educational environment principals indicated assistant principals would spend less time on discipline and clerical tasks and more time on leadership and curriculum development (Cantwell, 1993).

Assistant principals’ roles have notably changed in the educational environment from primarily that of disciplinarian and they are now considered part of the instructional leadership team. The principal has delegated more leadership responsibilities to his/her leadership team through increased job duties (Gallagher, Riley, & Murphy, 1986). One need only look at a job description from a vice-principal (assistant principal) from 1962 to see how many of the
functions of this position embody clerical duties including discipline, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), student assemblies, speech/music productions, faculty socials, fire drills, athletics, activities, and the cafeteria, but nothing relating to school instructional leadership (Goddard, 1962). The modern role of the AP has shifted to more responsibility in the academic realm and their training in advanced studies has shifted in that direction as well (Panyako & Rorie, 1987). Assistant principals are no longer considered subordinates in the school structure (Rankin, 1973). The assistant principal role has evolved into a leadership role symbolic of the traditional role of the principal. The difference in leadership has not only changed in the roles of principals and assistant principals but have also transcended and moved into the ranks of the teachers, now identified as teacher leaders.

Teacher Leaders

Teachers have always been the backbone of the school and new roles have been established for certain teachers as they assume more responsibility for school functions and leadership (Ervay, 2006). Studies relating to leadership of the 21st century identify the role of the principal and what type of leadership style that he/she exhibits and the degree to which they influence teachers into becoming agents of leadership in their teaching positions (Ervay, 2006). Teacher leaders for the purpose of this study are the academic department heads, department leaders, or academic coaches under the leadership of the principal. These teacher leaders are key figures for the principal because these positions have a direct impact on students and school culture. The principal uses teacher leaders as an extension of their academic responsibility for collaboratively achieving NCLB standards (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006). The building administrator has become overwhelmed with the number of academic responsibilities and has
been forced to look for other avenues of leadership that can advance the culture of the school and meet the needs of outside expectations from NCLB.

In high schools, the teacher source of leadership often falls within the domain of department heads. Those positions are usually determined by seniority or qualifications through advanced degrees and teachers in these roles take on the responsibilities of department budgets and curricular assignments (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b). Though these relationships have not always proven successful, there is a feeling this form of leadership encourages collaboration between teaching staff and administration. The effects of teacher leadership may not lead to changes within the school, but has impacted the staff nurturing feelings of commitment within the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

The different forms of leadership acknowledged within the school; the principal, the assistant or associate principal, and the teacher leaders, have produced more of a democratic sense of leadership seeking to reach common goals (Lumby, 2009; Scribner, Madrone, & Hager, 1999). Leadership is far more complex than early theories of school organization relating effective leadership with a top down organizational structure. Buy-in from the members of the organization, whether assistant principals or teachers, furthers the development of the school’s organizational culture and promotes a sense of learning community (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996). Heck and Marcoulides’ study took place in Singapore and indicated that knowledge of the school’s environment was a predictor of the school’s success. The school culture may be a predictor of a school that is successful or high performing.

*Successful or High Performing Schools and School Leadership*

The thread of commonality tying successful or high performing schools with school leadership lies in analysis of the culture. Finding research that specifically tied school leadership
with success in the school was difficult, but many studies indirectly link positive school culture and academic achievement to school leadership (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson, et al., 2008). High performing schools share multiple characteristics. These schools have a clear and shared focus, high expectations, and effective school leadership (Bergeson, 2007). Studies continually show the consistency of these characteristics documented for those schools considered high performing and successful. A study in Tennessee showed evidence of these characteristics for high performing schools with leadership involved in the educational process being a key component of their success (Craig, et al., 2005). Other studies have pointed out that success can happen at low economic or low SES schools as demonstrated in a study in Kentucky where low income schools were academically successful or high performing. These schools nurtured a number of identified characteristics involving effective leadership, high expectations for faculty and staff, and a shared vision (Johnson & Asera, 1999; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005). The focus from selected studies continues to point to characteristics that reflect positively on school leadership and the potential application of AI in schools.

*Appreciative Inquiry in Schools*

Utilizing AI as a research perspective in education is a relatively new approach to action research. Viewing the school situation from a positive rather than a deficit stance is more prevalent now as change becomes necessary in the school setting. Leadership and change are used almost synonymously in today’s educational environment (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Research using AI to create positive change at schools has been done in several locations where parents, students, and staff have been involved in planning for the future with specific goals or outcomes in mind (Cooperrider & Pratt, 2001; McKenzie, 2003). The AI approach has benefited
school leaders by changing the attitude and demeanor with which problems in schools have been addressed (Calabrese, SanMartin, Glasgow, & Friesen, 2008; Peelle, 2006). Focusing on what works in the educational setting and dwelling on the positives of the core set of values and beliefs the school leaders may find ways to change the status quo and implement creative programs that assist students and makes the school more effective. Bloom’s study involving counselor methods demonstrated the ability of counselors to effectively use AI questioning techniques with students to empower them and bring out their strengths, skills, and abilities (Bloom, 2002).

Chapter Summary

The literature review began with a review of the theoretical framework, consisting of a review of organizational culture and appreciative inquiry. The next section of Chapter 2 included an historical review of educational accountability associated with leadership in schools in the U.S, reviewed and synthesized the acquired knowledge of research for linking of organizational culture with educational leadership, school culture and academic achievement as it relates to high performing schools.
CHAPTER 3
Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998) was used to examine a high performing Kansas 6A-5A high school that met AYP during the 2009-2010 school year. Hobart High School (a pseudonym) met the criteria for the study and served as the research site. Detailed information about the school and community are included in Chapter 4. This study was conducted utilizing Appreciative Inquiry formed questions and data collected included individual, semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with school leaders, including administrators, counselors, and teacher leaders to seek out the positive core of the organization, the school culture, and their positive core of experiences. There was also time set aside to tour school facilities to review and document visible school artifacts and review pertinent school district documents related to the school and school culture.

*Appreciative Inquiry*

Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research for organizational analysis used in problem solving (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987a). AI is a research theoretical perspective and methodology developed from the work of David L. Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve University in 1985. It takes the best from an organization’s past and present context to create the future (Bushe, 1999; Kinni, 2003). The AI theoretical perspective gave researchers a method of action research that varied from the norm of systemic problem solving and organizational development. Instead, AI focuses on how a group collectively makes meaning of its past and present and constructs knowledge of its culture (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987a). The co-construction of organizational knowledge includes the beliefs and values of the culture, shared language and thoughts, stories of shared experiences, and any knowledge as it relates to the
positive conditions of what gives life to the organization. Creating a work environment where the emphasis is on what is working best assists workers in becoming more positively involved and seeking more of what is appreciated in the culture (Cooperrider, et al., 2000; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2001). Cooperrider breaks down the process of AI research into distinct areas of exploration and reporting known as the 4-D cycle.

*The AI 4D Cycle*

The AI 4D Cycle is the process of action research where human systems and organizations have the opportunity to move in their most positive direction through the (a) discovery, (b) dream, (c) design, and (d) destiny phases. The discovery phase identifies the best of what is and what has been in the organization. The dream phase develops the concepts of what might be and further brings out the positive core values of the group through individual interaction. The design phase identifies the ideal environment and what should be. The destiny phase, or the final phase of the 4D cycle, reminds participants of what will be through the change process. All phases of the 4D cycle include change and provide for the participants of the group a means by which they can communicate openly and identify the changes that need to be made to better the organization or group (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Cooperrider, 2003). For the purpose of this study the discovery and dream phases of the 4D cycle were used to document descriptions from school leadership of those parts of the school that make it successful or high performing. Looking at the actions of effective leadership allowed me to create a mental diagram of Schein’s levels of culture. The rationale for utilizing the discovery phase of the 4D cycle was a desire to seek the positive experiences of those responsible for leadership in the school by question and answer segment to inquire and then disclose information. The discovery phase relied on the interviews conducted to construct their experiences and revealed the positive
qualities of the organization and changes that have taken place (Whitney, et al., 2003). The focus of the study was on discovering the positive core of experiences and how that affected the school culture and asking about the best of what is and what is appreciated about the school (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987b). The dream phase sought ideas from all study participants of what could be in this educational setting. Looking at the present and seeking their perceptions of the future enhanced the data collected during interviews and focus groups. This study is not about designing a new culture, or reshaping the culture (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999), but understanding the organization as it currently is and possibly could be in the future.

Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework is comprised of my professional experiences, epistemology, and theoretical perspectives. I address each of these components in the following sections.

Professional Experiences

Educational leadership has been the focus of my educational experience for the past three decades. During the past 30 years, I have seen the focus of education change repeatedly with changes in federal legislation, to the addition of special education directives, to concern with accountability and the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Educational leaders and mentors have inspired me to pursue a career in education that has provided me with a rich and meaningful experience. My educational background is comprised of experiences with colleagues through conversations, observations, and learning experiences that have shaped the way I have chosen to be a school leader. I learned to build a sound foundation for an effective leadership style premised on the belief that contemporary school leadership should enhance the learning environment and culture of a school. It is this perspective that I took to this study of school leadership and culture of academically successful high schools. I broadly
defined school leadership to include the principal, assistant principals, athletic administrators, academic department heads, school counselors, and a secondary instructional coach.

My experiences as teacher and administrator have taught me two lessons. One, my experiences have been important in developing my value and belief system to promote a productive learning environment. Two, they have provided me with an understanding that building leadership can make a difference in shaping the culture of the school. These experiences have provided me with a view of what affects school culture and promotes academic success (Andrews & Soder, 1987). I believe experienced and knowledgeable leaders create and enhance opportunities for success within the culture (Gawerecki, 2003). Consequently, this study describes experienced and knowledgeable leaders, which assisted me in discovering the core values of the school culture and in directing the effective leader to seek the best of what works within the framework of the school (Henry, 2003; Kinni, 2003).

My professional knowledge and experiences formed my belief that the school culture is strengthened by the values and beliefs of its members, which in turn influences their actions (Baker, 2002). My experience as an educator has shown that school culture can be influenced by internal and external factors. An internal factor affecting school culture is leadership. Leadership enhances the productive learning environment by reflecting on achievement data, setting realistic goals, ensuring a caring and knowledgeable staff, and implementing standards, all based on assessment data (Schmoker, 2003a). A productive learning environment is one that is based on high standards of performance and achievement and a constant reminder of the importance of relationships and respect (Pasi, 2001).

Part of the leadership plan for the learning environment is to establish goals in the school. A common set of standards for teachers, students, and leaders assists school leaders in setting
goals and standards for high achievement in the school. These standards provide a guide for members of the culture and the leadership (Gasper, 2005). My experiences working for other principals have provided an understanding that effective principals create a positive environment in their school. These experiences have helped form my belief system and defined my own goal of creating a positive academic school culture.

My experience has revealed that seeking the best of what makes the school successful often leads to a positive school culture that reinforces academic achievement (Cresswell, 2004). Purposely seeking positive aspects of the school culture reveals that leaders make a difference (Lee, 1998). Effective leaders provide the impetus for a successful school (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Effective and active leadership may implement a more positive approach to providing answers for educational solutions in the school. Leadership that seeks the positive core of the organization changes the paradigm of educational leadership and decision making through AI (Cooperrider, et al., 2000). Although I did not know about AI until recently, I have been influenced by the AI precepts throughout my educational leadership career. Seeking the best in teachers, their work in the classroom with students has guided my leadership style and focused the direction of my research on educational culture and high school student academic achievement.

Epistemology

My study is framed in social constructionist epistemology. AI is tied directly to social constructionism (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003). The components of social constructionism, human knowledge, and organizational discovery, are principles associated with AI and are important to school leader effectiveness. Effective leaders facilitate the construction of knowledge to understand and identify areas of the system critical to systemic change and social reality
(Fitzgerald, et al., 2003; Warmoth, 2000). This knowledge makes it possible for the researcher and study participants to construct the characteristics of the organization and to highlight the characteristics that make for a productive learning environment (Baker, 2002). The principles of constructionism, human knowledge, and organizational discovery assist in defining the social constructionist epistemology to generate new knowledge through collaboration and as a tool used in the culture to establish a shared set of theories and actions not based on what individuals believe or do (Gergen, 1996). Knowledge or our perception of reality is created through social interaction and social processes (Gergen, 1985).

Social constructionism is the epistemological basis for AI because it identifies the manner members of the group or culture construct meaning of knowledge they have attained and share. Through social interaction, the group constructs perceived reality (Gergen, 1985). The association of these social interactions and experiences through an AI theoretical research perspective reflect the search for the positive core values of the culture (Lewis, 2003). The connection of individuals within the culture provided the basis for my research in exploring the nature of leadership and how leadership and culture can affect academic performance in the school.

A social constructionist epistemology fits securely within the structure of the AI theoretical research perspective premised on the belief that humans make meaning of their experiences, and that the positive core of those human experiences and the best of peak experiences emphasizing what works best within the culture can be co-constructed (Hammond, 1998). Establishing this positive core of the culture focuses on the strategies and practices, the systemic values, and the collective beliefs of the members of the group (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993). The members of the group have positive core experiences in the school environment and
it is through the AI perspective that we will make meaning of them through the research process (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987a). Through the descriptions of positive core experiences of leaders in the school, the AI theoretical research perspective assisted me in determining what makes the difference in a large high school that is academically successful.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are characteristics that define the boundaries or limit the scope of a study. The delimitation may limit a study because of geographic location, age, sex, population traits, population size, or other considerations that are self-imposed to narrow the study (Calabrese, 2006). My study had the following delimitations:

1. It was delimited to one 6A-5A high school in Kansas that met AYP during the 2009-2010 school term.
2. It was delimited to a school whose principal has been at his or her present job for a minimum of two years at one 6A-5A high school in Kansas that met AYP during the 2009-2010 school term.

**Assumptions**

Assumptions are basic premises related to a study that are accepted on faith or are known to be true (Walker, 2003). This study made the following assumptions:

1. School leaders who are involved in student achievement have a positive core of experiences related to leadership and school culture within a 6A-5A high school that has met AYP.
2. High performing 6A-5A high schools have a positive school culture.
3. High performing 6A-5A high schools have an effective school principal and an effective leadership team.
**Data Collection Plan**

The following research methods were used for data collection at Hobart High School: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, collection of information on artifacts obtained through school tours, and a review of district and building documents relevant to the case study. Twenty-two Hobart High staff members in various leadership roles were asked and agreed to participate in the study. This data collection plan was enhanced by scheduling an interview with each of the individuals in the leadership team and groups selected for interviews. There was a follow up focus group with those individuals in the leadership team who participated in the semi-structured individual interviews for the purpose of analyzing the data that had been compiled, sorted, and coded. Confirming their responses within the focus group gave me an opportunity to member check the group’s individual responses created in the original interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Protocols are an important part of the research process with an emphasis on the degree of protection of human research subjects. All participants in this study were informed of the nature of the study and purpose and were assured that any data collected from them would remain confidential and used in the study only after they had given specific permission. The consent form can be found in Appendix A. Patton (2002) reflects that for any researcher in any study there is a balance of seeking the truth with their sense of professional ethics. Therefore, interviews were conducted with neutrality, with no intention to change or influence the individuals being interviewed (Patton, 2002). I attempted to establish a degree of compassion and rapport with the participants, while still maintaining a high level of integrity, informed consent, and confidentiality (Patton, 2002).
Qualitative research is an emergent design that takes place in a natural setting with human subjects (Creswell, 2003). An emergent design is open ended and may change in scope or focus according to the initial modes of data collection (Patton, 2002). The researcher looks for the paths that the line of questioning takes them and offers flexibility for responses from the participants (Creswell, 2003). Key to the quality of emergent research is the interaction with participants in the data collection process. Participant responses guide the direction of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The methodology of this study was to follow specific protocols in questioning techniques through semi-structured focus groups and interviews done at Hobart HS. Questions were focused on obtaining positive responses from participants relating to the school. School leaders included academic department heads, a secondary academic coach, and the leadership or administrative team at Hobart HS. A predetermined set of questions was asked of focus group participants and during individual interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with the administrative leadership team followed by a focus group with the same participants to check for similar responses and to utilize a methodology called member checking for validation of data being utilized in this research.

Data collection was done during the months of May and August 2010 for interviews and focus groups due to work schedules and availability of participants. A document review was completed during September and October 2010 utilizing web site information, yearbooks, and other public information available from the school. Pertinent to this study was the state of the physical structure of Hobart HS at the time data were collected. The school has been under construction or in the state of total remodel for two years. Some of the points reflected in the compiled data are only recollections from leadership staff, as the physical structure changed.
significantly with the remodel. Additionally, access to the physical facility of the high school was restricted due to the construction at the time of data collection visits. Some important items or locations discussed in interviews and focus groups were stored away or being remodeled at the time of data collection at Hobart HS.

Documentation of data was stored into separate data bases in Filemaker Pro. Those databases are identified as document review, Hobart high school staff, and interviews-research notes. Each data base contains information pertinent to this study relating to educational leadership and school culture.

Questions for this study demonstrate a process for seeking the positive experiences for study participants. Members of the leadership team are identified by their positions at Hobart High School. Members of the leadership team encompassed staff from administration including three assistant principals, the activities director, and the principal. Other participants were four guidance counselors who work very closely with the administrative team in all aspects of the operations of the school. One guidance counselor interviewed in a focus group left her position during the summer and was replaced by an internal teaching applicant for her position. The new counselor was interviewed in one of the semi-structured interviews during August 2010. Also included in this group were the various department heads and a secondary academic coach. Information received from these participants on their experiences point out on many occasions that their positions are significant and important in developing the positive core of the educational environment.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine members of the school leadership team, which was comprised of the principal, three assistant principals, four school counselors,
and one athletic administrator. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to obtain rich descriptions of the individual’s peak experiences relating to the school’s positive core. The semi-structured interview encouraged two-way communication with the use of probing questions to expand the range of data collected. These interviews were conducted utilizing an AI design and showed the administrative team point of view from a positive perspective of the school culture. A number of questions were designed to answer the research questions posed earlier in Chapter 1. Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were planned and conducted; one with the five members of the administrative team (three assistant principals, a career and tech-ed director [former assistant principal], and the athletic administrator), three focus groups involving a total of 17 individuals, inclusive of department heads and academic leaders. The final group was comprised of the two guidance counselors, a social worker/guidance counselor, and a secondary instructional coach. The secondary instructional coach is a district office support person who provides support to all personnel in the classroom setting from grades 7-12. Her responsibilities include the assistance and delivery of curriculum strategies, instructional methods, and staff development for new and experienced HHS staff.

The administrative focus group served as the second opportunity to visit with the administrative team in a more relaxed group setting to confirm data collected in semi-structured interviews. The department head focus groups were divided into three groups with the following makeup; group one contained department heads from physical education, art, special education, band, and FACS (Family and Consumer Science). Focus group two was made up of the department heads for the core academic subjects of math, social science, science, and English.
Focus group three was made up of the department heads for foreign language, media/librarian, tech-ed director, and the head of guidance. Focus group four was made up of two guidance counselors, one combination guidance counselor and social worker, and one secondary instructional coach. Focus group five was made up of the administrative team, three assistant principals, one athletic administrator, and the director of Tech-Ed and former assistant principal. Similar questions were asked of focus groups made up of the same participants identified in the previous paragraph. Focus group questions are contained in Appendix C. Responses to focus group questions were analyzed and cross-referenced to cite similarities in responses by participants.

Data collected from individual interviews formed the basis for identifying those parts of the culture that comprised the positive core of the school and were confirmed in the data constructed from the focus groups. Focus groups gave the researcher an opportunity to extract ideas from people from similar backgrounds in a group session where they could share ideas and build on the data collected. They could listen to each other’s responses and add to them for clarity (Patton, 2002). These focus groups did, by design, make available two levels of leadership within the school; the administrative and teacher leadership groups. The questions were constructed according to the principles of AI (Cooperrider, et al., 2003). Focus groups were a relaxed group of participants having a natural dialogue on a specific topic (Israel & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2009).

Documents and Artifacts

Documents from the district of USD 308 were examined for relevant information relating to the school. Documents from HHS included public records, web site information, personal documents, and physical materials (Merriam, 1998). The written history of the school was
ascertained from the information collected from yearbooks, district policies, and student handbooks. According to Merriam, personal documents contain a person’s individual actions, experiences, and beliefs specific to school life. This also applies to the questions being asked through the theoretical framework of organizational culture looking for the shared values and beliefs, along with the physical materials or artifacts of the school (Schein, 2004). Care was taken to keep an open mind in discovering what brings meaning to a school’s historical development in a case study. I made a distinction on the relevance of any document materials as a primary or secondary source used in the study (Merriam, 1998). Merriam goes on to reflect that written sources of collected data often pass the stability question because the data is grounded in the study. School demographic information was screened for data pertinent to the school culture and the study. Relevant information was needed for subgroups within the school to identify high performing units as a part of the study.

Artifacts are those visible or recognizable items within the school culture that help bring life to the organization or school. Prior to the individual interviews with the leadership team and focus group with teacher leaders each individual was asked to bring an artifact or share a story relating to a known artifact at the school. Artifacts were photographed and catalogued for the study. A school tour was also done in areas that were available to be toured to gather more data relating to the visible artifacts explored as part of the positive core of the school, but construction restricted access to many areas of the building during the course of this study.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed as recorded verbatim. All information was unitized and coded after transcription and evaluated for similarities of specific themes generated by these similarities. Coding was valuable in
establishing themes consistent with the positive aspects of the school culture and how they related to the influences of building leadership. Coding was done using Filemaker Pro software initializing cards of information based on determined case study themes. Coding is the first step in the process of qualitative data analysis (Patton, 2002). Organization of coding data was important in selecting common themes and identifying the positive core of experiences of school leaders.

Coding was accomplished by analyzing chunks of data expressions from collection into descriptive tags or labels (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Descriptive codes relating to where the data came from and what significance or topic the data indicates was used to provide the rich descriptions needed for supplying answers to study questions. Initially, organizational codes were determined and used for conceptual and structural order in the database of information (Miles & Huberman, 1994), however the initial set of codes did not limit the identification of other codes that emerged from the data collection.

Other items coded and categorized were the artifacts and documents selected and a determination made to the relevance of the items to the culture of the school. These items varied from person to person as to their importance and how they brought meaning to HHS. Each person was asked to reveal an artifact or document and convey the meaning of the item during his or her interview. Artifacts and visible parts of the school culture were photographed. Part of revealing the culture of the school lies in the level 2 values and beliefs that Schein identified in his organizational theory. The documents and artifacts also provided a path for further inquiry through discussions with participants (Patton, 2002). These items selected provided insights into the nature of the culture of the school and how they fit into and provided clarity to the data.
collection. Converging data or fitting the pieces of data together was the challenge of the coding process in providing meaningful data for this researcher.

Following the collection and coding process, the researcher must provide credible as well as trustworthy findings from the data received. Establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through establishing truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Key, 1997). The researcher gains a holistic picture of the research being done through a process known as axial coding where the researcher begins to compare pieces of data and put them together a larger picture of what is being sought (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After coding, I employed the theoretical framework of the study and made decisions on whether the data and concepts were worthy of noting. I drew all of the data together in a credible study worthy of being viewed and read by other researchers interested in leadership studies. Important to all research development is the nature of respect gained from doing worthwhile research that can be useful to other researchers in the field.

In an appreciative inquiry study, I had to be cognizant of the fact that these stories or data collected provide meaning to the research. The data are recognizable as having taken place over a certain period of time to establish meaning and the data focused on related experiences of the participants in the organization (Whitney, et al., 2003). Also, to be included in the collections were any positive thoughts or insightful information that added to the overall story to be told. AI is qualitative analysis seeking the peak experiences and stories that bring out the best of participants core experiences in the organization and provide singular examples of personal experiences that bring about a change in behavior or meaning to the group.
Research Quality

Good research is searching for the truth in an honest and forthright manner to a well-constructed research problem. A well designed research study finds answers to ideas and creates useful knowledge for the reader to draw their own conclusions based on the literature written (Litman, 2009). This study will be enhanced by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Credibility was assured through the triangulation of data obtained from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, school artifacts, participant documents, and school tours. Part of the credibility for the study is my prior relationship with HHS. My school is in the same athletic league as HHS and I have formed friendships with several of the participants in the study. This relationship assisted me in providing a less restrictive or less formal interview or focus group environment that enhanced responses from participants to be more open. I was careful to not reflect or imply bias or any position other than that of a neutral observer throughout the study. Qualitative field work requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the school culture to establish the trust and fairness necessary in seeking best responses from the participants, but also maintaining empathetic neutrality throughout (Patton, 2002). These factors were key to my research in establishing an environment of impartiality while interviewing and collecting data at HHS.

Information sought was coded, analyzed, and checked for reliability and trustworthiness. Data collected from the participants or units of the study were shared with the same nine participants in the semi-structured interviews of the study to check for credibility and accuracy in a second set of interviews in the form of focus groups. This researcher does not make any claims
to the generalizability of this data and will leave it up to the reader to determine transferability based on their conclusions.

Transferability in a qualitative study means the results of the study may be conceptualized to the researcher and findings may be transferred to other contexts and settings established for research. The person responsible for the research is also the person who must be responsible for the transferability of the data. This concept is appealing to researchers to compare one set of research findings with another in a similar context, but comparing is more difficult in qualitative research because of the differences in context (Trochim, 2006). I believe the results of this study can add credibility to the premise of leadership adding to or influencing the culture of comprehensive high schools.

Dependability means applying a standard of consistency throughout the study by insuring trustworthiness in the research. Dependability for this study was demonstrated through the researcher and the structure of the data through the triangulation of multiple sources of data. The consistency of collection and the full description of the material further insure dependability. Also involved to insure dependability is the consistency in coding information (Kairuz, Crump, & O'Brien, 2007). Researchers cannot rely on study results being conducted exactly the same in different study situations or conditions. For this study it was important to document all data collected; notes from interviews and focus groups, different documents from the school, and an added part of artifacts considered part of the HHS culture. Proper coding of all materials collected must be part of the findings for consistency in the study.

Confirmability of the project comes from the data, the researcher findings, and interpretations of collected data, and the recommendations as confirmed as sound research based data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the confirmability audit being done that can determine
dependability and confirmability in a single audit. The audit for this study was done by an analysis of all collected data and reporting was thorough and all-inclusive. The audit left a trail of composed data: how they were collected, how they were categorized, and how decisions were made in regard to the study (Merriam, 1998). I examined all data in a self-audit mode for clarity of all pertinent information utilized and examined in this study. This was done to prevent any personal biases or prejudices in the data collection, coding, recoding, and analyzing inquiry process.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 explained the research design and methodology employed in this research. The design of this case study was to show the summation of peak experiences of the building leadership at Hobart High School and how these peak experiences assisted in maintaining and developing a positive school culture in a high performing high school. The use of AI as an action research theoretical perspective changed questioning techniques to seek the positive core of the school in this study. This chapter also explained the conceptual framework of this study utilizing my personal and professional experiences in education as a sound framework for educational research. Covered also was the social constructionist epistemology and the fitting of the AI theoretical perspective into it. Construction of the meaning of all data was key to finding the connection of school leadership to success in the positive school culture.

Chapter 3 also contained the delimitations of the study, the assumptions, an overview of the research site in Hobart and at HHS, the data collection plan outlining various methods of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, research quality that includes credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and a summary of the chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Findings: Hobart High School Culture and Positive Core Experiences

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study and has been divided into sections describing the school, community, and artifacts. Also included are sections that identify the positive core of responses of the HHS leadership team. These sections are further subdivided into the themes that emerged from data analysis.

Research Site: Hobart High School

The selection of Hobart High School (HHS) for this study was due to its consistency of academic achievement and high performance over a three year period and specifically during the 2009-2010 school year meeting all standards for AYP and other study criteria (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). Hobart High is 5A school that is part of the Unified School District 308 located in Hobart, Kansas. HHS has 116.5 full time staff/faculty members, an 11-person leadership team made up of the principal, three assistant principals, four counselors, a career and tech-ed director, and two athletic administrators. The district also employs one teacher leader or an instructional coach at the secondary level, who works out of the district office (Hobart High School, 2009).

Enrollment at Hobart High School has fluctuated for the past few years, but overall has been declining. The school has fluctuated between the 6A and 5A size classification for several years. For the past two years it has been classified as a 5A school, showing a consistent decline in student population. After the 2009-2010 student enrollment had been determined, HHS remained in the 5A classification for competitions in all athletics and activities for the 2009-2010 school year (Kansas State High School Activities Association, 2009). The student count is taken in September on the 20th to determine student populations in all state high schools. The result of
this count is the basis for student participation for the remainder of the year. The top 32 schools by enrollment compete in the 6A classification with the next 32 schools by enrollment compete in the 5A classification. HHS has fallen into the 5A classification for the past few years after being in the top 32 schools by enrollment for many years (Kansas State High School Activities Association, 2009).

Hobart High School’s enrollment during the 2009-2010 school year was 1304 students with 49.2% being female and 50.8% being male. Of these students, 52.7% are considered economically disadvantaged. The ethnic makeup of the student body during the 2009-2010 school year was 71.5% White, 6.7% African-American, 17.3% Hispanic, and 4.5% other (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). The ELL (English Language Learners) students make up 1.8% of the high school student body, but 4.7% of the students district-wide are ELL identified. At the state level, the ELL population is significantly higher at 9.1%.

Those students requiring special education services make up 14.0% of the overall student body which is slightly higher than the state average at 13.6%, but overall the district has 16% of its students needing special education services (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). For the state of Kansas, these data indicate a fairly substantial minority student population, a significant number of economically disadvantaged students, and a growing ELL population. These trends in demographics show steady increases in ethnic diversity at the school since the 2003-2004 school year, when 32% of HHS students were considered economically disadvantaged, and the school was 85.5% white, 5.3% African American, 11.9% Hispanic, and 1.3% other in its ethnic makeup. The ELL population at the time was 0.7%. HHS has two subgroups large enough to report in the performance of the school. The first subgroup is the socioeconomic group signified by the term “free and reduced lunch” and the second significant
subgroup is the Hispanic ethnic category. Although HHS has seen increasing numbers of low-income, ELL, and racial minority students, it has been successful in academic as well as athletic competitions over the past few years, which became part of the positive core of data that was collected from the school.

The city of Hobart is a relatively large community in central Kansas, with an estimated population in 2006 of 41,085. It is located in Reno County, which is 35 miles northwest of Wichita, the state’s largest city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Approximately 88.6% of the entire community is white, which is higher than the national average of 75% of the U.S. population being white. Hobart’s population has approximately 7.7% Hispanic which is lower than the school, where 17.9% of the student body is of the same ethnic origin. The community also is made up of about 49.6% women, which is below the national average of 50.9%. Males have a median income of $32,645 whereas females’ median income was only $21,190.

The Hobart community has an educational background with 82.3% of the entire population having earned a high school diploma. Only 17.2% of the entire population has a bachelor’s degree. One interviewee stated that he sees many former high school students around town years after graduation. He recognized many of the names on trucks of businesses mixed into the economy being those of former students who have made commitments to stay in Hobart. As another respondent stated, “the students just don’t leave,” again referring to the students after they graduate from HHS, “People just don’t leave.” This may be an exaggeration, but the population has remained constant over the past two census periods.

There are five high schools in the Hobart area; Hobart High School (HHS), Buhler HS, Nickerson HS, Trinity HS, and Central Christian HS. The first three in this list are public schools and the last two are private schools. Hobart also has a community college which supports post
graduate studies in the county and supports the vocational programs at Hobart High School (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). Members of the staff at HHS had differing opinions of the schools in the area, especially Buhler, which was viewed as a rival school, as the district boundary overlaps between the Buhler and Hobart public schools. One staff member reported that he was a graduate of Buhler HS and had children who graduated from Buhler HS. He felt the trend where Hobart citizens sent their children to school in Buhler was more popular in the past but had changed now. Another staff member stated that when he first moved to Hobart, Buhler schools were the place to send your kids if you had a choice. One of the counselors used to work in Haven, another community near Hobart, but for the past 14 years has been employed at HHS. In the past he did not even look at HHS for a teaching job because he had no investment in it, but has now come to know HHS as his home and as his calling to teach and help kids. Staff members in recent years have seen more families in the Hobart area select HHS as their school of choice. HHS’s reputation is viewed now as much more positive and the students believe they can be successful in anything they do at school. There are high expectations set when competing or representing HHS. One focus group respondent stated,

Students are proud to go to HHS now and that was not the case 10 years ago or longer and so much of that is because of their success and the perception that they are so successful. They achieve and they are winners and that is so much a part of who they are, and playing proud like HHS. That is why kids like it, teachers like it, everybody likes it – it feels good to be successful or to think you are successful.

HHS administration and teacher leaders all believe this change is due to the success that has become tradition at HHS. Focus group participants felt like Buhler was the “Utopia” of schools
in the past, but now they believe HHS provides a higher quality education for their students than other schools in the area.

This transition of positive feelings toward Hobart public schools did not come without some strategic decisions being made. One example of such a decision was the realignment of the district’s two middle schools. Students came into HHS from two feeder middle schools, Liberty and Sherman. At one time, these schools both had 7th and 8th grade students, and when students transitioned to the high school there were issues with students from the two middle schools fitting in at HHS. One of the middle schools, Liberty, was considered more affluent and this dynamic alone created ill feelings between the two schools. After a time, the incoming freshmen got used to their new surroundings, but the former superintendent saw problems in the dynamics of the two feeder schools. The Board of Education made a decision to change the two schools into attendance centers. Sherman Middle School became Hobart Middle School -7 and Liberty became Hobart Middle School - 8. Now the kids are combined at an earlier age and the staff at HHS felt like this has made a difference in the students getting along so well at the high school. The vision of the former superintendent and Board of Education has improved the district and in particular for the students at HHS.

Study participants also believe many staff members and members of the community have changed their perspective on the schools in Hobart, primarily because of HHS’s six straight 6A-5A state football championships.

Artifacts Relative to HHS

As mentioned in the previous paragraph the athletic success of HHS has been a powerful symbol of the school’s success. Study participants were asked to identify something at school, an artifact, a place, or something about HHS that makes it a special place to them. One respondent
from the athletic department brought an artifact that for him, truly represented HHS and why he has felt positive about his experiences as a member of the leadership team. He brought his six state championship rings from football to show how positively this one activity has affected the entire student body, school, and community (See Figure 4-1).

![Figure 4-1. Football State Championship Rings](image)

Not only did he talk about football, but also stated that overall the various athletic and activity programs have won 18 KSHSAA sponsored state titles in recent years. As he stated, the individual accomplishments of the athletic and activity programs reflected positively on the school, but what this kind of success has done for the community at large has been huge. He placed these successes in the scope of the big picture for the district and what is taking place with the new construction and positive community attitudes toward HHS.

Another symbol of community pride and teamwork is Gowans Stadium, which was a dual endeavor between the school district and the community college to rebuild the football/soccer/track facility (See Figure 4-2). These renovations were completed in the summer
of 2006, even before the present bond issue. Another athletic facility, the Salthawk Activities Center (SAC), (see Figure 4-3) was completed in January of 1999 at HHS, and was identified as an important structure at the school for indoor sports.

As one teacher stated,

The importance of this building to our school was great. Before, we played our basketball games at the Hobart Sports Arena, located in the same parking lot, but there was a sense of not being connected to HHS. With the Activities Center, the sense of community at HHS increased for students and players.
Outside the Activities Center is a small monument with the inscription “March forever onward, ye comrades of the Gold and Blue,” a verse from the school song, which one teacher identified as “corny” but all the same indicative of the progress of the district (See Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-4. Monument Sign in front of the SAC

Rich histories of graduates from HHS have moved on in life and have made their marks all over the world. These facilities symbols of success have all happened within the time frame of the past 8 years when HHS became the school of choice in Reno County and people who moved to Hobart did not automatically choose to go to Buhler as was the trend.

Another artifact mentioned in a focus group associated with HHS and school athletic traditions was the Victory Bell located in the Quad. In past years the Bell would be rung on every occasion of a HHS victory, but in recent years this tradition has not been maintained. Only the symbolism of the ringing of the Victory Bell remains and according to one focus group member it should be rung after each win at HHS. School administrators talked about the Bell still being in the Quad, but it has been silent for the past few years (See Figure 4-5). With the renovations at Gowans Stadium students feel very positively about their school, facilities, their team, their classmates, and about winning. School facilities are a big part of the traditions of HHS.
Others talked about the Quonset Hut, a physical education facility that was not a new part of campus, but an older one. To the physical education teacher, this facility had special memories. The Quonset Hut, or the ½ “beer can,” was an important part of the HHS campus. Any student who took PE at HHS had a class in the Quonset Hut. “I loved the smell of that old north gym” was one teacher’s comment. She reminisced how she had coached for 8 years in that gym, wryly noting, “we had one [volleyball] net and we were a 6A high school.” The old gym has since been remodeled into a weight room and wrestling room in the new plan. An administrator reported that some of the HHS staff members were graduates who used to attend dances in the Quonset hut when they were students and then sponsored dances there after becoming staff. They felt an attachment to the old gym and sadness with the building being remodeled.

The other parts of the physical structure of the school that have been under construction for the past two years are positive for the staff and students who know the changes being made are making HHS a better place. During data gathering at HHS there was limited access to any of the new construction areas because of safety reasons. Areas highlighted by staff in focus groups and interviews included the Quad, which was blocked from access during the study.
Administrators described the facility changes at HHS as needed and one of them joked that he is the manager of the trailer park in the center of the campus. This interviewee spoke freely and with good humor about his makeshift office being a portable trailer in the center of the construction at HHS along with the other construction trailers. His entire office and staff have been in temporary facilities since the beginning of the project in the spring of 2008. The project has been difficult with the number of areas under construction while school is in session and the number of students in classes that had to be relocated to other parts of the building. One focus group commented that even with the construction, dropping of steel beams, and constant noise from heavy machinery, the kids and staff have maintained a positive attitude. Classrooms have moved and students have been displaced, but kids are still learning and the distractions have not caused any negative effects toward academic achievement.

Other, not so concrete examples of significant artifacts at HHS were expressed in interviews. The principal talked about his classroom visit log and how he would visit 40 classrooms per day. This documentation assists him with evaluations and documents the rigor and relevance in each classroom. These principal visits were reported in focus groups with teacher leaders as being appreciated by the staff. These actions send a strong message about the importance of instruction and the importance of the administrative team being visible in the school. All staff interviewed reported that the principal’s visibility provided a positive image for not only the staff but also for the students. According to participants, students also reported to the administration the visibility of administrative staff is a good thing. Administrative staff believes students feel good about them being in the classrooms and in the hallways because they have the sense they were not there to catch them doing something wrong. It was reported by staff that students had positive feelings about the school’s culture.
The “Salthawk Nation” has been embraced as a frame of mind created by the number of events, items, and people who care about HHS. The school mascot is the Salt Hawk (see Figure 4-6), which was named in the 1930’s, referring to the salt mine industry from which the city grew its roots and has been nicknamed the Salt City. Salt Hawk was shortened to Salthawk in the 1990’s. The Salthawk Nation is what HHS is all about; the traditions, the records, the students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community.

One administrator explained that one of his duties was to supply the “grab bag” on every Friday. The grab bag was filled with candy and any student in a classroom who had on Salthawk clothing would receive a piece of candy. This practice was identified as a simple gesture, but one that students appreciated and looked forward to each week. It was also stated that if any one of them missed being out there with the grab bag on any Friday the students would not forget.

Another artifact discussed in focus groups and interviews was the positive referral form that has been presented to students who are displaying positive actions during school at HHS. The positive referral is a result of the administration trying to change the culture of the school through positive interactions between staff, administration, and students. Positive referrals as
reported by one administrator have outnumbered the discipline referrals at HHS by a 2-1 count over the past two years. The plan was presented by the administration three years earlier as a result of the large number of negative referrals turned in to the office. The staff followed the lead of the administration and as one faculty member remarked about the rewards system, it has made a difference in the culture of the school. It is not just about the administration or staff; it is also about the students and how they have made a difference at HHS. He went on to say, “we try to reward students for doing good things…it might just be that their kid [the parent’s kid] got caught doing 15 minutes of doing something good, but at least someone took the time to notice something good.” The staff has spent time catching kids doing something positive rather than doing something negative. This attitude has become infectious with the staff and spread to the attitudes of the students as well. Parents, as well as students, notice the difference in reflecting positively on their actions in school.

The final identified artifact at HHS that seems to reflect what is important about the students and the culture of the school is the “couch” made by several of the classes (See Figure 4-7).
Several teachers and administrators mentioned the couch in their responses and how important it is to the students at HHS. The art teacher talked about how this project was funded in part by local businesses, and was developed and worked on entirely by students at HHS as a collaborative project. The design of the couch is the figure of a woman lying down. Students from several academic areas worked on the project and at the completion of the figure, they described a dilemma of not knowing what to do with the skin or face of the figure. The students made a decision to finish the figure with mirrored glass so the reflection would create the true identity of who she really is. This perception is a key concept in explaining the symbolism of the figure to the diversity at HHS. The couch is a key component for how the students identified how they feel about their school, because everyone can see themselves in her reflection, which means there is a place in the school for every student.

Leadership Team

The leadership team includes the administrative team and the teacher leaders or academic department heads, non-teaching personnel, and the secondary instructional coach. The academic
department heads make up the most of the teacher leaders with assistance from the secondary instructional coach who is a supplementary resource for staff needing assistance with instructional methods, style, or content ideas. Many non-teaching personnel were mentioned by numerous staff and administration in interviews and focus groups as important informal leaders as it concerned student success at HHS. These individuals are custodians, the school resource officer, a volunteer, and the probation officer for the district and the city of Hobart. All of these supplementary, non-teaching personnel were cited by staff as playing an integral part in the success of HHS students. Each group of the leadership team played a part in the success at HHS. Each of the groups that comprise the leadership team is discussed in the following sections.

**Administrative Team**

The administrative team at HHS is made up of the principal, three assistant principals, a director of Career and Tech-Ed, and a full time athletic director. Interviewing all of the members of the administrative team and having a long standing association with them through league activities in the Ark Valley Chisholm Trail League gave me more insight into the relationships among the HHS administrative team and an appreciative outlook on accomplishments at HHS.

Teacher leaders had nothing but positive comments about the administrative team at HHS. The administrative team works well together and has affected the school in many ways. The administrative team knows the students and is visible in the school. Teacher leaders cited many ways the administrative team makes a difference in the school. One teacher mentioned that behind the scenes before they had students in class, the administrative team makes decisions on student schedules that benefit the staff. Working closely with counselors in scheduling the more difficult students into classes reflected a proactive approach to student discipline at HHS. This reflected back to administration knowing the students and knowing who needs to be in what
class or what would be the best combination of students in any particular academic setting. Counselors confirmed this is a common practice with the administrative team, working together to be proactive with potential problems that might occur in the classroom.

Teacher leaders believed the school’s administrative team made decisions that were in the best interest of students. A teacher cited, “we’ve got an administration that is pretty committed to helping kids” and another said, “they lead by example.” Another staff member commented on the assistant principals being visible and how that creates a good climate in the school. She really appreciated their help. She did not call on them very much, but it was nice to know they would be supportive of the classroom teachers. Nearly everyone in interviews and focus groups spoke positively about the administration and specifically about the principal’s positive influence with students, staff, and the overall school culture.

*Principal Leadership*

The principal was identified in nearly every interview and focus group as the academic and emotional leader of the school. Teacher leaders reflected positively in many focus groups about the principal and the relationships formed because of his leadership. When asked about who makes a difference at HHS, several groups responded emphatically that the principal does. For example, a department chair said, “He provides the academic freedom to teach my class and run my department the way I want to run it. I am trusted to do that and make hard decisions.” Another respondent commented, “We value our relationships with the administrators,” where another observed, “they really work well together.” When asked who makes a difference in the culture of the school, all teacher leaders and other administrative staff said the principal makes the difference. His commitment to HHS is shown daily by his visibility in the hallways and in the classrooms. One respondent talked about the principal being “everywhere, and he knows the
students by name.” Another interviewee pointed out, “He makes the biggest difference. He really wants to know what I think.”

Some of the characteristics that staff complimented the principal on was his efficiency while also remaining committed to staff and students. Teachers appreciated the way he runs meetings, stating, he “always starts meetings on time” and they are always to the point. “He doesn’t stand up there and spew … he doesn’t show us – HR videos or things that are irrelevant.” Another comment about the principal was, “he doesn’t waste our time” referring to meetings that have no purpose and no direction. As one teacher put it, “leadership is definitely top down here,” but this comment was made to indicate how HHS staff has faith in his leadership and how he sets the example for them to follow, not that that he is authoritarian. The principal also “sets the atmosphere of freedom, but yet purpose – the assistant principals follow suit.”

The principal is the driving force behind these relationships at HHS. Flexibility at HHS is a standard that helps those who have special circumstances relating to their education. The principal has made it clear that he has some non-negotiable items as stated by one of his assistants. “He is flexible, he is agile, and he leads by example” are the phrases that best describe him. His willingness to be flexible has resulted in assistance for students at HHS. An example of this problem solving mixed with flexibility was a situation of an ELL student who could not grasp the material in one of her classes. HHS had a bilingual student who spoke the ELL student’s language fluently and was allowed to earn a speech credit by tutoring and interpreting in the class for the ELL student. The principal saw the value and opportunity in assisting a student in another language to be enough to receive credit for the speech class she needed to graduate from HHS. He had to also take into account that the teacher had to have speech certification in order to make this opportunity a valid one.
Staff members stated the principal listens to them and may offer ideas, but allows his staff to be a part of the solution to problems in the school and not just a recipient of dictated policy. One instance of this involved the entire staff and the fact that too many students were failing in numerous classes at HHS. His comments to the staff were that he needed to have 95% of all students passing their classes at HHS. Some faculty took this the wrong way indicating to other staff that “he just wanted the kids passed in classes,” but that was not his message. He challenged the staff to find ways to help kids come up; to find a variable that would make a difference with their kids in class. The staff was to find a way to pass students at a higher rate but also maintain rigor and have them pass local and state assessments. One assistant principal said it best, “whatever it takes” was the theme that prevails with the principal, and the challenge to the staff was to find a way to make it happen.

The faculty respects the principal and how he sets the example for everyone in the building. He leads by example and would ask nothing more of his staff that he would ask of himself. One way he does so is by teaching a class in the math department with some of the more difficult students at HHS. He is an outside of the box thinker and creative with the operations of the school and what is good for students. This attitude and belief in students and staff is part of the school culture. A counselor commented that the principal “is really proud of HHS and really puts a lot of energy to it and makes it easier for us to do the same.” One respondent commented, “part of our success is due to us being problem solvers and we do a great job of that. There is not a model.” Thinking positively with a “we can” attitude has made HHS a more productive school environment for students.

Teacher leaders pointed out that students know who the head principal is and he is visible in the school. Others said that he makes corrections to students and they respond positively to
him because they know him. If you mention a student’s name to the principal he will respond in a manner that lets you know that he knows the student. Teachers believe what sets HHS administration apart from others is their familiarity with the students. The principal is very visible in the school. Each hour he is either in a classroom or in the hallway. Staff have compared other schools to the principal and assistants at HHS and say that in previous schools the administration is not as visible as they are at Hutch and do not know the students as well. The administration at HHS knows when things are going on and before someone visits with them about an issue, they already know about it.

Another response that indicated a strong relationship exists between the staff and the principal was that “we are treated like professionals … here we are treated the way that we would like to be treated.” The principal also writes notes of praise for accomplishments of all students and staff whether they are in athletics or a skateboarding competition or a play in school. He always communicates in small ways to make teachers aware that he knows what is going on in his building. In some ways, the principal knows things need to be done at school that are requirements that he finds a way to get the same thing done without making a huge issue out of it. He does so in a way that protects his staff from being overburdened with new edicts and directives so they can conduct their classrooms as they have always done.

Teacher Leaders

Teacher leaders were identified as the teaching personnel in the building who have taken on leadership responsibilities based on their status as a department head in their content area. The administrative leadership of the school trusts the teacher leaders to make good decisions for their students in the operation of their classes. That trust goes a long way with the staff and they feel confident in their teaching and leadership positions. Teacher leaders have worked well with
administrators and are willing to do what is necessary for all students to be successful. Teacher leaders provide a diverse curriculum in classes that make it possible for all students to learn at their ability levels. The administration also makes sure that the teachers at HHS have the latest research and best practices to be utilized in their classrooms.

Teacher leaders have the opportunity to be positive influences with other staff and be role models to their students. The administration has influenced the staff by their example to focus on the positive aspects of the school. The teacher leaders have accepted their roles of looking for the positive in their situations in and out of the classroom. One administrator commented that it is wonderful to go into classrooms and see a staff that “likes to come to work” and who are “enjoying their jobs.” The teacher leaders have communicated to their departments that they have the support of the administration and the freedom to teach their courses as they choose. One teacher leader stated that he “enjoys the academic freedom” given to him in the classroom to work with his students.

Teacher leaders have focused on student outcomes and challenging students to seek higher level learning opportunities at HHS. The staff has worked with students with testing deficiencies in the math department pulling students out to work with them one-on-one to improve their math scores at HHS. This practice has improved scores overall and specifically for Hispanic students that was a target area for school improvement. One of the teacher leaders has 4th and 5th blocks off and he works with students during that time to improve their math skills. To carry this thought further there has been a push within the staff that students are not allowed to sit and do nothing in the classroom. Some schools do not want to create issues in the classroom for students who are doing nothing and choose to not confront them in the school setting. This practice is a two edged sword with one edge being it would be less of an issue if you just let a
student sit, but the other is if you expect students to achieve then you must encourage and keep
them engaged in the learning process. At HHS, however, students are forced to be engaged in the
learning process. “If they forget a pencil … you give them one” as one teacher leader stated,
“You don’t send them out of the room.” Consequently, HHS has improved test scores to meet
their AYP goals for the past three years. The teacher leaders acknowledged that taking the extra
time with students has benefitted HHS. Through professional development training the staff at
HHS has developed rapport with their students. “The relationship piece is huge,” reported one
administrator when speaking to how the faculty affects student success. In a testing setting one
coach, who gets along with everyone, was asked to be involved because he had positive
relationships with the students. He shook their hands as they entered the testing room and told
them that he was glad to see them and then commented, “You can do this.” The previous test
nearly 70% of them failed the exam, but this time that same group passed.

Modeling positive behaviors and focusing on the positive at HHS has created an
atmosphere where teachers are able to exhibit their passion for their subject matter. Teachers
have been able to provide an environment where all students feel safe regardless of their ethnic
background or socio-economic status. More staff has obtained ELL training and certification to
assist those who have language issues. The staff feels supported and shows in their actions that
they truly care for their students. They have created a staff that supports one another and
cooperates with each other to work for the common good of the school. The teacher leaders
identified through their focus groups that they are there to help kids. The positive communication
that has taken place with parents from teachers has made a difference in how the school is
perceived by the community; especially since many of these contacts have been positive rather
than the negative discipline contacts from previous years. That is not to say that there are not
some negative contacts. Kids make mistakes and there are still discipline issues, but the administration and the teachers have a design to accentuate the positive and do not waste energy or time with issues that create a negative atmosphere in the school. Other individuals in the school who help to create a positive learning environment at HHS are several non-teaching personnel.

Non-Teaching Personnel Informal Leaders

HHS has a number of non-teaching personnel whose informal leadership has made a significant difference in the operations of the school. Each school has support staff that take on responsibilities with students that indirectly assist the students and make them feel more positive about the school. These roles may vary from school to school, but the effects are the same in how they interact with the students, staff, and administration.

Instructional Coach

One of those in an informal leadership position at HHS is the instructional coach, who has curriculum and instructional duties for the secondary teaching staff. Her purpose is to provide assistance for any staff member working on methods or content in the classroom. She is housed in the central administrative offices, but spends a great deal of time working in the secondary buildings in USD 308. She has provided individual as well as group professional development sessions for staff. She is a person who the staff trusts with confidential as well as non-confidential questions and she gives them the latest methodologies and strategies for their classrooms. Any administrator or experienced staff members who see struggling teachers are able to recommend that she help them in the classroom. According to the administrative team, she has made a difference in the classroom for new and experienced teachers. She stays current
with the latest classroom strategies and best practices. She has worked with staff on re-teaching concepts for building assessments to improve test scores.

*Parent Volunteer*

One focus group member pointed out a volunteer at HHS who for years has been volunteering her time assisting dyslexic students attending HHS. The volunteer’s own child was severely dyslexic and she made a decision to volunteer her time and expertise to assist others at HHS. She has also been utilized to assist in the testing and recognition of students with this disability. The volunteer has committed to assisting students with reading deficiencies as well and works in the computer lab where there are programs available for students she is assisting. These students amaze staff because they do not read well, but with the volunteer’s guidance they are continually working on the computers and make regular visits to the library to check out books. Their reading levels are improving and she has made a positive difference at HHS.

*SRO – School Resource Officer*

Another non-teaching person whose leadership makes a positive difference at HHS is the SRO (Student Resource Officer). He is not an employee of the district, but is stationed at the high school for his assignment with the Hobart Police Department and his salary is split between the city of Hobart and the school district. He has provided a strong presence at HHS with students and staff. Several staff members commented they feel HHS is a safe school and attribute part of that to the SRO’s presence on campus and his interaction with students and staff.

The SRO works effectively with the students and assists school leadership with problems that arise. One assistant principal talked about how “we work as a team to find solutions to a situation.” One instance was a case where a student had a problem with his citizenship and faced possible deportation the week before graduation. The student had been in Hobart his entire life,
and the family had been in the community for 20 years, but there was an issue with his papers. The counselor commented that “the SRO knew who to contact with INS,” referring to Immigration and Naturalization Services. He worked with the probation officer, the counselor, and the administrator to keep the student at HHS. The student “got to graduate and he is still here,” cited the counselor involved in the case. This is an example of him going above the scope of his responsibilities and making a difference for students and staff at HHS.

_Probation Officer - HHS_

The probation officer for HHS works closely with administrative staff and students who have difficulties with the law or with school attendance. The probation officer is stationed at HHS and is also not a direct school employee, like the SRO, but his salary is split between the county and the school district. He spends time going into classrooms to talk with students. One focus group member mentioned,

He is working with our roughest kids. He sees them every day, checks on their attendance and their grades – not just those kids, he is out you know meeting other kids as well and does a great job and our officer does a great job as well, upbeat and talks to kids.

One incident an interviewee reported involved a student who went missing. The student was not on probation, but the officer contacted the parent who did not speak English and tried to assist her with the problem. The probation officer’s commitment to the students is documented in another incident involving a student who quit coming to school a week before graduation. The probation officer assisted administration in making a positive situation out of a negative one. The student graduated after all parties agreed to what needed to happen to complete his education. Students on his caseload have been successful in staying in school and eventually graduating. A staff member commented the probation officer has “a lot of tools in his tool box” referring to his
ability to work effectively with the students at HHS. He will visit with “students even if they are not on his case load,” remarked one focus group member.

*Influence of Staff Development – Ruby Payne*

The faculty respondents in the study spent hours in focus groups discussing the supports and positive culture of HHS. The principal stated that students are treated with respect and they like the adults in the building. He also stated that one of the best things they did as a staff was to receive training related to Ruby Payne’s work on poverty, which stresses how to communicate effectively in the classroom with students who may not understand the social differences of the dominant class. Being able to communicate as a staff to all students for better understanding makes HHS a student friendly environment. They have incorporated that perspective into how staff and administration treat students at HHS. Several staff members mentioned the Ruby Payne staff development and the difference it made in how staff treated students. They also remarked that students could tell when staff made comments that were not in the parent voice and would remark, “Are you Ruby Payne-ing me?” Students understood the differences that were taking place. They were not being talked at, but with, and not in an authoritarian manner.

Several staff members said they could see a positive difference in how students and staff reacted to the training and how it helped change the school’s culture. This professional development also made a difference in perceptions of some discipline procedures by staff and administration. The principal remarked, “We don’t bang on them a lot about dress code and things like that … there is a wide variety of things that they can do.” He went on to say, “I think they [the students] appreciate all of the choices and appreciate the teachers that paint with a broad brush.” This “broad brush” identifies what the teachers do for the broad spectrum of students at HHS. Treating each student as an individual with different needs exemplifies a
statement made by a staff member, “whatever it takes” as the approach they take when meeting student needs. “We all have our exceptions, but the teachers want to help them.” Another member of the administrative team remarked, “it is a supportive culture...you see the kids really are tough...but they feel comfortable at school because they know it is a safe place to be. People care about them.” They attribute much of the supportive culture to their professional development. One administrator remarked about the Ruby Payne training, “We have gotten more out of that than anything that I have ever seen in my years in education.” He went on to identify how the Ruby Payne training has affected more than just the Hispanic population, but the entire student body. The changes brought about by the training include the manner in which the staff interacts with students, especially those in the lower SES group, breaking down the rules that govern the classroom setting and making it possible for all students to understand the rules and opening the doors to be successful. Within the halls of HHS there are other factors that make the students feel comfortable and safe.

**HHS Curriculum Structure**

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, another common theme that emerged from participants about HHS was the diversity of courses and programs offered in the school curriculum. HHS is unique because of its trimester schedule for their courses. The trimester schedule allows HHS to offer three separate periods per year whereas most high school schedules are based on two semesters. Consequently, most high schools do not have as many opportunities that HHS students have in a year or over the course of their four year high school career. HHS is also on a five period day with a block schedule. Classes are approximately seventy-five minutes in length. When staff was asked about what they felt the students at HHS liked about the school, several responded as this teacher did, “I think they like the flexibility of
the curriculum...we have a lot of flexibility...the trimesters have created opportunities for students to take whatever they want to take...it is a curriculum that is far reaching and wide range.” Participants in one focus group commented there is a place for everyone at HHS, with programs that fit the needs of every student. One of those areas of inclusion is in the special education department.

The focus for special education students is to include a majority of them into regular education classes. Several respondents spoke to the school’s philosophy about special education students, noting, “They are so included.” Examples of situations were conveyed during focus groups with staff on how students in the HHS environment included students with special needs. A teacher talked about her assignment in a previous school where students with special needs were not involved. In contrast at HHS

We see special ed. kids that are involved in honors classes and who are involved in the dance class that we have on campus... A lot of my kids are low functioning and are in the front row of the pep assemblies and they are included...that is a really cool thing.

Others commented that HHS “is so capable of finding a place for each kid...we have so much of that...we communicate that and that helps that child succeed and they are a part of the school.”

Students with special needs were not only included in regular classes, they were accepted by other HHS students. To illustrate, a staff member stated,

I’ve always bragged to other people about our kids...don’t want to say none but 99% of the time are so accepting...sometimes because of the habits they have they can be annoying to other people, but I see our kids talking to them... I have always been proud of our kids for how they have treated the special ed. kids...I’m not sure why, but it has always been a part of the culture here.
Another teacher remarked, “Teachers, and more important than that, other students are accepting of students who are outside of the norm… There is a lot more acceptance here for a wider variety.”

Supports for students are visible in all areas at HHS. Students with special needs are not just those identified for special education services. HHS has a diverse population and a growing part of this population is students who are English Language Learners (ELL). An assistant principal remarked that the administration is sensitive to the needs of this faction of their student body and even reach out to make home visits to better communicate with their students. The parents are more responsive to the face-to-face visits from the administrators than they are to phone calls. An administrator explained, “If I try to call them I don’t know if they are getting it or not. They get it when we go there.”

Students who come to HHS are not all proficient in the English language and some live in homes where Spanish is the primary language spoken. These students often have difficulty participating in the regular education classes at HHS. To address this need, the school has set up alternatives for these students to assist them in adapting and learning effectively in their school environment. Hispanic students have formed a school club, HIP (Hispanics In Progress), to be a support for each other. “This is a cross-cultural school…it is recognized that diversity is important,” one counselor stated. There is also a diversity faculty group at HHS that meets on a regular basis to discuss the students who might be ready for opportunities in upper level academic courses as well as those that struggle to make it in the regular curriculum.

Dealing with diversity is also dealing with the poverty involved with diversity. HHS is over 50% low-income as determined by free and reduced price lunches and a mostly middle class faculty that did not do well in communicating with their students. As noted previously, the
administration provided Ruby Payne training for their staff, which addresses how to communicate with and understand low-income students and in some cases extreme poverty. An administrator remarked, “being able to work with them [Hispanic students and students of poverty] has been huge and helping them find a place here has been a big benefit.”

Relationships were viewed as critical to student academic success. The principal commented, “It all comes back to relationships… when we have low test scores, we have to remediate them. We get in there and teach them and focus in on the relationship with them.” This scenario has been repeated in situations at HHS where the administration will look to someone who has a great relationship with the students to work with them on improving their scores.

Recently, HHS had a group of students who failed the reading test. It was necessary to pull these students from class and tutor them. One of the staff responsible for tutoring was a coach who had no professional experience in teaching reading, but had established the relationship piece with students in this group. Seventy percent of this group passed the reading test on their second attempt. “It had nothing to do with teaching reading. I think the relationship piece is huge,” the principal stated.

*Student Academic Supports at HHS*

Students at HHS have opportunities in many academic areas. The diversity of courses at HHS is exemplified by the IB (International Baccalaureate) program, concurrent credit-dual credit courses, honors courses, regular education offerings, credit recovery courses, special education courses, and career and tech-ed programs. When students are asked by staff about what they like about HHS “they always say more options.” One staff member also commented, “we have a lot of programs in place that support and help students and that comes mostly from our leadership recognizing that we have a very diverse student population.” The two programs
mentioned most often, however, were Computer-aided Instruction (CAI) and Career and Tech-ed, which are described in more detail below.

Computer-aided Instruction (CAI) Program

The CAI program has been a positive option for those who need additional help. Students new to HHS and who would be lost in a regular education classes take some of their courses in the CAI lab where they can work at their own pace and where language is not as large of an issue. The population of students identified as ELL takes some of their core classes in the CAI lab where they are able to learn and be productive. Sitting in classes where language is a barrier presents specific problems for ELL students and inhibits their learning. One focus group brought up that it does not do any good to put a student with no English skills into a biology class where they do not understand the language and they are getting nothing out of the class when they could go to a computer aided class and learn a little at a time to become more proficient. A counselor agreed the CAI program

Is a good place for these students as they first come to school to pick up some credits – and here again they are not in the classroom where they do not understand a teacher and it is a pretty safe place for them to work at their own pace.

There is also a support person for the ELL population at HHS. This staff member speaks fluent Spanish, is their advocate in the school setting, and provides a safe haven for the students. A district initiative is to certify more staff members as qualified ELL instructors to meet the growing needs at HHS.

Career and Tech-ed Programs

Fortunately for HHS, Hobart Community College is nearby and shares resources for the career and tech-ed programs. As part of the new construction at HHS the new Career and Tech-
Ed Academy was opened in 2010. The high school offers 12 of the 16 individual programs in six general career and tech-ed areas available for students as shown in the Kansas Career Fields and Clusters Model (See Appendix D). Career and tech-ed opportunities meet the needs of a wide range of students. Recently, in the Health area at HHS the director had to add another instructor for the CNA (Certified Nurses’ Assistant) program because of the large number of students enrolled. This is not the only area of expansion. With the students needing to reach proficient or above in math testing the tech-ed department has taken students who need to improve their skills in math and found them a place where they can focus on their strengths and use tech-ed to help them learn math in a different way. On staff member spoke about “putting them in building trades or automotive program or something of that nature to help them learn in a different way, but by focusing on what they are good at – we kind of do that for all of them.” The strength of finding a place for students to be successful is a focus of the career and tech-ed program at HHS.

Other areas of the HHS curriculum benefit the more advanced students. One of the counselors remarked that they needed to offer more dual credit courses for students seeking more college credits while in high school. “More dual credit courses would be nice,” then went on to say they offer quite a few now, but there is always a need for more especially “more that we could do with our articulation agreement (with Hobart Community College) to offer more would be more positive for kids and get more college credits for our students.” HHS also offers the IB program and honors courses to supplement the curriculum for those students that need to be challenged to a greater degree. Students of all levels are challenged in curricular areas and are provided opportunities to fit in at HHS.
Special Initiatives to Assist Students

During the past several years, HHS has introduced a number of new initiatives to assist students for the explicit purpose of changing the culture of the school. These initiatives encourage the students and staff to look for the glass to be half full and not half empty. This positive attitude resonates from the top down at HHS. One of those initiatives, the Ruby Payne staff development, was discussed earlier in the chapter. Other initiatives are the positive referral, HHS’s Renaissance or student/staff recognition program, a focus on Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships, and the Opportunity for Improvement program. These initiatives differ from the curricular programs mentioned in the previous section because those programs are designed to improve student achievement. The school initiatives are school wide programs designed to enhance the culture of the school.

Positive Referrals

The staff at HHS described a single event, which they believe had the most impact on staff and students at HHS in recent years. Positive referrals were introduced to the staff after a few critical years of negative discipline referrals and overwhelming numbers of negative behaviors exhibited at the school. A suggestion from an assistant principal to change this method of dealing with students and to turn it into a more positive environment took time to make the difference that the administration sought. New programs take time and commitment to make them work and in this case a new perspective of looking for the positive actions of students rather than the negative actions which had dominated the reports from the staff and administration for years. The punitive nature of the school had made discipline the focus of the administration and staff. Working from the opposite direction took more effort and a change in the way people in the school focused their energy. Negative discipline referrals numbered in the
hundreds, but now positive referrals outnumber the negative by a 3 to 1 count. Positive referrals are handled in the same way that discipline referrals are handled. The referral is written and turned into the administrator. The teacher then contacts the parent by phone to relay the good news. These contacts take a lot of effort, but for the school this event made a significant difference in school climate. Parents appreciate hearing something positive from the school rather than always the negative and “what did my kid do wrong” scenario. One administrator commented about how positive referrals have increased student’s “overall awareness that people are watching what I do.”

_HHS Renaissance_

“We have come a long way with the Renaissance stuff,” stated one administrator. He was referring to the Jostens program for recognition of students and staff. Jostens Corporation works with schools to provide a number of student services including student recognition and school yearbooks, and has a component for staff recognition as well. HHS has developed its own Renaissance program for recognition of students and staff, which includes the “staff member of the month” and the “teacher of the month” at HHS. The program for staff and faculty recognition came from donations sought from the community through business sponsorships. A staff member pointed out how they have socials after school serving ice cream and passing out t-shirts to staff. All of these recognitions have been a part of the transformation at HHS to seek and focus on what is important and to look for the positives that are taking place to make a difference and to have a positive impact on the school environment.

_Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships_

Another administrator commented about the three R’s at HHS. Rigor, relevance, and relationships are the triad of what counts at school. Visiting with the principal, he stated that the
rigor, relevance, and relationship program was one that originated from the former superintendent. It is still utilized today, but not in the same vein that it was in prior years. Teachers and administrators still utilize the concepts for determining sound educational practices in the classroom. The simple nature of these terms defines the direction of the school on what is important to emphasize in and out of the classroom.

Rigor. As it relates to the rigor part of the three R’s the teaching method of “stand and deliver” has been overcome and is no longer good enough for HHS in every class. Other factors are expected to be a part of the teaching model include delivery, guided practice, checking for understanding, re-teaching, and checking for mastery. Teachers learn their styles of teaching from models they have had in the past or with the style used when they were in the classroom as a student. Students do not learn in the same manner, as was the case in past years especially as it relates to minorities and low SES students. All HHS teachers believe all students can learn.

Relevance. Relates to the view of school personnel, starting with the principal, by offering students what is needed for them to be successful in school. This is evidenced by the commitment to a wide variety of programs and courses that reach all students at HHS. The director of the vocational-technical academy said, “Half your day is spent doing what you want to do – that creates the relevance to offset the rigor if you will.” As described earlier by a staff member, “there is a place for everyone here.” This is also true in other courses for students that need the more challenging course work to develop them educationally. The other focus of the three R’s is what makes HHS a special place to be.

Relationships. Another part of the HHS three R’s program recognizes “the relationship piece with teachers and students” that administrators felt was integral to classroom learning. Establishing relationships with kids has especially made a difference in the connection with the
low-income kids at HHS. More students in the low-income and Hispanic ethnic groups have been identified as students who should be moved to honors courses. Counselors and administrators have opened doors for these students to be more challenged with rigorous curriculum because of the connection that has been nurtured by forming relationships with school staff. An assistant principal made it a point to say, “The principal has made it a point to have administrators track positive comments that they make with students and staff a priority.”

The need to better understand the Hispanic culture in more detail was a point brought out by one of the assistant principals. “I don’t feel like we have a large Hispanic population but yet it is growing but if we cannot connect the dots between the parent and the school…they want their children to be successful in the school…we make contact all of the time.” Coming from Dodge City, where they have a more pronounced Hispanic population, has provided this administrator with more insight about the culture and what is expected. Knowing the culture emphasizes the need for more structure and rigor in the academic programs for these students.

*Opportunity for Improvement*

Another positive initiative at HHS is the OFI or Opportunity for Improvement program for those students who fall into the lowest performing group at the school. The students are divided between staff and administration and in essence are “adopted” by them. Faculty and staff then informally monitor these students’ grades and attendance. One AP indicated this could be done in the hallways, during passing period, or before or after school. The purpose is to have contact with the student and deal with them in a positive manner, encourage them, and get them additional help where it is needed. They identify these OFI students by GPA and by credits earned. This has been a very popular program at HHS and again fits into their establishing relationships model.
Acceptance of Diversity

The meshing of the diverse population in Hobart is considered an asset in the school community. A focus group pointed out that smaller schools do not have the diversity that a school like HHS has. This characteristic provides a niche for every kid and an opportunity to fit in if they truly want to. Others stated in focus groups that they came from other districts to Hobart and in their previous districts; they did not have the diversity that is present at HHS. “Diversity is critical here,” stated a focus group member speaking about HHS. Another spoke freely about how she has learned a lot about the Hispanic culture at HHS. Students brought her tamales and at first, she did not know that you were not to eat the outside or the cornhusk wrapping. She felt like she learned a great deal about the culture, but she has also learned a lot about herself and how to deal with people who were different from her. Her experiences with diversity at HHS have been positive.

Diverse populations like that of HHS have many success stories that have not been told. In the case of Hispanic students, there is a little pressure from everyone to be successful. The teachers believe in the students and set high expectations for them. The faculty diversity group was identified in one focus group. The faculty committee meets periodically to discuss minority students that need to be pushed more or encouraged to take upper level courses to enhance and develop their skills in the classroom. One such student, a Hispanic male, left a note in a staff member’s mailbox last year thanking him for the encouragement that he had received after taking an honors biology course. Then he entered the IB program at HHS and completed two years of work. He received a “B” in the IB biology course that he had taken. The counselor went on to say that this student did not have the greatest writing or reading skills but was determined to accept the challenge and opportunity offered to him by the staff. The staff member went on to...
say, “This will definitely be a note that I will keep.” Another respondent noted, “I have learned a great deal about our diverse community.” Then another focus group member completed their thought, “but there is still a lot to do.” Learning about students’ home culture takes time and commitment from everyone.

**Community Connection**

Like many high schools, a challenge for HHS is maintaining positive connections with the community. Each community across Kansas is facing similar issues with high unemployment, increased poverty, and declining populations. It is difficult to project the realities of school needs without that bond between the schools and their patrons. Hobart was a community that saw the need for a complete remodel at HHS and citizens support their schools and a commitment to students through their tax dollars.

Having attended several sporting events at HHS has given me a perspective that I can attest the community supports school activities and athletic success. The ties with their alumni are strong. School traditions help build these ties with the community. During the time of the bond issue question, community buy in and approval was necessary for the bond issue to pass. Community members driving by the renovated Gowans Stadium have seen and heard about the successes from athletics and now want the school to reflect and look the part of a successful school. In several focus groups the mention of community coffee shop meetings held by the former superintendent were viewed as important in the passing of the bond issue. Several staff members thought that the bond issue might not have passed if the school had not been so successful in football.

Mentioned in several interviews were the many things the school does in turn to support the community. Many HHS students are involved in community service activities. HHS receives
many requests to assist the elderly. The retirement home nearby the school called to ask for
volunteers to assist them with square dancing activities because they were having Western Days.
The school is heavily involved in wellness activities with the younger students in the district with
the Kansas Kids Fitness Day where members of the Junior–Senior Leaders Group assist with
fitness activities held at Gowans Stadium for 600-700 youth from Hobart. Many students
regularly participate in scheduled blood drives.

Community-School Relationships

Community expectations of the school have changed over the years. When discussing
perceptions the staff has about what the community expects of HHS there were different
responses, but all encompassing, from winning football games to making sure that their student
graduates from high school. In the counseling and administrative areas, the parents trust the staff
to have students enrolled in the right classes and to prepare students to be ready for their plans
after high school graduation.

There is also an expectation that HHS is preparing a good work force for local businesses
in the community. This involves the skills related to jobs in local manufacturing. The tech-ed
coordinator met with local businessmen about their concerns related to a new industry moving
into the community and taking present employees from them. Possibly 400 workers would be
employed by the new corporation and would be looking to the high school to produce high
quality graduates to fill these vacancies. The advantage that HHS has over many schools is its
close proximity to the community college, which means there are more opportunities to train
students for future careers. The Career and Tech-Ed Building is new and has been an exciting
addition to the HHS campus. The association with Hobart Community College (HCC) has
increased the opportunities for students and then as they enter post graduate studies they can move into a career field for future employment opportunities.

_Athletic Success_

As stated previously in sections of this dissertation, there has been a change of perceptions relating to HHS in many areas of the school. One of those areas is athletics. The athletic director at HHS has indicated that since 2000 the school has won 18 state championships sanctioned by the Kansas State High School Activities Association. HHS over the years has won 32 state championships in athletic competitions. Some staff members reflected that for years Hobart was considered a basketball community because of the National Junior College Tournament being played in Hobart at the Hobart Sports Arena, which is located directly across the street from HHS. Before the addition of the Salthawk Activities Center, HHS basketball games were played at the Arena. The most significant trends to many in the Hobart community are the six consecutive state football championships. These culminating events to each of the past six fall seasons have changed the attitude of a community and have made a difference in the culture at HHS. Staff talk about how these events have made differences in the students and the community and made a difference in how the community looked at the nearly $79 million dollar bond issue that included a major remodel to HHS. Differences pointed out by staff were reflective of a renewed school spirit and commitment by students to be involved in a positive school culture. These sentiments have carried over to the community as well. This positive school sentiment leads to an environment that students and staff enjoy and administration is able to monitor the actions and climate of the building.
School Policies

The principal indicates that rules for the school need to be well thought out and consistent with the policies of the district. Schools are full of rules and policies that reinforce the behaviors that are important to running an effective school and to providing a safe and orderly environment. HHS is no different than any other schools having a student handbook that contains all of the policies for student governance and accountability. These rules are not much different than any other high school’s policies. Several staff had commented that the atmosphere at HHS is laid back and the principal is not someone who wastes a lot of time with enforcement of rules that have little to do with getting an education. One example referenced was from an assistant principal’s interview when he brought an issue to the principal about a kid who came to school with his hair dyed blue. In his previous administrative position that would never have been allowed, and it would have been a big issue. He went on to say he would have chased that student down and dealt with it. At HHS the principal asked him if the blue hair was keeping him from getting an education. The principal is not someone who sits in his office and makes rules. The principal stated,

We try not to take up people’s time - we try to focus on teaching and learning. Keep all the other stuff out – keep it from being our focus. We try not to solve complex problems with simple solutions – let’s make a policy. The problem with that is that if it doesn’t work – everyone just gets mad. And they start blaming each other – that teacher over there did what they were supposed to … Admit that problems are complex.

The principal cited the tardy policy as one that has been an issue for years in every school, but in spite of rules, the issue continues. “So, let’s not kid ourselves and spend hours and hours about it – it is what it is and let’s not let it bog us down.” One staff member’s perception was “there is
not a lot of rules or structure, but great leadership allows that to take place or happen.” An AP said “we have two rules, be where you are supposed to be and do what you are supposed to do. It is really that simple.” These concepts are very similar to the ideas of knowing right from wrong. The statement “we have two rules” may be hyperbole, but the concept of keeping the rules simple gives the administration the flexibility to not waste time with issues that do not warrant much attention. The administration stressed common sense and not wasting people’s time. An example of this is reflected at the beginning of school when most schools assemble all students in the auditorium to go over rules with them; something different takes place at HHS. The principal takes them in the auditorium and shows them a video of the kids at different times of the year having fun and enjoying HHS.

Extracurricular Opportunities for Students

Students at HHS have many opportunities to enjoy their school and to take part in a host of activities. Student journalists prepare the yearbook at HHS each year and provide a snapshot of the clubs, activities, athletics, and other school related events that happen at HHS. From the state championship football team to Student Council and Senior Leaders to Powder Puff, the students at HHS have a wide variety of activities and opportunities to get involved in while being a student. That certainly does not eliminate the academic responsibility that each student has in order to earn their high school diploma.

HHS has been a school that eight years ago had 1200 discipline referrals and in 2009-2010 had only 184. In 2009-2010 the positive referrals were double the number of discipline referrals in the school. In a graduate poll taken by the counselors 98% of the graduates marked either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the education they received while at HHS. Consensus of present staff indicated that HHS is a great place to work and one that provides a positive
learning environment. The overall themes when referring to HHS are that one size does not fit all when it comes to educating students; teaching is taking place when students are learning and meeting standards, and the relationships developed at HHS matter.

Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 included the findings from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Hobart High School teacher leaders and administration. The chapter contains information relative to the school, the members of the school community, and those facts reported that identify and assist with making sound qualitative statements about this study involving school leadership, academic achievement, and school culture. The chapter is divided into sections covering a description of the community of Hobart, the school and new construction, and artifacts associated with HHS. The second section is detailing data relating to the administrative team which includes sections on supports for students at HHS. The third section is about the teacher leaders, characteristics of the principal and other non-teaching personnel. Also included in this section are sections on community involvement, athletic success, school policies, and opportunities for students at HHS. Chapter 5 will describe my conclusions based on the data collected and my reflections for the future.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

A multitude of academic, athletic, and activity opportunities at HHS made it possible to build a positive culture for the students, staff and parents. Focusing on the positive core of experiences at HHS has become the mindset of the administration and staff and carries over to the students and community. This is consistent with the theoretical approach developed by Cooperrider (1987) known as AI or appreciative inquiry where one seeks the positive core of experiences in an organization. AI is also known as a process for change where in the business world there was a change in focus from a problematic focus or deficit thinking to that of identifying what works in the organization. AI, whether done consciously or unconsciously, has become an integral part of the development of the HHS leadership team and their students. The principal consistently demonstrated and reinforced the theoretical perspective of always looking for the positive in the school setting. The focus for the school has been to create the best situation for all students and to minimize the negative aspects. This example, set by the principal, has carried over to the staff, students, and members of the HHS community.

The leadership team at HHS recognized a need for change in their environment. The AI principle of focusing on the positive has been utilized by administrative and teacher leadership. The HHS principal intrinsically understood the concept, but did not relate the theoretical perspective to the school’s method of overall school management. So much of what the staff stands for is to assist in the creation of a healthy, productive school environment, and to emphasize the positive aspects of the school and their students. In this chapter the focus of AI and the five basic principles will drive the organization of the conclusions for this study. Already introduced is the positive nature of the AI process and how perceptions and problems are dealt
with in the school setting at HHS. To further review, the purpose of this study was to show how school leadership and culture affect a 6A-5A high school in Kansas that had met AYP. The research was designed to describe the positive core of experiences of school leaders and examine the relationship between leadership, school culture, and student academic achievement. The research questions guiding my study were based on the theoretical perspective of AI and sought the positive responses from the leadership team and teacher leaders at HHS about their experiences being a member of the staff. Taken into account were many responses from members that reflected not just the positive, but also ongoing issues when formulating the data used in this dissertation, as no organization is completely without problems.

The following research questions directed this study:

1. How does the leadership team of a high performing 6A-5A high school describe their positive core of experiences within the school?

2. How do teacher leaders in a high performing 6A-5A high school describe their positive core of experiences within the school?

3. How do the leadership team and teacher leaders in a high performing 6A-5A high school describe the relationship between leadership, school culture, and student academic achievement?

These research questions set the design for the research that was conducted in Hobart. The theoretical perspective of Appreciative Inquiry was the focus of the research study and what has happened to a community and school district. Two basic parts of the AI 4-D Cycle were used in this investigation; the Discovery and Dream phases were used in the questioning and the formation of the interview and focus group questions. The Design and Destiny phases also played a role in the study, but mostly for the leadership in planning for the future events that will
affect HHS and the community. The five principles of AI introduced in the review of literature from Cooperrider (2000) are the a) constructionist principle, b) simultaneity principle, c) the poetic principle, d) the anticipatory principle, and e) the positive principle. Through this chapter the changes and perspectives will be identified by these principles of AI.

The Constructionist Principle

The constructionist principle defines the existence of the culture that is created at HHS. This is, metaphorically speaking, a reality for the students, staff, administration and community in Hobart. With the passing of the bond issue in Hobart in 2008 the term constructionist became a literal reality for HHS. The development of the constructionist view moved people from deficit thinking to that of forming a more positive social culture (Aiman-Smith, 2004). The heliotropic hypothesis expressed in the AI principles moved those into a frame of mind of developing or constructing their new reality (Bushe, 1998). From the changes seen in the attitudes of personnel and students to the physical construction going on has helped define and create a more positive school culture. The construction taking place at HHS converged physical reality with perceptions in this transformation. Important to the development of the constructionist principle are the strengths exhibited in the community through their support of new school construction, new athletic facilities, changing attitudes, strengthening the connections with parents and the school, committed staff connections in the school, student successes, and meeting head on the academic challenges of the school.

Hobart High School Facilities

Looking at the positives of the school, the transformation of an entire school’s physical setting gives HHS a well-deserved facelift. The physical plant at HHS at the present site at 13th and Severance in Hobart was built in 1960 and has been redone and minimally modified during
its 50 years of existence. In 2006 the patrons of Hobart passed a $78 million dollar bond issue, and HHS would receive another extensive renovation that would affect many parts of the present campus (See Appendix F). The completion of the project is expected in the spring of 2011. The building is an asset to the students and community in providing the physical structure for their successes to take place. There is a sense of pride among all constituents with the new facilities and how they represent community support. It is difficult at times to identify a direct a cause and effect relationship with any series of events. It is obvious, however, that the successes demonstrated at HHS are not directly related to the changes being made in the physical structure of the building at the present time, but the anticipation of the completion of the project has affected students and staff throughout the project due to construction. Some areas of the bond project were completed during the summer of 2010 and made an immediate impact on those students and staff involved with the Voc-Tech side of the curriculum at HHS.

School Athletic Facilities

Another physical aspect of the campus at HHS was the renovation of Gowans Stadium that was completed in the summer of 2005. All athletic facilities at the school have been renovated during the past decade and provide HHS athletes with a comfortable environment in which to compete in their selected sports. The three athletic facility renovations at HHS are Gowans Stadium, which is used for track and for football, the Salthawk Activities Center used for volleyball and basketball events, and the Quonset Hut that during the present renovation was remade into the new weight room facility for the students at HHS.

Community Support for New and Upgraded Facilities

Speaking to the assets of HHS takes this researcher to the community of Hobart and the support patrons have shown to the school through their actions at the voting polls. The passing of
a $78 million dollar bond project is no small task for any community in these difficult economic times, but the community stepped up to support the project. Having community support in any school district is vitally important from a physical plant perspective, but also for the support of academic programs and district needs. Knowing the community is supportive of the school leads me to conclude that with this support many of the peripheral issues of the district are handled effectively by the board of education, the central office administration, and the building administration levels with the needs of the students in mind. This is a community that has remained stable in population numbers, but has seen demographic changes in ethnic diversity with a greater increase in the Hispanic population both in the community and in the school (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009b). Many HHS graduates go on to become productive, working members of the community. The bond issue of 2006 was one that needed a large percentage of the population to buy into supporting the need for the renovations to the schools. Having supportive members of the community made the bond issue a reality. The former superintendent took an active role in conducting coffee shop town meetings, which gave her the opportunity to reach out to the public to gain their support for something that had been long overdue for the students of the district. Thousands of loyal HHS alumni support the school, not only financially, but also through their web pages that reflect positively on the school and traditions. Again, the focus of the strengths and assets of HHS center on the people associated with the district. Their actions are important to the accomplishments and beliefs of a school district.

*Changing Attitudes*

Looking at HHS from an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, much of what has happened over the past ten years has been the result of a change process involving the entire school
community in Hobart. As much as many of the participants did not want to admit, much of the change has been the result of changing their mindsets and those of the students through their participation in school activities and believing in themselves that they can be successful.

Conveyed to this researcher were comments about how in years past the community and school was considered second-class when compared to surrounding districts. At one point the focus and beliefs of the school community reflected negatively on the district, the staff, and the students, but then the table turned to reflect a more positive and more accepting view of the school. How did this take place? Beliefs in processes and people have made the difference in the Hobart community, but there were events that made an impact on these attitudes. The Buhler connection to Hobart was a belief that Hobart residents thought Buhler was better, even by constituents of HHS. This is a difficult concept to imagine that the people of a school community did not even believe in their own system. Part of this study was to determine what or who made the difference in changing the atmosphere into one of believing at HHS.

*Strengthening Parent Connections with HHS*

The people are the focus of the strengths of the district. The mindset is that of a blue-collar worker in the community. Many residents in Hobart are of the middle class and have expectations of a lifestyle of hard work with a good work ethic and expect the same of their children. The parents had grown accustomed to hearing only negative feedback from the school. Parent involvement in the schools is key to creating the cultural piece that connects the school with the entire community. Changing that negative view was necessary in making the parents a more valued part of the school and to set the standard for expectations in the school. With a wide variety and ever-expanding curriculum at HHS there is a place for everyone who chooses to be involved. As an administrator, I have frequently heard the comment made that schools cannot be
all things to all people, but as schools become larger and parent expectations become greater, the schools are required to take on a greater role and responsibility in the community. At HHS, this has been a change over the years, one that has created a purposeful relationship between the school and the community. Parents feel good about having a positive relationship with the school and their staff.

Committed and Strong Staff Connections at HHS

The staff of the school has been the positive connection for students, parents, and the community as a whole. The staff has been identified as somewhat older, but a staff that has a commitment to their students and to the community. Being a smaller community or one-school town provides a basis for exceptional support. Living in the community where they work creates commitment or buy in from the staff and supports the comments made that the HHS staff is caring and truly believes in their students. With thirty years of experience in schools even this researcher knows that not all staff will believe in this mindset, but the attempt to provide this support for students is contagious and the more supportive an atmosphere that is created in the school, the greater the belief. People are willing to do more to help students be successful, and creating trust with students and the community is a strength that can be nurtured and supported by everyone.

Student Success

Another strength of the district at this point in time is the students themselves. Already mentioned in this dissertation are the awards and success stories of athletic prowess and activity participation, which for most in education are quite impressive. State championships are the ultimate goal for a coach, a school, and definitely for the students. These are also the most noticeable and receive the most notoriety for a short period of time. Even as an educator it is
difficult to remember from year to year who won what from the year before. HHS has been fortunate to win 6 straight state championships in football, but this is not the norm and this one point has set them apart from many other schools. Coaches will tell you that it is all about the “Jimmys and Johnnys” that you have in school referring to the students and their ability level in a particular sport or activity. This study pointed out many of the positives that have taken place at HHS over the past few years and the football story was a pinnacle moment in time for the school and for their students, but the impact of these events made a significant difference in the connection between the school and the community. Staff related these successes to the overall mood and involvement of the students in a more positive school environment. The students do make a difference in how the school is perceived by everyone.

Confronting and Overcoming Academic Challenges

Not to diminish the overall achievements of the athletic teams at HHS, but the significance of this study is ultimately grounded in the academic successes of the students in this school. With the overall analysis of the student body at HHS the facts are the school has met the standards imposed by the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of meeting AYP or Adequate Yearly Progress in reading and math. These are the factors that make HHS students the strength of the community. With the deck stacked against them in many ways, economically and socially, the students have met the standards set by the government educational agencies. HHS has a significant, growing Hispanic population that measures 17.3% of the overall school population. Out of this group nearly 80% reached the proficient or above category in reading and math. This, coupled with the staff and caring students, makes this one of the greatest strengths of the school. Creating an environment of caring and a place for all to fit in makes HHS a good place to be.
The Simultaneity Principle

The simultaneity principle refers to the AI process where incidents and actions take place at the same time and even though separate in occurrence are not separate in how they impact the change process. Part of this change occurs immediately as questions are asked of participants in a study (Whitney, et al., 2003). At HHS there were many actions taking place simultaneously that affected the personnel and students and had a positive impact on the change process. The principal’s approach to leadership was simultaneously to identify and resolve problems as they arose in the school. He did not employ a “one size fits all” process of making rules and policies, but each situation was viewed on its own merits. Some of the issues acted upon at the same time at HHS were the positive referrals initiated by the administrative team and the focus by the administrative team to have fewer rules and stress having fun for the students. The rules of a school are important for the culture, but the directive for the staff was to not sweat the small stuff and to address issues as they arise on a case-by-case basis. The focus shifted from negative student behaviors to the positive things that students are doing. This was not an easy transition, but effective when all of the pieces fit together. The administrative team might have initiated the changes, but the buy in from the staff and teachers at HHS put them in a position of being informal leaders who significantly affected change in the culture.

Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff

Dynamics in a school refer to the functionality created within the system and the principal has the key to unlock the stresses of most administrators (Birky, et al., 2006). The HHS principal’s philosophy on issues at school is “don’t sweat the small stuff.” Where most administrators are busy putting out small fires or dealing with pockets of behavior issues each day, that is not the case at HHS. The principal, sharing responsibilities with his administrative
team, makes sure the focus is on preventing problems in the classroom or hallway and not reacting to them. Their stance is to be visible at all times.

Part of the administrative team’s position is to evaluate the programs and rules at the school each year. Some school issues are nagging ones that never go away, but changing the mindset of how issues are perceived may shed a different light on them. One example of this happened a couple of years ago at HHS. The administrative team constantly had to deal with hats being worn in the building. One summer a comment was made how the administrators certainly wasted a lot of time disciplining kids about their hats. The next year the administrative team allowed hats to be worn at school. Hats are now a non-issue, but more impressive is the issue has gone away. The staff agreed wearing hats did not prevent a student from getting an education or making bad decisions in the classroom. This is something small, but the problem took too much administrative time to deal with and they decided not to deal with it. The same could be said for their approach to tardiness to the classroom. Perceptions are everything. If you do not make a big deal out of something and spend a great deal of time on it, then it becomes a non-issue. If teachers want students to be in their classes on time then they will set that expectation and make it happen.

Don’t Lecture on Rules

School principals who focus on rules to follow are usually lecturing to students on the “do this and don’t do that” principles for the first few weeks of school. The example set by the HHS principal that gained him a great deal of respect from his staff and from students was to have an all school assembly where he brought in all of the students and gave them an opportunity to see in a slide show how students during the previous year had fun at HHS. There was no lecture, no beginning of the year sermon on being good, and no threats of what happens if they
did not follow the rules. Instead, time was spent seeing what students do at HHS and how they are involved in the school. Herein lies the context of the AI approach to leadership. The principal has determined these are important contacts with the students and ones that need to be positive and to deliberately seek out the positive actions of the student body (Bloom, 2002).

HHS has rules, and like other high schools they have high expectations for their students. They expect their students to comply with rules and with the administration’s visibility in the school the staff has commented that the students feel like they are there more to catch students doing something good rather than hovering over them to catch them doing something wrong. They correct things when they need to be corrected, but they operate more from their values than strict rules.

*The Poetic Principle*

The poetic principle, probably the most telling of the AI principles reveals the story being told about HHS. With extensive interviews and focus groups there are many stories that have been told about HHS (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2006). The most telling are the stories that continually cited the effectiveness of the administration and specifically the principal. The example the principal sets for his staff is one that merits discussion from all levels of HHS. His example of teaching math to the more difficult students puts him on the line with other staff. He has not lost touch with what is going on in the classroom and makes it a priority with his schedule and responsibilities. What happens with many teaching staff is that they look at administration as those staff members who have lost touch with the realities of the classroom and profess that administration does not understand their issues at school. He has set expectations for his staff that he is willing to assume for himself. He would ask nothing of them
that he would not do himself. He is visible every day in the classrooms at HHS and he makes it a point to know the students. What more could a staff ask of their leadership?

He also does not want to waste teacher time at school with unnecessary meetings and demanding more of his staff than is necessary to make kids successful. The teachers set their own goals and take an active role in the leadership at HHS (Birky, et al., 2006). The culture of the school has been created over time to be student centered. The story being told at HHS is that the staff, including administration, through the example of the principal have created a culture where “whatever it takes” to make students successful is their credo.

The examples of creativity and doing what is necessary to make each student successful are a result of the principal making things happen. The staff feels comfortable about seeking his advice and knowing their ideas are valued. Listening to staff and giving them the opportunity to seek solutions to individual issues is a result of supportive leadership and the culture that has been created at HHS. The key to the culture has been the leadership and giving staff the opportunity to believe in what they are doing for kids is valued by everyone associated with the school district and the community.

The Anticipatory Principle

The anticipatory principle can come from the stories being told of how changes have taken place in the school and what the expectations are for the future. Creating images of what is expected provides the members of the group a positive image of things to come (Whitney, et al., 2003). The telling of the transformation of the physical campus at HHS has set the tone for the past two years as these changes have taken place. Much of the discussion has been about the creation of the new, but the stories and positive images being created among staff members leaves the story open-ended and full of anticipation. Many of the images created about HHS are
positive memories of past experiences but with the creation of the new facilities at school there is also anticipation of new beginnings. The staff and students believe in where they are going as a school and feel confident the HHS culture will continue to be nurtured and developed. The focus is on student successes from class graduation to individual successes in and out of the classroom. Hearing the successes created from all staff working together and realizing that this success can only be sustained with resources being maintained at HHS. Building these new ideals for the school culture opens more ways to refine and provide academic assistance for students at HHS. Students have many ways in which to be successful at HHS and provided for them are many opportunities to seek academic challenges that meet their needs on their way to graduation. Those who seek more academic challenges at a higher level have that opportunity. There are also opportunities for students seeking more vocational opportunities

*The Positive Principle*

The positive principle keeps all people in the system motivated and feeling good about the change process and what has happened and is going to happen in the school (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2006). Creating these positive images for all is what makes the change process easier to accept. Forming the new culture at HHS has taken time to change the old attitudes. Much of the positive sense of accomplishment demonstrated at HHS has been a result of a significant transformation of the staff at the school. With the impetus of the administrative examples and modeling, the differences at school are a direct result of the people in the school and in the community. Mentioned in the constructionist section were all of the positive things that have been constructed through changing attitudes and new facility construction at HHS. HHS has many programs that are similar to other high schools; however, the difference in school success is a direct result of the people and their attitudes toward
implementing those programs. People make the difference. Examples of this connection were in
the personal touch shown to students taking state assessments who previously had not been
successful. Matching a staff member who made kids feel good with testing paid dividends for the
school and the self-esteem of the students involved. Much of this has been accomplished from
the positive student successes in activities. The students, staff, administration, and community
believe in HHS. What better motivation for the community than the 6 straight state football
championships in their school classification. This is only one example of the relationship of the
positive principle and all of the success stories happening at HHS. The other part of this principle
that must be cited is with the staff at HHS. At one point in past history the school had a negative
image portrayed but over time the impact of effective leadership and changing views has
bolstered a more positive approach to the work environment and has made HHS a better place
for staff and students.

_HHS Administrative Team Focus on the Positive_

The administration of HHS has provided a framework for all to embrace. Some areas of
greatest importance are the examples established by the leadership in the building. That
perspective was addressed in greatest detail from other staff and teacher leaders at HHS.
Building administration concentrates its efforts on the positive actions at school and not the
negative. As leadership focuses on the positives at HHS that creates a paradigm shift in modeling
for the other staff in the building and leaves more time to spread the good news rather than the
negative. Schools and businesses alike have set a tone over the years that leadership must deal
with the things that go wrong and have been relegated to problem solvers. As a long time
administrator this view is a dominant one in education. Most of the literature and staff
development information focuses on solving issues that have been school centered for years
rather than preventing them (Avalos, 2011; Bergeson, 2007; Daly & Chrispeels, 2005). From classroom tardiness to behavior issues the school administrator has been confronted yearly on how to effectively deal with issues that have been a part of the job for decades, and has helped the staff identify priorities that focus on student learning and well-being. At HHS, the administrative team is able to focus on the positive through leading by example.

*Lead by Example*

Beginning with the principal, the administrative team at HHS has made a deliberate effort to deal with the positive aspects of the school rather than focus on the negative. The principal has determined there is no reason to waste their energy on the negatives at school. His design is to be proactive and visible in the school environment, which reflects a preventive rather than reactive stance on school issues. So much of what he does is an effort to prevent issues from happening. His visibility in classrooms is his first step to the positive leadership model and setting expectations for all to see. His expectations are the same for his assistants. Being out and visible is number one and this design leads to not only a productive classroom, but also a safe and orderly school environment. HHS is no different than any other high school and has similar issues, but the focus is not on negative behaviors. The students reflected to staff that the principals’ visibility was positive for them. Staff knowing that the principal is always around and aware of conflicts with students before they happen makes them feel more at ease and supported in their classrooms. This creates a positive school environment and culture. The staff feels as though his leadership style is one that is not easy to do, but is definitely appreciated by everyone in the building. On more than one occasion staff stated that the principal’s commitment makes the difference at HHS. They feel supported and are appreciative of his leadership.
People and Not Programs Make the Difference

HHS is not much different than many other high schools in Kansas with programs and initiatives being utilized in classrooms in response to student needs. The programs utilized at HHS have been adopted because they meet the needs of the students, but these programs provide services for students that are not just programs. The success of these programs is defined by the people who are administering and implementing them. Mentioned in an earlier section of this dissertation as a strength at HHS was the people and the staff associated with the school. This reflection is possibly the strength and backbone of the entire study with programs being very similar to other schools but in HHS’s case, what does make the difference? Deal and Peterson through 20 years of examining leadership, identified roles, and school cultures have found that a positive school culture makes school reform work (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The school must be connected to the community. To this researcher the significance of the leadership style contributes to the attitudes of the staff in doing their jobs that they have been assigned to do and trusting them to be productive in their classrooms. High expectations are the norm and there is an extreme amount of trust between the staff and the students and they care about the school and what goes on. A statement used by leaders that I have worked with and would be descriptive of the staff and administration at HHS would be “students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” In my experience in leadership and based on the data for the study, this is an appropriate reflection of the staff at HHS.

One of the key reflections from the research was the statement made by the principal when he commented on how they would affect the testing for some of their lowest performers. He made a decision to put a coach in the testing area that met every kid at the door and made them feel more positive about their contributions that they could make on that day that impacts
the entire school and their status with state accreditation. This commitment is just one example of the staff buy-in to whatever it takes to make HHS a better place to be. These examples resonate throughout the entire building from leadership to other personnel as they embrace the culture that has been created at HHS. Decisions at HHS are made with the students in mind. From programs to staff the school is student centered.

**Ongoing Issues**

Even with the focus on the positive, no school is entirely problem-free all of the time. The administration at HHS would probably agree that not all of their interactions with students at school are positive. There are incidents that take place in the school setting that can be considered dangerous to others and would be considered criminal acts. The leadership team, SRO, staff, counselors, and probation officer at HHS do an effective job of maintaining a peaceful atmosphere at HHS. It would be naïve to assume that all interactions at HHS are positive all the time. Much like was addressed in an earlier section about the fact that not all staff will buy in to the pedagogy of the AI theoretical perspective. Not all students are happy and content with their situations at school or at home. There are reasons that the positions of authority and specifically the positions of intervention are in place at HHS. Their success stories have been documented in Chapter 4 and their interactions with students have been, for the most part, success stories.

**Leadership Lessons**

Drawing upon my thirty-four years in education I have had many experiences and opportunities to form opinions about education and what works best for students. The students are the focus of education and each school and district is distinct with specific problems and challenges facing leadership (Ervay, 2006). The leadership of the school has one of the greatest
influences on the school environment and the culture. The principal, in my opinion, has one opportunity to make his or her mark with the students and the staff. This opportunity may be over an extended period of time, but first impressions last. In the case of HHS, the principal has made the first impression last for a long time. He has made a commitment to his students, his leadership team, and his staff that they can and do make a difference in the students at HHS.

**Being An Effective Leader**

Some of the experiences of being a school leader are positive and some are negative. In the school climate of today parents, students, and the general public are now more inquisitive and confrontational about procedures and the overall structure of the school. Part of what I have gained as an observer at HHS has been to witness and learn about how the experienced administrator must develop as a school leader and a mentor to others in the building and learn to handle stressful situations created by student and parent issues. The principal has a positive impact on the staff and assistant principals in a daily modeling process (Henry, 2003). How the principal has chosen to deal with issues at HHS is beneficial to my development as a leader in being able to look at similar issues and look at changes that can be made to rules and procedures that can improve the school. Effective leadership, to this observer, indicates the ability of the administrator to handle stressful situations with a calm demeanor and be able to process changes that need to be made in the school by gaining consensus of the staff and students. The level of communication has to be a top priority to the workings of any institution.

**Communicating Effectively**

I have witnessed an interaction between the principal and other members of the staff at HHS that reflects positively on teamwork at the school. This communication can be verbal or non-verbal, but still very effective from a staff perspective. The principal has made it very clear
that he does not like wasting the staff’s time with unnecessary meetings that can be done effectively in a short e-mail to the staff. There are high expectations to be successful in district initiatives and staff development, but the priority is the relationship piece the principal nurtures. I have seen the respect that he has gained by supporting his staff and making them feel needed. In my experience I have seen the lack of connection and lack of communication between the staff and the administration and it usually results in an unhealthy and unproductive environment. Effective communication can ensure a more positive environment and one in which both groups can mutually support one another (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001).

Caring As A School Leader

No one can measure how much you care as the principal of a school. It is difficult to sell your commitment to the constituents of the district, but being visible has been a positive and measurable part of my existence as the principal of a large 6A high school. Much like the leadership at HHS, the principal’s visibility sets the example for all in his building to follow and they appreciate him (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a). This is one of the small things for those of us who have assumed that building leadership role. Being seen is also important in the leadership role as the person that listens to his or her public that includes students, staff, parents and upper level administration. The culture created in the principal’s office is one that has to please many people and a key to being successful is to be able to listen and reach consensus in decisions that have to be made.

Establishing Trust

Probably the most important factor for any principal is the trust established between all of the constituents of the school (Marks & Printy, 2003). Without establishing trust, communication can break down and leadership becomes ineffective. As a lesson for any aspiring leader trust may
be the most important characteristic to be developed in school relationships (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Believing in themselves and others is the strength of the staff. Delegating responsibilities to members of the staff and allowing them to do their jobs creates a positive working environment. No one member is more important than the whole. Working with department heads and assistant principals allowing them to make decisions and answer for their work creates an environment of “we” being important in the workplace. This is a definite strength at HHS and a lesson from which others could learn.

*Students Come First*

A difficult position to be in as the leader of the school is to make all decisions based on what is best for kids. As one gets into discussions relating to the educational environment there are three factions or members in the school environment that have to be attended to. One is the student body and what is best for them, but a close second and third are the staff and administrative needs that are readily expressed. Sometimes as leaders, we make decisions that are best for us rather than what is best for the students. Our decisions must be based on the student’s needs. It is easy to think of situations where this decision would be best for the staff and not consider the students, but the leader must be careful to think in terms of the entire situation and not just one side of it. The important part of any decisions made is to consider all of the parties that the decision affects. Someone is ultimately responsible and usually that will be the principal and we must live by our decisions.

*Honesty in Leadership*

The final characteristic that I wanted to expand upon was honesty. A true characteristic that I saw from the outset at HHS was the honesty from the study participants toward their existence at HHS. Not often do you hear the sincerity of voice with staff relating to their
principal and the interactions they have in the workplace. Honesty has been the virtue that I endear from HHS. From the interjections of comedy and jousting from friends that I have known for years from a positive working relationship to hear their candor about their leader and the impact that his upfront and honest approach to education has given them an edge (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). It is hard to explain what has been created but it is the creation of effective leadership and a feeling of positive relationships and an honest leader.

**Study Recommendations**

My recommendations in this educational research study have been further reinforced from previous views of leadership and the affective domain that exists in each facility. However, as large comprehensive high schools with entrenched cultures have continued to struggle with academic achievement, this study shows what is possible when the administrative team focuses on the positive and faculty, staff, and students invest in that approach. As a teacher in my earlier years before becoming an administrator, comments were always made about how subject matter must be stressed in the classroom and that relationships with students were important, but not nearly as important as the content. This study has reinforced my view that the most important part of the student’s education is the contacts or relationships that are formed (Kinni, 2003). Theodore Roosevelt once said, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” The amazing fact is that HHS is a school of caring.

In the world of high stakes testing and school accountability and AYP it is difficult to stress the importance of establishing the school culture (Bryan, Klein, & Elias, 2007). The end product becomes the important factor with administration and staff and the affective domain of students and staff becomes less and less important. This contrast in views puts the principal in a position of determining what matters most in the school setting and what determines the
successes being accomplished. This perspective has been identified in the culture of HHS and AI has become a large part of how staff and students are linked in their processes (Cherney, 2003).

**People Matter Most**

The introduction to this section says volumes about what defines HHS. From the staff and leadership a constant message is sent out to everyone; students, parents, and the community that the people associated with HHS are special and make a difference in the school culture. From the band instructor to the math department head and all staff in between each adds value to the culture of HHS. The difference has been established that everyone believes in what leadership expects from the entire staff in all areas. As the leadership establishes their connection with the staff and people believe there is no limit to what can be accomplished in this environment (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

**Set High Expectations**

With effective leadership and a sound belief in shared goals setting high expectations is a recommendation for success in a school. Much of what was heard about HHS moved participants from the discovery stage of AI to the dream stage or imagining what could be in the school (Cooperrider, et al., 2000). With the construction of new facilities and a combination of all facets of programs and successes established in the classroom and on the playing fields higher expectations are believable and attainable. As one staff member commented, expectations are the same for all students. Educators should believe their students can reach lofty goals and do what is necessary to get them there.

Part of the success in this situation is the principal set high expectations for the students in his math classes, and spends time nurturing relationships with some of the more difficult students in the entire school. He misses meetings with other colleagues in the league because
what he does at school is more important than a meeting. He sets his priorities based on what is
good for kids, and especially for his kids. What is important are the people and the expectation is
that every staff member do whatever is necessary to make their students successful at HHS.

**Know Your Students**

Part of this success formula is to know the students. From the administration, the staff,
the custodians, the SRO, the probation officer, and others in and out of the building a sense of
caring exists that resonates with the students of HHS. Success, though measured by state
assessments for accreditation, is measured by the attitudes within the culture of the school. More
than one leader mentioned that the students like HHS and like the atmosphere created there
(Bergeson, 2007; Birky, et al., 2006). The students, according to the staff, feel safe at HHS and
they know that people are looking to see what they are doing. Not in the negative perspective,
but in the positive. The staff knows the students and knows what their interests are at the school.
A comment to reflect a good performance or an appearance at an event at school can make the
difference in the school’s culture. Students notice if you are there and care more than they would
ever admit to an adult. Know your students and make yourself visible in the school.

**Community Expectations**

Leadership must realize the impact of the environment that supports the school. At HHS
the cultural changes have been influenced by changes in attitudes in the community. Changes in
the community have been gradual, but the most influence on the community has come as a result
of their kids being successful in activities and probably most influential has been the success
with the football program at HHS. School renovations involving the stadium and the school have
made a difference in the school’s culture and the future looks bright for the students at HHS.
These changes would have been impossible without leadership realizing the potential for growth
and development in the community and knowing what, when, where and why to reach out to those that support the school and their kids. Communicated well with the staff are the facts relating to the community and how those facts affect the school. A changing environment of diversity has made a difference in HHS and in the community. Leadership must acknowledge changes and the significance of cultural changes.

Know What You Want

A principal with a plan knows the direction to be sought in the efforts being made in the school. Success breeds more success, but what is the magic formula for being successful. Positive actions lead to more positive reactions in the school (Whitney, et al., 2003). Each principal and each school will be different and leadership styles will be different, but with each situation the experienced administrator should be able to evaluate the culture and be able to respond to issues presented in order to introduce and implement possible changes or provide the framework for change within the school. In my experience, each day is a new day and each experience created may have similar outcomes, but the prospect of the new day brings new challenges to building leadership. Having a plan that takes into account everyone that the plan may impact provides the framework for success. Success is the value that a culture can be built on.

Staff Is Important For Success

Part of the success at HHS can be attributed to physical changes and part to the successes of the students seen over the past few years, but the biggest factor has been the buy in from the staff in accepting the leadership example set by the principal. The staff has opened themselves up and accepted the methods through programs and various initiatives at HHS that are being used to make the students successful (Bohn, 2011). Some of the focus of this study was to see what is
being done to help Hispanic students be successful. There are programs in place, but it still comes back to the relationships and the people committed to assisting them in their course work and in trying to attain a diploma from HHS. Some of these examples regarding students and last minute saves to make it to graduation took all of the resources available at school to make the difference. The most significant part of this statement is the staff has bought into the attitudes established (Brady, 2008). “Whatever it takes” is the statement that had the most significance for me along with “there is a place for everyone at HHS.” That welcoming attitude is engrained in the school and that expectation is a common focus.

Building On Success

Specific to this study are these attitudes and expectations for success. Schools and administrators across America should focus on what will make a difference in their schools. I am not naïve enough to think that this is an easy solution to a difficult problem. As the HHS principal stated there are no easy solutions to complex problems. Regardless of the seemingly simplistic nature of a problem, solutions are complex and every school has factors specific to their environment and community that will dictate the complexities for change. Utilizing the AI model is a means to this end. Reduction in deficit thinking and refocusing on the positives that are happening in the school can make a difference (Bushe, 1995). I have been spoiled with this study because I have examined a school that has a positive view and many of the pieces of the puzzle are in place. Finding what works is not a simple solution, but the part of the solution that is consistent is that of leadership and the tone that is set by either the leader or leaders in the building. This makes the difference possible. There is good in every situation. Finding that good and focusing on it can give everyone a perspective that will lead to higher productivity and a more positive learning environment for students.
Final Thoughts

So much of what has been cited and explained in this dissertation has become a life and career change for me. The old dog can learn new tricks or at least can look at the glass as half full and see the perspective that positive changes are possible in any situation. This study has made me take a hard look at the workings of my school and the intricacies of school management and reflect on my earlier times in education where colleagues stated emphatically that it is all about subject matter. I have always considered myself a people person and can pretty much get along with all people that I come in contact with. Even the most difficult situations that come up at school have a silver lining to them and eventually fade from the skeptical to the positive. I mentioned life changing and this journey has become a life changing event with all of the pressures of the job and more responsibilities being piled on with planning for a new high school in my district opening in the fall of 2011 and facing budget cuts that are imminent in the near future there has been more than enough to do. How else does one experience this pressure than by utilizing a theoretical perspective based on AI?

My school has become a better place with outside of the box thinking and a more positive perspective being demonstrated and modeled by my staff and the administrative team. Our steps toward a more positive environment have been small ones created out of the need to review our procedures and policies and do a member check to see how the administrative team thought things were going this year. In my fifth year as the principal, there have been some items relating to discipline that we needed to take a new look at. One issue is students having cell phones at school, which is a constant problem in schools. Who would have thought when I first started teaching that cell phones would be a school issue – the thought was 25 years ago, what is a cell phone? We thought about this issue and decided as a team to make adjustments to the policy to
allow their use during passing periods and in the lunchroom. With determination, the move was made to allow restricted cell phone use in the building. To date the change has been a positive for the school and a positive for the administrative team in the number of violations being cut by two thirds from the previous year. This change is not consistent with the methods used in businesses, but has worked for us in the school workplace. Other changes or modifications being made in my school are related to rules and violations and trying to make a significant change in the amount of time being wasted attending to discipline related to these violations. This is not to say there are not still violations and negatives associated with those violations, but a significant number of them are no longer pressing administrators for time being spent chasing issues that are not worth the time being spent on them. HHS had a good theory – don’t sweat the small stuff. So much of our time is spent on issues that have always been issues in schools and probably are not going away soon. Coming up with a productive way to eliminate the stress of these issues, not by just saying they do not exist, but dealing with them in a more positive manner makes a difference. As a leader there is always more than one right answer to a problem. I think back on my experiences in education and see the changes that have taken place in the schools, but some of those same old nagging issues still remain; tardies to class, student apathy, truancy to name a few of the older ones, and it is amazing to me that we cannot find a workable solution to any of these. Problem solving by utilizing methods that focus on positive interactions between people will direct my actions over the next few years as I focus on making a difference in education.

The final message for leaders in the field is about treating people with respect and caring about them as you would your own family. The job is leadership and it is all encompassing and there are so many parts to be addressed if you are to become an effective leader. School is a people issue and the more positive that students, staff, and community members feel about their
place in the school and feel valued the better the school. Creating a positive focus in the school is
dependent upon the relationships that become intertwined under the umbrella of the school or
community. All people working and sharing a common focus and goals form that organization of
caring that makes for a productive school. Leadership does make a difference in the school
setting.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Hester, M. L. (2009). *An appreciative inquiry case study of technology-oriented pedagogical practices in a high performing Kansas high school* Wichita State University, Wichita, KS.


West, M. K. (1996). *A comparative study of school culture in one higher achieving and one lower achieving urban high school*. The University of Texas, Austin.


APPENDIX A

WSU Protocol – Participation Permission Form

Department of Educational Leadership
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a study of leadership and culture in a high performing Kansas high school. I hope to learn about the positive core experiences of the leadership team in the high school and how leadership affects the school’s culture.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your leadership position in the school. Participants will be members of the leadership team including school counselors, school administration, athletic administration, teacher leaders or department heads, and an academic helper or curriculum specialist for a total of approximately 30 participants in the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in either an individual interview and/or a focus group with 6-8 others. The interview or focus group will consist of 7 to 8 open-ended questions to seek information relating to the positive core or nature of the culture at Hobart High School. Interviews and focus groups will last approximately 45 minutes and will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview and/or focus group so that I can create a complete transcript, which will facilitate data analysis. Approximately 5 focus groups and 10 interviews are planned.

Discomfort/Risks: There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences expected from any of the interviews or focus groups conducted in this study.

Benefits: The purpose of this study is to provide the school with information related to the positive nature of the school culture at Hobart High School and to add to the body of research knowledge about the appreciative inquiry methodology and how it applies to this study. So that I might share what I learn from the study with others, results will be published in journals and presented at conferences.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Raw data will be maintained in a secure location, and no identifying information will be used in the final dissertation or subsequent publications. No one other than my advisor will have access to the raw data.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
APPENDIX A (continued)

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: (Bill Kelley, (316) 648-1060 (cell phone), or at bkelley@goddardusd.com or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at 316-978-6392 or jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

__________________________________________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of Subject                                                         Date

__________________________________________________________________________  _______________________
Print Name                                                                  Position at Hobart HS

__________________________________________________________________________
Years at Hobart HS
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol and Questions

Hello, my name is Bill Kelley, and I represent Wichita State University as a doctoral student doing research in the field of educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in my doctoral research study. The study is being done to explore the positive core of experiences that you, as a part of the leadership team, have had at Hobart High School and what effect these experiences have had on the school’s culture.

You have been selected because of your position, involvement, and knowledge of Hobart High School as a part of the leadership team. Please keep in mind that this study is seeking the positive experiences that you have had while employed at HHS.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to tape record our conversation for clarity of your responses and for the purpose of note taking to report findings. The copy of the tape recording will be destroyed after the completion of this research. This session will last approximately 45 minutes.

Interview Questions

Please tell me your name, position with the Hobart USD 308, and how long you have been with the district in your position.

1. Looking at your experience as a leader at HHS can you think of a time when you felt really good about something that you did as a leader?
   - What made this experience special?
   - Who was involved?
Can you describe how you felt?

2. What do you value most about being a leader at HHS?

3. Describe something special about HHS, an artifact or part of the school that you feel has special meaning to you at HHS?
   - Why is it important?
   - Why do you feel it is special?
   - What meaning does it have for the school culture?

4. How does HHS support student success?

5. What makes HHS a special place to work?

6. Who, in your opinion, makes a positive difference at HHS?

7. What positive changes would you like to see in the future at HHS?

8. What do you think most students like about HHS?

9. What positive methods have been used to make students more successful in the classroom?

10. Is there another positive experience I haven’t asked you about?
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Protocol and Questions

Hello, my name is Bill Kelley, and I represent Wichita State University as a doctoral student doing research in the field of educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in my doctoral research study. The study is being done to explore the positive core of experiences that you, as a part of the leadership team, have had at Hobart High School and what effect these experiences have had on the school’s culture.

You have been selected for this focus group because of your position, involvement, and knowledge of Hobart High School as a part of the leadership team. Please keep in mind that this study is seeking the positive experiences that you have had while employed at HHS.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our focus group conversations. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to tape record our conversations in this focus group for clarity of your responses and for the purpose of note taking to report findings. The copy of the tape recording will be destroyed after the completion of this research. This session will last approximately 1.5 hours. Do you have any comments or questions before we begin?

Focus Group Questions

1. What makes HHS a special place to work?

2. What positives can you give about the leadership team at HHS?

3. What do you value most as a teacher leader or leader at HHS?

4. Who makes a positive difference at HHS?
APPENDIX C (continued)

5. If money were not an issue in the school, what positive changes would you like to see at HHS in the future?

6. Describe a time when you felt good about something you did as a leader?
   - What happened?
   - Who was involved?
   - What made it special to you?

7. What do you think most students like about HHS?

8. What has been done to make low-income or Latino students motivated to be more successful in the classroom?
   - Are there special programs?
   - Special classes?
   - Positive motivation for success?

9. What do you think are the positives that the community expects from HHS?

10. Is there another question that I should have asked you about something positive about HHS?
APPENDIX D

Kansas Career Fields and Clusters Model
APPENDIX F

HHS Campus – New