Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Developmental-Interaction Approach on Student Achievement Within a Charter School Setting

Madeline M. O'Dea

Seton Hall University

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE
DEVELOPMENTAL-INTERACTION APPROACH ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
WITHIN A CHARTER SCHOOL SETTING

BY

MADELINE M. O'DEA

Dissertation Committee
Elaine Walker, Ph.D., Mentor
David M. Browne, Ed.D.
Monica Browne, Ed.D.
James Caulfield, Ed.D.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University

2007
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

My parents who dedicated their whole lives to their children,

My children who have been my partners, my supporters, my strength,

My friends who have believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself,

Educators everywhere who believe in children.
This doctoral dissertation has been a journey into my beliefs about how children develop, wise practice and commitment to making a difference in how we educate children.

There have been many individuals who have helped shape my beliefs and realize my dreams. My mother and father have sacrificed their whole lives so that my sisters and I would have professions and better our lives and the lives of those we touch. I am eternally grateful to them for their undying faith and love for me.

My children are my pride and joy. My daughters, Jennifer and Amy and sons-in-law, Todd and Matt are my rock. I am truly blessed with their love, support and dedication to me. I am so proud of the people and parents they have become. My four grandchildren, Matthew, Zachary, Zoe and Daegan are the joy of my life. They all have contributed as the driving force through this dissertation journey and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

My Trinity family has been the “wind beneath my wings”. Their belief in me and my vision for educating children has been a constant source of strength. Every one of them has been an integral piece that helped develop the dream of a place where children love to learn for life. A special thanks is necessary for Alisa Murray without whom I could not have completed this dissertation. Whenever I wanted to give up, she made sure I forged ahead. I am so proud of her and what she has become as a professional. She is truly a gift to the field of education.

The Educational Leadership Program at Seton Hall University and members of the faculty who serve there were a great source of encouragement and guidance. Dr. Elaine Walker, my mentor and committee chair worked hard to help me achieve my goal. I am very grateful to her. I could always count on Dr. James Caulfield for words of encouragement and support and I
greatly appreciated that Drs. Monica and David Browne have become great friends as a result of participating in the Executive Ed.D. program. I am proud to have them as members of my committee and thank them for their friendship and encouragement.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to determine if the subject of this study is a successful school as defined by research, analyze the ability of this charter school to achieve a balance between implementing sound pedagogy and meeting its state’s accountability requirements and determine the feasibility of replicating key aspects of this school’s model on a nationwide scale. The research was conducted using the model of interpretational analysis by examining the secondary data sources and in looking for constructs, themes and patterns to help to determine if this school is successful. The data analyzed student achievement scores, data collected from a larger University of South Florida (USF) study which examines the school’s culture and learning environment, survey data collected by the Florida Sterling Council and published research and writing by Barber Biber, John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Nancy Nager, Jean Piaget, Edna Shapiro and Lev Vygotsky.

Each set of data has been examined to determine if the school meets the requirements for success as defined by the individual source. The combined results of the individual sources have been used to determine if the school meets the attributes of success as defined by research. The limitations of this study are attributed to the infancy of the charter school; this researcher’s role as founding member of the school and its current principal; and this study has been conducted only at this school. During the 2005 school year the subject increased its student population by 33%, impacting the data by adding participants to the study. Moreover, the researcher has relied primarily on secondary data that may or may not be reliable and this particular kind of research is bound by its setting and context.
Examination of the data illustrates that the subject of this case study has met or exceeded all of the requirements for a successful school. This researcher also concludes that the subject of this study has achieved the delicate balance of implementing sound pedagogy and meeting the accountability requirements of high-stakes testing.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In April 1983, the American people and the educational establishment were put on notice that our public schools were failing its students. The National Commission on Excellence in Education during the Reagan Administration authorized a study of American schools titled, A Nation At Risk (NCCE, 1983). The Commission reported inadequacies in the way the educational process itself was being conducted with its diluted curriculum, unclear objectives and the watered down expectations of students. The report found that the country lagged behind its international counterparts in many areas. Since that report, several arguments have emerged calling for a complete overhaul of the educational system; however, arguments in defense of the United States educational system have also been offered (Beets, 2004). Supporters and critics agreed this study created a sense of urgency, and made America’s schools a part of the national discussion.

Background of the Study

Newmann et al (1996), Elmore et al (1990) and Murphy (1991) all published major studies that examined school restructuring. Similar themes have been found in their work: (a) students’ experiences in the classroom; (b) teachers’ professional lives; (c) leadership, management, and governance; and (d) coordination of community resources. Newmann et al (1996) placed strong emphasis on authentic instruction as a means to restructure schools. They argued that a focus on the production of knowledge rather than simple reproduction, disciplined inquiry, in-depth thinking about particular knowledge base versus superficial thinking, and knowledge have value beyond the classroom in students’ everyday lives. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has
been a unique organization including leaders and educators in business and education that have come together to help schools fully address the educational needs of the 21st Century. They authorized a report in 2002 that supported Newmann’s et al. assertions and concluded that today’s educational system faces irrelevance, unless we bridge the gap between how students live and how they learn (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002).

The government’s response to A Nation At Risk was to raise standards through high-stakes testing and linking the amount of funding districts receive to the testing results. Achieving a balance between developmentally appropriate practices and preparing test-takers has been strained as schools strove to increase student achievement. As federal and state governments analyzed the problems facing public schools education, they recognized the power of reform in improving student achievement. High-stakes testing provided one avenue for reform, and school choice provided another. The high-stakes testing model for educational reform has not served students well in terms of retention and application of information; on the other hand, it provided a form of accountability (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002). School choice allowed for opportunities to examine the impact of various pedagogies on student achievement.

The Charter School Movement

School reform, as it relates to the state of education today, has been at the forefront of national attention. As each political campaign season begins, education takes on a high priority on the platforms of both parties. The charter school movement has been one vehicle for reform that has grown in popularity (OPPAGA, 2005). This option allowed schools to operate autonomously while providing the necessary funding. Charter schools emerged on the public
education landscape in 1991 and have grown at a significant rate, growing to more than 3,800 charter schools serving more than 700,000 students nationally (Lake and Hill, 2005).

Because the charter school movement has just begun to come of age, the research available has been varied and inconclusive. What was learned is more time, experience, and research are needed for conclusive findings to surface. Researchers have stated that for a new area of scientific inquiry, the research has been good but not good enough for making strong policy decisions. Credible research has been further complicated by the number of variations in charter schools and governing laws from state to state (Lake and Hill, 2005). With some limitations, the National School Boards Association, the National Educational Association, and the American Federation of Teachers have also lent their support to the movement (Good and Braden, 2000).

Charter schools are public schools that come into existence through a contract with a state agency, a local school board or other authorizing agent. The charter contract establishes the framework within which the school operates. The authorizing agent provides public support for the school for a specific period of time. The individual school’s charter gives the school autonomy over its operation and frees the school from most regulations that other public schools must follow. In exchange for the flexibility afforded by the charter, the schools are held accountable for achieving goals set out in the charter including student performance and financial accountability (The State of Charter Schools, 2000).

Charter schools are freed of many regulations and restrictions placed on conventional public schools. They reflect their founders’ varied philosophies, programs, and organizational structures. They serve diverse populations and are committed to improving public school education. In return, they are required to achieve educational outcomes within a three to five
year period and be finally sound (The State of Charter Schools, 2000). Political leaders, including Presidents Bush and Clinton, see charter schools as a workable political compromise with their emphasis on autonomy and accountability (The State of Charter Schools, 2000). The charter approach uses market principles while insisting that schools be nonsectarian and democratic (Bunde, 1996).

Charter schools receive per-pupil funding based on funds generated by their student enrollment just as the public schools do, but amounts vary from state to state (Nathan, 1999). The charter school is held accountable for achieving educational results and scrutinized carefully to determine its effectiveness in the areas of student achievement and academic excellence (Perkins-Gough, 1997). The charter school movement brings four powerful ideas to the forefront for the first time in public education:

1. Choice among public schools for families and their children
2. Entrepreneurial opportunities for educators and parents to create the kinds of schools they believe make the most sense
3. Explicit responsibility for improved achievement, as measured by standardized tests and other measures

In its final report, Charter Schools in Action Project, the Hudson Institute (1997) has concluded the levels of satisfaction within existing charter schools are wide and deep. Hoxby (2004) and Lake & Hill (2005) have found similar results. Charter schools have focused on education without frills. Their students flourish academically in many cases, and the schools have become havens for children of all races, backgrounds, and abilities who were not thriving in conventional schools (The Hudson Institute, 1997).
Public support for charter schools can be traced to several historical and contemporary trends, four of which are especially significant:

1. Increasing pressure for choice in public education through publicly funded vouchers;
2. Rising public dissatisfaction, based on reports critical of student achievement;
3. Increasing support for the privatization of public functions; and
4. A growing desire among parents for public schools that focus more closely on specific values (Good and Eraden, 2000).

There are many unanswered questions regarding the movement, such as the impact on student achievement; there has not been sufficient data collected to measure the impact that charter schools have on student achievement. The Rand Study (2001) concluded that charter schools are still too new to provide conclusive evidence on how well charter schools are doing but agrees that there is a significantly higher parent satisfaction reported in these schools than in other schools. The National Education Department (2004) reported data that showed fourth grade students attending charter schools were performing at about a half year behind other students in the traditional public schools in both reading and math. It was later reported by Hoxby (2004) that the data came from a study including only 3% of charter school students. Released on the heels of the Department of Education study was a more comprehensive study of student performance published by Harvard University. The results of this nationwide study show that more charter school students were proficient on state exams than their public school peers by as much as 10%. Hoxby (2004) of Harvard University compared the performance of charter school students with students in the nearest traditional public school. Ninety-nine percent of all elementary students in charter schools were included in the study. Studies have been very close to providing conclusive information on how this movement is developing (Hoxby, 2004).
Current research affirms that the success of the charter school movement remains undeterminable due to the complexity of charter schools and the lack of sophisticated tools for collecting student achievement data (Leke & Hill, 2005).

Chester Finn, Jr., a former United States Assistant Secretary of Education and a solid supporter of charter schools, has described the future of charter schools as problematic. He has observed that while we may be in the early days of a paradigm shift, "we could just as easily turn out to be in the middle of a failed revolution" (National School Board, 1998).

Current Study Focus

The charter school that this case study examines is located in Tampa, Florida, in the west central portion of the state on the Gulf of Mexico. The Tampa community is diverse and this school's community is representative of that diversity.

The State of Florida is a strong proponent of charter schools and a national leader in the movement. The state is now the third largest state in charter school population (OPPAGA, 2005). The governor of the state and his cabinet support and sponsor legislation that is favorable to charter schools. Florida's 330 charter schools serve almost 100,000 students. Charter schools in Florida operate in 42 of the state's 67 school districts. Florida ranks behind only California and Arizona in the number of charter schools in operation (OPPAGA, 2005). The number of schools and students they serve continue to grow each year. The state reports that many of these schools serve an at-risk population including low-income students. They also provide opportunities for educational innovation and school choice. The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA, 2005) for the state's legislature advocated the minimization of barriers to the creation and continued operation of charter schools. They recommended that the legislature strengthen the role of the charter schools' governing board and
consider options regarding sponsors and funding. They also recommended that the Department of Education provide assistance to school districts to improve academic accountability and management of charter schools (OPPAGA, 2005. p.17).

Statement of the Problem

In this study, the researcher wishes to examine a charter school’s organization, leadership, use of a specific pedagogy, and stakeholder involvement to determine if it is successful in one or all of these areas; and to determine, based on these results, if the school itself is successful. Nationally, high-stakes testing drives accountability in public schools, defining their level of success. The researcher also examines if high-stakes testing and sound pedagogy can align to achieve school success.

A successful school is defined by research to have the following:

1. Well Defined Vision: Statement of clear and distinct purpose for an organization’s existence (Schorr, 2002; OPPAGA, 2005).

2. Strong Leadership: Individuals that collaboratively define the essential purpose of an organization and then empower all stakeholders to become energized and focused (Sagor, 1992).

3. High Stakeholder Involvement: Individuals that share a common vision, have high academic expectations, and partner with each other to affect a common goal (Hoover Commission, 1996), and include the following:

   a. Families: Partnership with the school is focused on student learning and a safe and orderly environment (Hoover Commission, 1996).

   b. Community Leaders: Include individuals from both the public and private sectors.
c. Faculty and Staff: Committed to a clear mission focused on instructional goals and priorities; spend significant time on instruction and frequently monitor student progress; understand and share the school’s vision; see instruction as key; define tasks and focus on constantly striving to improve their craft (Schort, 2002, OPPAGA, 2005).

d. Students: Become educated citizens who are equipped to be productive and supportive players in shared community life (Hoover Commission, 1996).

4. High Student Achievement: Defined by nationally normed measures for reading, writing, and mathematics (OPPAGA, 2005).

The Purpose of the Study

This researcher wishes to:

1. Determine if the subject of this case study is a successful school as defined by research.

2. Analyze if this school can achieve a balance between implementing sound pedagogy and meeting its state’s accountability requirements.

3. If the school is found to be successful, determine the feasibility of replicating key aspects of its model on a nationwide scale.

Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that policymakers, practitioners, and researchers will benefit from the outcomes of this study. If the examination of this charter school proves that the school is successful, it could have an impact on public schools across the nation by providing a model for using the charter movement to implement sound pedagogy. Understanding the elements that lead to success will add to the data being compiled on charter schools and their effectiveness.
The charter school movement is at a critical juncture in its development. This study could provide citizens, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers with valuable insights and information on the importance of pedagogy with accountability as well as the effect of the charter school movement on school reform as they consider its future.

Research Questions

This study wishes to examine two questions:

1. Is this school a success based on specific aspects of its organization, leadership, instruction and stakeholder involvement that have led to its success?

2. Is there evidence that these aspects positively impact student achievement?

Subsidiary questions that will be addressed include the following:

1. Can the subject achieve a balance between the implementation of sound pedagogy and high-stakes testing? And, if yes, then how is this balance achieved?

2. If the subject is found to be successful, can its success be replicated?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are attributed to the following factors:

1. The infancy of the charter school

2. The researcher’s role as a founding member of the school and its current principal

3. The study has been conducted only at this school

4. During the 2005 school year the subject of this study increased its student population by 33%, impacting the data by adding participants to the study

5. The researcher has relied primarily on secondary data that may or may not be reliable

6. Case study research is bound by its setting and context.
Definition of Terms

Bank Street College of Education

Lucy Sprague Mitchell established Bank Street College of Education in New York City in 1916. It was first known as the Bureau of Educational Experiments but then took the name of the street that housed the original school, namely, Bank Street, New York. Lucy Sprague Mitchell was a friend and disciple of John Dewey and the progressive movement. This school was established to help train teachers to teach and learn along with their students. The size of the school was to help teachers and in turn their students to develop a scientific attitude toward their work and life. For Bank Street this meant to develop an eagerness in the students to learn, to become keen observers of the world around them, and to question old procedures in light of new observations. It was important to be open-minded and keep reliable records as situations permit in order to base the future upon actual knowledge of the experiences of the past (Amher, 1987).

The Developmental-Interaction Approach

The developmental-interaction approach is an enduring pedagogy rooted in developmental psychology and progressive education that has formed educational theory and practice since the early twentieth century. It is identified with, but not unique to, Bank Street College of Education. This coherent philosophy focuses on human development, interaction with the world of people and materials, building democratic community, and humanistic values. It has an explicit purpose: to educate teachers and children within an educational framework that brings together concepts from dynamic and developmental psychologists, progressive educational theorists, and practitioners (Shapiro and Biber, 1572).
The developmental-interaction approach stresses the importance of the "whole child." It recognizes and appreciates the continuous entanglement of the cognitive and the social-affect parts of development. Its premise is that the "whole child" is not only a guiding concept but also a powerful image in this approach.

Six guiding principles of this approach are basic to understanding it:

1. Development is not a simple path from less to more; and it is not an unfolding, like the unfolding of a flower. Development involves changes or shifts in the way a person organizes experience and copes with the world.

2. Individuals are never at a fixed point on a straight line of development, but operate within a range of possibilities.

3. Developmental progress involves a mix of stability and instability. A central task for the educator is to find a balance between helping a child consolidate new understandings and offering challenges that will promote growth.

4. The motivation to engage actively with the environment – to make contact, to have impact and to make sense of experience – is built into human beings.

5. The child's sense of self is built up from his experiences with other people and with objects; knowledge of the self is based on repeated awareness and testing of one's self in interaction.

6. Growth and maturing involve conflict – conflict within the self and conflict with others. Conflict is necessary for development.

A fundamental principle of the developmental-interaction approach is that cognitive growth cannot be separated from the growth of personal and social processes. Bank Street's belief is that a school should be an active community, connected to the social world of which it is a part,
rather than an isolated place for "learning lessons." The school shares responsibility with childrens’ families and with other neighborhood institutions. To effectively implement this approach, significant amounts of time must be spent on curriculum development, instruction, and the monitoring of student progress through child observation and assessment.

The Developmental Niche

The developmental niche is a theoretical framework generated specifically to foster integration of concepts and findings from multiple disciplines concerned with the development of children in cultural context (Harkness & Super, 1992a; Super & Harkness, 1986a). Two overarching principles reflect its origins in social anthropology and developmental psychology: first, that a child’s environment is organized in a non-arbitrary manner as a part of a cultural system; and second, that the child has an inborn disposition including a particular constellation of temperament and skill potentials.

At the center of the developmental niche is the individual child, and that the child can be analyzed using a particular set of inherited dispositions and family compositions in particular settings.

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is part of Florida’s overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards. The FCAT, administered to students in Grades 3-11, contains two basic components: criterion-referenced tests (CRT), measuring selected benchmarks in Mathematics, Reading, Science, and Writing from the Sunstate State Standards (SSS); and norm-referenced tests (NRT) in Reading and Mathematics,
measuring individual student performance against national norms
(http://www.fim.edu/deo/sas/fcat.htm)

Florida Sterling Council

Established in 1992, the Florida Sterling Council is a public/private not-for-profit
corporation supported by the Executive Office of the Governor. It is comprised of public and
private sector members. The Council is led by the Executive Committee which oversees the
Governor’s Sterling Award for Performance Excellence (GSA) and all Sterling process activities,
including the annual Sterling conference.

Since 1992, 46 organizations have received the Governor’s Sterling Award (GSA) for
significant improvement and achievement of performance excellence. The GSA is derived from
the internationally acclaimed Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and is based on the
application of the Sterling Criteria. The Governor’s Sterling Award is recognized as the
preeminent state award process in the nation. Sterling promotes organizational performance
excellence through the offering of three assessment tools. The Governor’s Sterling Award,
Sterling Challenge, and Sterling Navigator provide organizations at all levels explicit feedback
on systematically improving their management approaches (http://www.floridaSterling.com).

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is any person or entity that has a vested interest in and/or is the customer of an
organization. For the purpose of this study, the term stakeholder refers to the students, families,
and community that are served by the subject of this study.
Sterling Navigator

The first phase of the Sterling assessment process is a simple, cost-effective, and quick tool that provides organizations with a snapshot of where the organization currently is. The process begins with the organization administering a survey to a cross section of employees. The Sterling Council then analyzes the data, determines the results, and provides a feedback report for the organization. Several strengths and areas for improvement are identified as related to the Sterling Criteria; this information can be used by organizations to set future direction and develop strategic plans.

The Sterling Navigator includes a blind, on-line, self-assessment survey with 42 questions directly related to the seven categories of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance Excellence: leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, measurement analysis and knowledge management, human resources focus, process management, and organizational performance results. Each category is assigned a point value between 50 and 170 points with a total possible score of 500 points. Results are compiled by the Sterling Council and then reported to the participating organization (http://www.floridasterling.com).

Transformational Leadership

A term that describes leaders who are successful in defining a school’s vision while empowering employees to enact said vision in a focused manner (Sager, 1992).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A successful school is defined by research as exhibiting characteristics that include a culture of high academic expectations, strong instructional leadership, teachers committed to a clear mission focused on instructional goals and priorities, significant time spent on instruction, frequent monitoring of student progress, partnership between the school and parents focused on student learning, and a safe and orderly environment (OPPAGA, 2005).

Defining Successful Schools

Views of successful school leadership are changing. This is largely because of current restructuring initiatives and the demands of the 21st century on public school education. In the past, a leader was a person who had the capacity to take charge and get things done. Mitchell and Tucker (1992) explain that this view keeps us from focusing on the importance of teamwork and comprehensive school improvements. Researchers have suggested shifting the paradigm of leadership from aggressive action to a way of thinking about ourselves, our jobs, and the nature of the educational process. This explains transformational leadership (Sadog, 1992). Leithwood (1992) and Sergiovanni (1990) both concur that student achievement is significantly improved when transformational leaders are present. Therefore, the development of a school’s community, culture and ultimate success are dependent on strong, transformational leaders.

Senge (1990) notes that the principal who is able to adapt a vision to new challenges will be successful in building strong school cultures. Covey, Sergiovanni and Buehl (1992) suggest that principals must actively intervene when those values are out of alignment with the common vision. This implies that formulating a vision is more of a continuing dialogue than a one-time event. All seem to agree that the principal is the key to successful school culture. What
successful schools have in common are strong instructional leaders, a well-defined vision, and staff that understand and share the vision. The teachers see instruction as key, define tasks, and focus on constantly striving for improvement of their craft (Schorr, 2002).

Researchers agree and the literature supports the importance of collaboration on the part of all stakeholders in the school organization. The study, *Comparison of Parental Involvement in Charter and Traditional Public Schools* (2000), was undertaken in order to determine the difference between parental involvement in charter schools and traditional schools. The study concluded that the more active a parent’s involvement the greater the student achieves.

These collaborative cultures tend to support a shared sense of purpose, focus on long-term improvement, and support networks of professionals and parents who share problems, ideas, materials, and solutions. These cultures are not easy to develop, but they provide substantial and meaningful settings in which teachers develop craft knowledge, a powerful sense of efficacy, and a deep connection to fellow educators, parents, and students (Klug, 1989).

**Pedagogy**

Research has demonstrated that the developmental-interaction approach engages students in learning, motivates them to achieve, and prepares them to succeed in a democratic society. It has an explicit purpose: To educate teachers and children within an educational framework that brings together concepts from dynamic and developmental psychologists and progressive educational theorists and practitioners (Shapiro & Biber, 1972).

Education has played a key role in shaping the nation as well as the individual character of its citizens. Historically, the civic role of education has been to promote democratic values. Dewey believed that education itself should be democratic and that schools should be
"communities of learning," where individuals can make changes that, in turn, restructure society (Dewey, 1963).

From Lucy Sprague Mitchell's experiments with learning and children at the turn of the twentieth century came the development of the developmental-interaction approach. This approach to pedagogy has its roots in developmental psychology and progressive education. It is identified with, but not exclusive to, the Bank Street College of Education. This coherent philosophy focuses on human development, interaction with the world of people and materials, building democratic community and humanist values. (Shapiro & Biber, 1972). The developmental-interaction approach stresses the importance of the "whole child." It recognizes and appreciates the continuous entanglement of the cognitive and the social-affect parts of development. Its premise is that the "whole child" is not only a guiding concept but also a powerful image in this approach.

A fundamental principle of the developmental-interaction approach is that cognitive growth cannot be separated from the growth of personal and social processes. Bank Street's belief is that a school should be an active community connected to the social world of which it is a part rather than an isolated place for "learning lessons." The school shares responsibility with childrens' families and with other neighborhood institutions.

History of Reform and the Charter Movement

*A Nation At Risk* (1983) has caused many waves across the educational community. As a result, school reform initiatives have taken a front seat in the national arena. Ausbrooks (1997) stated the most precious right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of children should be under parental control. The conclusions indicated that the values taught in all the institutions studied were more similar than different in the values emphasized in their
instructional programs. The final conclusion suited that if values form the foundation of human behavior, it remains to be seen how all schools for the greater good may foster these values.

The charter school movement began in the early 1990's and has been growing rapidly. Perkins-Gough (1997) explained that the charter movement grew out of a belief that carefully developed competition among existing public schools and new kinds of schools developed by local educators, parents, community members, school boards, and other sponsors could provide both new models of schooling and incentives to improve the current system of education.

Fordham's work (1990) described a community that was divided over what a good school is and does. The divisions could not be bridged by compromise or through local politics. The main lesson learned was that sometimes the only way to satisfy groups that strongly disagree is to offer more than one choice.

Schorr (2002) described the trials and tribulations of two Oakland, California charter schools and found that the charter concept serves as a beacon for education and can fulfill a pressing need: to create a workplace that will attract skilled, strong teachers and principals. This concept stands a good chance to help students make statistically significant gains (Schorr, 2002).

The Hudson Institute's Charter Schools in Action Project (1997) conducted a study that attempted to explain the explosive growth of charter schools nationally. This research found that charter schools are very popular with their primary constituents. Pupils are interested in their schoolwork, pleased with their teachers, and likely to return each year. Parents are satisfied and engaged. The teachers believe in what their school is doing, like working in it, and feel that it is succeeding.

The Fordham study, Charter Schools in Action (1998), which was conducted over two years, had several goals. The suggestions to illuminate the practical and policy issues
surrounding the creation and successful operation of charter schools, to begin to gauge their educational impact, and to inform the people involved in the creation and operation of charter schools, both practitioners and policymakers, of strategies devised elsewhere. The study found the charter concept simple but powerful. School choices can be provided to families under the umbrella of public education without the micromanagement of government bureaucracies.

The insights provided by this study are that charter schools are customer-oriented, they respond to the frustration of parents and teachers, they are diverse institutions, and that the consumer driven system creates diversity and choice. Moreover, they tend to be accountable and results-oriented institutions. Charter schools are focused on what children learn and how well they learn it, not on compliance with rules and procedures (Fordham, 1998). They are professional institutions and operate the way that is best for the school. And lastly, they are a voluntary mediating institution. Because of their size, they are able focus on intimate relationships (Fordham, 1998).

Howley (1994), Klonsky (1995), Rayvid (1996), Deborah Meier (1995), and Lee & Smith (1996) agree that small school sizes encourage teachers to be innovative and students to participate, resulting in greater commitment for both groups. More positive attitudes and greater satisfaction are reflected in higher grades and test scores, improved attendance rates, and lower dropout rates.

The literature shows that charter schools have become popular because they can provide a high quality education to public school students without regulatory constraints imposed on conventional schools. Whether or not charter schools do provide a high quality education remains unknown due to a lack of longitudinal studies. Hadderman (1998), The Hudson Institute (1997), and Schwartz (1996) state simply that the schools are under-funded, that they serve a
diverse population, their programs are innovative and exciting, and that they are havens for children that have had a bad educational experience elsewhere. However, these studies do not provide conclusive evidence regarding the success or failure of charter schools.

In a report issued by Lake and Hill (2005) from the Center on Reinventing Public Education out of Washington State University, the nation’s charter schools seem to be enrolling low-income students and students with disabilities in proportion to their surrounding districts. They report that it is still not clear as to whether they are providing a better education. One of the aims of this study is to publish a series of annual reports that track all aspects of the charter movement. The study suggests that the states lack sophisticated student-tracking systems that might let experts determine the answer to whether or not charter school students are performing as well if not better than their traditional school counterparts. Lake and Hill (2005) commented that for a new area of scientific inquiry, the research is good, but not adequate for making sound policy decisions. The number of variations in charter schools and charter school governing laws from state to state furthers complicates credible research.

Charter School Policy and Law

Rand (2001) provides a comprehensive study that discussed five policy goals, namely academic achievement, choice, equitable access, integration, and preparation for civic responsibilities. The study did not find a significant difference for the large majority in the area of student achievement; however, parent satisfaction remained high for both voucher plans and charter schools. Although the research shows that voucher plans have been successful in reaching low-income, low-achieving, and minority students, there is inconclusive evidence that the charter schools are experiencing the same success. The study also suggests that both voucher plans and charter schools have had less success in providing access to students with disabilities.
The Rand (2001) study reports that the effects of choice programs on integration are unknown. It does indicate that there are a racial and ethnic balance between the charter schools and public schools. There is no indication that these types of schools are more successful in helping with good citizenship. The Rand study was inconclusive as to the overall success of voucher plans and charter schools. What was learned is that additional time, experience, and research will be needed for more conclusive findings to surface.

Miron's (2005) outcome study on charter schools in the states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Connecticut, Ohio, and Delaware, closely examined the context and implementation of the charter school reforms, thus allowing the study to draw lessons to be learned regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school laws in each state. Miron found considerable disagreement about what makes strong charter school law. According to Miron, strong charter school laws should be judged by their positive outcomes and not by the amount of autonomy they grant or the structural conditions present to increase the number of charter schools. Lobbies and special interest groups, such as the Center for Educational Reform, have been effective in helping create strong legislation that grants autonomy to charter schools and laws that result in large numbers of charter school openings. The research has shown that permissive laws and states with large number of charter schools are less likely to experience positive outcomes. The early research on charter schools shows permissive charter school laws existed (Miron, 2005). The early publications were more rhetorical than empirical. The rhetorical arguments claimed that charter schools with more autonomy would create innovative havens for teachers, students and families and would have a positive impact on the public school systems around the country. Miron's (2005) study indicates that the rhetorical assumptions about charter schools largely have not been achieved.
There have been obstacles that have surfaced since charter school reforms have been implemented, such as start-up issues as they relate to facilities and staffing, insufficient funding by states, different levels of autonomy, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) performance guidelines. The reform has seen increasing levels of regulation, which has further limited autonomy. Charter schools are not operating with the freedom that was envisioned when they were first created. Most believe that policymakers and policy analysts need to rethink what characteristics or features should be present in strong charter school laws.

Over the past 40 years, The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University has been studying various school reforms. Data from their multi-year studies uncover that charter schools can work and produce positive outcomes if they are legislated properly.

Florida’s Charter School Legislation

In 2001 the State of Florida clearly identified the purpose of charter schools under Florida Statute 228:956. The explicit purpose for charter schools in the state of Florida is to:

1. Improve student learning
2. Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as academically low achieving
3. Encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods
4. Increase choice of learning opportunities for students
5. Establish a new form of accountability for schools
6. Require the measurement of learning outcomes and create innovative measurement tools
7. Make the school the unit for improving
8. Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to own the learning program at the school site
9. Provide rigorous competition within the public school district to stimulate continual improvement in all public schools
10. Provide additional academic choices for parents and students
11. Expand the capacity of the public school system

Once the purpose of Florida charter schools was clearly defined, their numbers increased and the need for effective accountability measures became apparent. This issue led to further legislation implementing data collection on the academic development of Florida’s charter school students.

The Florida legislature requires by statute s. 1002.33(22) a report analyzing the academic performance of charter school students and the systems used by the state and local school boards to hold charter schools accountable for student performance. Based on this report, they made the following determinations:

1. Charter schools serve students that share similar demographics to those of the traditional public schools. Charter school students on average are academically behind when entering a charter school as compared to students who remain in traditional public schools. Charter schools tend to be smaller than the traditional public schools.
2. When charter school students enter with academic deficits, a slightly higher percentage of charter school students do not meet the Sunshine State Standards grade level expectations in reading and math as compared to the traditional public schools.
3. Most charter school students make similar learning gains in reading and math as compared to the traditional public schools that start at similar developmental levels.
4. Performance of charter schools varies widely. About one-third of all charter schools students are not meeting the expectations in reading and math. There is a majority of charter school students whose annual learning gains are less than their peers statewide.

5. Successful charter schools exhibit characteristics that have been long associated with effective schools and are aligned with the definition of successful schools.

6. Currently, local contracts and annual reports are not effective in holding charter schools accountable for making improvements in student performance (OPPAGA, 2005).

Challenges Facing the Charter Movement

Wells (1998) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of charter schools in California. This study was conducted through the use of qualitative methodologies in 17 California charter schools located in ten districts. The purpose of Wells' study was to understand how the charter school reform policy interacts with different local communities. Wells concluded that advocates of charter schools believe that by empowering educators to best meet the needs of their students, they will create innovative practices that could be adopted by the local public schools and thus help reform them. The study examined the validity of the claim and the results led to the identification of several major findings.

The findings indicated that the charter movement in California had not been a catalyst for change as had been expected by reformers. The findings most significant to the issue addressed the inability to hold charter schools accountable for student achievement, school boards' ambivalence about their role of monitor, variance in the amount of autonomy charter schools want or need, the lack of communication mechanisms for districts and charters to learn from each other, and public school educators' belief that charter schools have an unfair advantage that inhibits competition (Wells, 1998).
Reformers for charter schools believe the autonomy that these schools maintain will result in higher student achievement. A study by Miron and Nelson (2001) sought to find out if this assumption was substantiated. This study was a synthesis of research of student achievement in charter schools. Miron and Nelson note four areas of limitation in their study: student achievement is not the sole output of a charter school or any school; measuring success must include other factors such as equity, customer satisfaction and market accountability; research has not defined clear and unequivocal statements of fact about achievement in charter schools; and results of studies are limited by size and design.

Miron and Nelson’s (2001) findings were restricted to studies that analyzed standardized test scores, including both norm-referenced and criterion-based tests conducted of entire states. The results were examined for only eight states, even though 38 states have charter school laws. A summary of their findings revealed that few studies provide evidence of substantial, positive charter effects. Two state studies in Arizona concluded that charter schools have a positive impact on student achievement on the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT 9).

However, three studies conducted in Michigan had negative results. Studies conducted in Texas represented the middle of the spectrum concluding that while charter schools overall scored lower on the state test than non-charter schools, charter schools classified “at-risk” outscored comparable non-charter public schools. Overall, the study concluded that results are mixed as they relate to the impact of charter schools on student achievement.

RAND (2001) examined the effects voucher plans and charter schools have in five policy areas: academic achievement, choice, equitable access, integration, and preparation for civic responsibilities. Conceptually and structurally, charter schools and voucher plans represent a departure from the traditional American system of public education; however, the study is very
clear that in order for empirical effects to be measured accurately, they must keep the comparisons as close as possible to empirical realities, in that the effects of the actual charter schools and voucher plans should be compared to the effects of actual public schools. The results revealed that many questions are still unanswered, and indeed that none of the important empirical questions have been answered definitively. The strongest evidence is based on programs that have been in existence for a short amount of time and with small numbers of participants; however, serious questions about generalizability remain. Rand (2001) presents a convergence exists with other research in the following areas:

Academic Achievement

1. Voucher programs targeted to low-income students show a possible modest achievement benefit for African-American students after one to two years in voucher programs as compared to local public schools (Rand, 2001).

2. For children of other ethnic/racial groups there has not been clear evidence of benefit or harm (Rand, 2001).

3. Achievement results in charter schools are mixed. The data suggests that charter school performance improves after the first year in operation although none of the studies suggest achievement outcomes are dramatically better or worse than their public school counterparts (Rand, 2001).

Choice

1. Parent satisfaction remains high in the charter schools studied. In voucher plans, parent satisfaction declined somewhat after two years but remained substantially higher than the public school comparison groups (Rand, 2001).
Access
1. Programs targeted to low-income populations succeeded in placing low-income, low achieving, and minority students in voucher schools (Rand, 2001).
2. In most choice programs, charter or voucher, students with disabilities and students with poorly educated parents were underrepresented (Rand, 2001).
3. Middle and upper-income families disproportionately use education tax subsidy programs (Rand, 2001).

Integration
1. In communities where public schools are highly stratified, targeted voucher programs modestly improve racial integration (Rand, 2001).
2. Limited evidence suggests that across the nation, most charter schools have racial/ethnic distributions that probably fall within the range of distribution in the public schools (Rand, 2001).
3. There is evidence to suggest that unregulated choice programs can lead to some increase in stratification (Rand, 2001).

Civic Socialization
1. The study suggests that virtually nothing is known empirically about the civil socialization effects of charter schools and vouchers (Rand, 2001).

Rand (2001) cautions policymakers, supporters, and opponents that there are not clear answers uncovered as to the success or failure of school choice. It calls for a program of rigorous research and experimentation that does not confine the study to choice programs but includes information on public schools and alternative reforms as well.
Hoxby (2004) compared reading and math scores of charter school students to that of their neighboring traditional public schools. Hoxby's intention was to compare charter schools with similar traditional public schools and maintain an "apples to apples" comparison. She reports that, thus far, poorly designed studies on charter schools have not made adequate comparisons but are more like "apples to oranges" comparisons. The findings show that compared to students in matched public schools, charter school students are 5.2% more likely to be proficient in reading and 3.2% more likely to be proficient in math on their state exams. Students in charter schools that have been in operation longer are more likely to be more proficient academically than their public school counterpart. The advantage in reading for charter school students is 2.5% in a charter school that has been in operation for 1-4 years, 5.2% in a charter school in operation for 5-8 years, and 10.1% in a charter school operating 9-11 years. The study finds that charter schools are more likely to have a proficiency advantage if their school enjoys the same funding as the traditional public schools. The study also suggests that charter schools are more likely to raise achievement scores of students who are poorer or Hispanic.

States that enjoy larger populations of charter schools tend to show larger positive results. There are exceptions, such as North Carolina. Hoxby (2004) suggests that since there are a number of states that do not show meaningful statistical results, it is still premature to evaluate the impact that charter schools have on student performance. She goes on to suggest patience in waiting a while longer for results based on multi-year studies.

Hendrix (2005) reported that if charter schools as a whole were graded, they would not be perceived as very successful. This statement was based on the findings of two reports by groups who are in the pro-charter camp. The first study was commissioned by the Charter School
Leadership Council which found a "decidedly mixed picture" when comparing standardized achievement scores from 38 studies of charter schools' achievement versus that of district schools. They found evidence of progress but not enough to support a significant difference.

Hess (2005) refers to Bryan C. Hassel, a policy consultant and charter expert who states the findings show the experiment of charter schools is worth continuing; however, he says, "the existence of poor charter schools makes clear that we have a lot more to learn about how to generate success with this policy." Hassel argues that more time and research are needed to understand why some charter schools are enjoying great success while others are failing.

The second report was released by the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), a think-tank in Washington, D.C. affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council, focusing exclusively on Ohio. They state that "available academic achievement information on charter schools in Ohio presents a mixed and incomplete picture, but one that should worry charter school supporters" (PPI, 2005). Ohio charter schools are in transition due to some revisions in charter school law in that state. The study presents an optimistic view of what could be as long as policymakers "actively work to ensure that these schools are as much about quality as they are about parent choice" (PPI, 2005).

The PPI (2005) has also released a report on the state of charter schools in Texas. The report looks at the need to overhaul policies concerning charter schools in the state. Texas has some of the most successful charter schools in the nation and trails only second to California in the number of students enrolled in charter schools. The report wants Texas legislators to look at policy changes that would reward the successful charter schools and provide more oversight to those who are not meeting the standards. The report also recommends making it easier to close failing schools that are a drain on districts and cloud the successes that many charter schools
enjoy. The PPI would like attention shown toward replicating successful models and rewarding them with more state funding.

School Districts and Charter Schools

The research has shown that school districts around the country look with trepidation at the development of the charter school movement. The first empirical study (Rofes, 1998) aimed to documenting the effects of charter school laws and the opening of charter schools on districts. The study entitled *How are Districts Responding to Charter Laws and Charter Schools* was conducted in eight states and the District of Columbia for the Policy Analysis for California Education. This study examined how charter school legislation impacted school districts, asking if charter schools did not exist what would be different; and what factors spur traditional schools and districts to respond to charter laws and offer improved educational opportunities to their students. The study included 25 districts. The results were mixed. Almost half of the districts experienced strong (20%) or moderate (28%) impact of charter schools and the other half experienced no (36%) or mild (16%) impact of charter schools.

Rofes' (1998) study found the primary impacts were the loss of students, loss of revenue, loss of particular kinds of students, the departure of unhappy parents, shifts in staff morale, and the redistribution of central office administrators. District finance is so complicated that when asked to articulate how much was lost, officials at high district levels could not answer. Moreover, districts were concerned the creation of charter schools that serve specific populations may create less diverse public schools; staff morale shifted as faculty perceived pressure to develop innovative programs that compete with charter schools; and charter schools created additional demands of oversight and accountability that further strained the district staff.
Rofes (1998) found that district responses to the creation of charter schools were not for swift and dramatic improvement. Their response was limited at best. They did not see charter schools as innovative and did not encourage the transfer of pedagogy into their schools. They saw competition as possibly harmful to district schools. And lastly, the study found that the impact charter activists had on districts were largely unsubstantiated. Rofes (1998) recommends to policymakers that systematic change rarely occurs swiftly and dramatically and asks that they avoid imposing inappropriate expectations and unrealistic time frames on the district/charter dynamic. He recommends that charter laws be examined as they serve to polarize constituencies that were unent to work collaboratively.

The U.S. Department of Education requested that a study be conducted by RPP International to further examine the impact of charter schools on districts. In the report *Challenges and Opportunity: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts* by Berman, Nelson & Solomon (2001), the researchers asked two questions: What changes have districts made in district operations and district education that can be attributed to charter schools, and under what conditions do charter schools affect change in district operations and district education. The study included 49 districts in the five states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan and Massachusetts. That represented 274 charter schools. The study was exploratory because early legislation had not provided enough time to track changes and their long-term effect on local practice and state policy.

Berman et al (2001) found all districts felt some impact by the charter schools. Almost half of the districts felt that charter schools had a negative effect on their budget because of reduction of student population, 47% reported no impact, and 8% reporting a positive impact on
their district. Interestingly, the eight percent that reported having a positive impact on their
district attributed it to funding associated with capital cost offsetting loss of enrollment dollars.

Other areas pertaining to the impact charter schools have on districts included central
office operations (93%), accountability (77.6%), facilities (61.2%), public relations (61.2%) and
school level staffing (28.6%). These findings represent an increase of work-load on
administrative staffs, additional time and attention paid to charter schools to help keep them in
compliance, more frequent communication with parents, teacher layoffs due to decreases in
enrollment, and reconfiguring schools when charter schools opened in their area.

Berman et al (2001) found that 61% of districts had implemented new programs that were
similar to those at charter schools and, in some cases, added after-school programs, at-risk
programs, gifted programs, and art and music programs. The study further examined the districts
overall view of charter schools. Almost half of the districts viewed charter schools as a
challenge. They experienced loss of students and revenue and, thus, view charter schools as
competition and a threat. The rest viewed charter schools as an opportunity. These districts
experienced more parent choice and relief for some of their overcrowded schools due to
population growth in their areas. The overall attitude of these districts was that the reform
helped their districts improve. This study found greater levels of impact on districts than
previous studies, which might be explained by the increased number of charter schools as well as
more time passing to assess the impact that districts are experiencing.

Summary

A Nation At Risk (1983) prompted the need for educational reform in the United States.
In response, school choice models surfaced across the nation, followed by research which
attempted to examine the impact of these programs. The research pertaining to charter schools
was inconclusive. Researchers repeatedly identified the need for further study in their findings. Berman et al (2001) has described their own study as exploratory because early legislation had not provided enough time to track changes and their long-term effect on local practice and state policy. Hassel has argued that more time and research are needed to understand why some charter schools are enjoying great success while others are failing. The absence of longitudinal studies has been evident in the literature and has prevented the presentation of statistically compelling arguments for or against the charter school movement.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOLOGY

This case study was designed to determine if aspects of a specific charter school's organization, leadership, instruction, and stakeholder involvement have led to student success. This chapter discusses the purpose of the study, significance of the study, rationale for using a case study, unique characteristics of the case's subject, data sources and data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine if the subject of this case study is a successful school as defined by research; analyze if this school can achieve a balance between implementing sound pedagogy and meeting its state's accountability requirements; and, if the school is found to be successful, determine the feasibility of replicating key aspects of its model on a nationwide scale. This study wishes to shed light on what role a specific educational philosophy and the charter movement have played at this school. The researcher hopes that this study's findings will add to the rational body of work regarding how the charter movement could be used as a vehicle to successfully implement a progressive pedagogy. It also hopes to affect change on the national level with respect to education reform and student achievement.

Historically, the attitude that charter schools have been given with respect to waivers from certain restrictions placed on traditional schools by state legislation causes public school districts to view charter schools as enjoying an uneven advantage. The entities competing for public education dollars have been given advantages not offered to traditional schools. This notion of competition within public education initiated through recent legislation has evoked attitudes among educators, parents, and members of the community that can negatively impact the district's response to the reform.
Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is two-fold. First, it is an attempt to understand what aspects of success, such as stakeholder involvement, the developmental-interaction approach, student achievement, and leadership style are evident at this school. And second, it is to determine if this school is successful, can it be replicated?

Rationale for Using Case Study

This researcher hopes to uncover if this school is successful, and if so to describe the factors that may have contributed to its success. Through a case study this school’s experience was examined to demonstrate if a school can achieve balance between implementing sound pedagogy and meeting the accountability requirements of high-stakes testing.

Case study research is defined as an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) also indicated that what individuals say they believe, the feelings they express and the explanations they give are treated as significant realities. The purpose for using the case study design was to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.

The audiences that would benefit from this type of study are policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Through the development of this case study, the researcher wants to examine this charter school’s impact on the community at large. Advocates of charter schools believe that the movement can be the engine that drives significant improvement in public education. Understanding the areas that lead to school success will add to the data being compiled on charter schools and their effectiveness. Finally, the results of this study could impact policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels. The charter school movement is at a critical
juncture in its development. This study could provide citizens, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers with valuable insights and information as they consider its future.

Unique Characteristics of the Case’s Subject

This school is located in Tampa, Florida, which is in the west-central portion of the state. The school is part of the Hillsborough County School District, which is presently the eighth largest school district in the United States. Hillsborough County is an urban school district that is approximately the size of Rhode Island in geographic area. The district serves close to 200,000 students in pre-kindergarten through adult programs and realizes a growth of close to 6,000 new students each year. There are over 200 school sites in the district in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods. The district has a varied ethnic population in which the minority populations will soon reach the majority. The 2002/2003 District Report to the community indicates: 48% White, 23% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 6% representing other ethnic groups. This area is also one of the fastest growing areas in the United States. The Tampa Bay region’s per capita income is slightly above the state average but below that of the nation. There is much overcrowding in the schools as a result of this fast growth and the school district is struggling to keep up with this challenge. Tampa is considered a secondary market for corporations, but at the present time is experiencing a tremendous real estate growth. The cost of living in the Tampa Bay region is commensurate with the national average.

The subject of this study is located in the western part of the city. The area is predominately Hispanic. The school does not provide transportation, and therefore, parents must drive or car-pool to get their children to school. The children who attend this school come from all over the Tampa area. It is not a neighborhood school. The student body is equally split by gender. The schools previously attended by the students are a mix of catholic schools (21%),
private schools (24%), and public schools (55%). The students represent 49% white, 7% black, 41% Hispanic, and 2% other ethnic groups.

The school in this study is an open-enrollment school. This school serves children from the age of six weeks to eighth grade. Grades kindergarten through eighth grade are considered part of the charter school and funded by the state, while the children attending the family center and early childhood programs are considered private and tuition driven. Children enrolled in the family center and the early childhood programs automatically roll into the charter school when it is age appropriate, thus bypassing the lottery system of entry into the charter school. All other entry into the charter school follows the lottery system.

**Understanding the Dynamics of the School**

In order to begin to understand life at this school, one must first examine both the philosophical and curricular link between the charter school and the Bank Street College of Education and the characteristics of successful schools possessed by this school as defined by research. The principal of this school is a graduate of the Bank Street College of Education and has replicated their Laboratory School for Children by using the charter school movement as a vehicle for accomplishing this duplication.

The subject of this study, as does the Bank Street College of Education, speaks to its philosophy in the following ways:

1. **Experiential Education** – Carefully designed and executed educational experiences that are reconstructed and reflected upon in a variety of ways through talking, writing, drawing, building, and acting.

2. **Constructivism** – The idea that a child makes discoveries from observations, explorations, and experiences and uses all of these to construct understanding.
5. Ownership of Learning – Because a student is directly involved with the environment and the assorted learning experiences, he/she feels more invested and more excited about learning.

The philosophical foundation of this charter school is steeped in Bank Street philosophy and evident in their adopted credo:

What potentialities in human beings - children, teachers and ourselves - do we want to see develop?

1. A zest for living that comes from taking in the world with all five senses alert
2. Lively intellectual curiosities that turn the world into an exciting laboratory and keep one ever a learner
3. Flexibility when confronted with change and ability to relinquish patterns that no longer fit the present
4. The courage to work, unafraid and efficiently, in a world of new needs, new problems and new ideas
5. Gentleness combined with justice in passing judgments on other human beings
6. Sensitivity, not only to the external formal rights of the "other fellow" but to him as another human being seeking a good life through his own standards
7. A striving to live democratically, in and out of schools, as the best way to advance our concept of democracy

Our credo demands ethical standards as well as scientific attitudes. Our work is based on faith that human beings can improve the society they have created – Lucy Sprague Mitchell, 1916.
The credo of this school speaks to the development of the "whole person," families, students, educators, and community leaders alike; and permeates every aspect of the school including stakeholders, leaders, curriculum, and vision.

The school's faculty emphasizes child development and individual learning styles from the early years. They acknowledge the emotional life of children as inseparable from their learning, interest, and motivation. The faculty strives to create and sustain a loving and nurturing community experience for children.

Class size is capped at 25 students per class in the charter school grades. In the family center and early childhood programs class size ranges from six to 20 depending on the age of the children in each class. There are assistants in each grade from the six week old through the second grade. The teachers are all state-certified. Besides the use of the developmental-interaction approach to curriculum, the school offers a complement of special classes such as art, music, physical education, Spanish, creative movement, and photography. The school has created working relationships with the City of Tampa, the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa, and the Museum of Science and Industry to name a few.

Data Sources

The data to be collected for this study are from secondary sources. The researcher will use the model of interpretational analysis in examining the secondary data and will look for constructs, themes and patterns to help describe this particular school's success. The data collected will include student achievement scores, data collected from a larger University of South Florida (USF) study on this school which examines the school's culture and learning environment and survey data collected by the State of Florida's Sterling Council.
State of Florida's Sterling Council

A key data source is the set of responses collected by the Sterling Council from the Navigator survey. The survey asks questions about the following: leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, measurement analysis and knowledge management, human resources focus, process management, and organizational performance results. The Navigator is an online self-assessment survey with 42 questions directly related to the seven categories of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance Excellence.

The survey participants were chosen to mirror the demographics of the employee population: 7.6% Administration, 10.5% Family Center faculty, 15.2% Lower School faculty, 15.2% Middle School faculty, 16.3% Upper School faculty, 8.6% ESE faculty, 11.4% Specials faculty, 5.7% Maintenance, and 9.5% Office Staff. Within each group, participants were chosen by an administrator through systematic sampling with a random start. The numbers one through five were placed in a hat and the number three was drawn. Thus, every third employee within each subgroup was chosen to be a participant. This rotation continued until the desired percentage was achieved. In total, 38 employees responded to the survey.

The Sterling Council tabulated the results of the survey and reported the total responses for each question without identifying the respondent. The researcher will analyze the responses within the seven categories of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance Excellence and report these findings for salient themes that might further explain if this school is successful.

University of South Florida Study

Researchers from the University of South Florida published a study of this particular school, *Multiple Dimensions of Success, A Microethnography of a Florida Charter School*. It is a qualitative study that includes elements of an ethnographic approach with phenomenological
data from interviews with participants representing members of each element of the partnership created at this school.

The study focused on uncovering aspects of the school culture and learning environment which have contributed to its “A-rated” public charter school status under the State of Florida school grading system and as a place of learning which is child-centered, learning focused, and inquiry-based. This study incorporated personal observations of the primary researchers and interviews. The data from this study will specifically focus on the information gleaned from the interviews.

The study is framed by a socio-ecological theory of child development, which posits that a child grows within a “developmental niche” which includes settings, customs, and beliefs (Super and Harkness, 1997). This theory was the template for the development of the interview questions that pertain to the aspects of this school’s history and culture.

The data set includes nine interviews. The participants in the interviews are those who care for and work with children of the school - the principal, selected teachers, and selected parents. One administrator, four teachers, and four parents were randomly selected to participate in the research project based on the length of time they had been with the school. Teachers and families who participated were volunteers who understood that the primary purpose of the study was to understand and share the history and culture of the school, and the primary criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants had been with the school since its reception, or since the first three years of the school’s opening. Of the 61 parents who met these criteria, four were selected. Of the ten teachers who met these criteria, four were selected. The only administrator at the school was also selected (see Table 1).
Their goal was to use the phenomenological data from participants representing members of each element of the partnership created at this school. They achieved this phenomenological approach by focusing on a particular phenomenon, collecting data from in-depth interviews with participants, and then identifying what is common to their perceptions.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The kind of information that was gleaned from each of these interviews was as follows:

**Administrators**

One administrator was interviewed. This sample represents 100% of the total number of administrators at the school. The researcher was able to gain insight into the school’s leadership, pedagogy, and development of the school culture.

**Teachers**

Four teachers were interviewed. This sample represents 40% of the teachers who met the criteria. During their interviews, teachers were asked questions related to pedagogy and climate.

**Parents**

Four parents were interviewed. This sample represents 6.7% of the parents who met the criteria. During their interviews, parents were asked questions related to why they chose the school, their understanding of the pedagogy, and the history and culture of the school.
The problem addressed in this study was what factors contributed to the “A” rating received by this relatively new school. The work was framed by a socio-ecological theory of child development, which posits that a child grows within a “developmental niche” which includes settings, customs, and beliefs (Super and Harkness, 1997). This theory was the template for the development of the interview questions that pertain to the aspects of this school’s history and culture.

Interviews of the participants were semi-structured to include the following broad areas of inquiry: the history of the school, who was involved, the reason why the school was started, the philosophical foundation of the school’s mission, and the steps taken to bring the school from an idea into a reality; the beliefs and psychologies of the people who care for (families) and work with (teachers and administrator) the children; and the customs of the school (with no regard to curriculum and practice).

Interviews were conducted by the primary researchers, Suzanne Flannery Quinn, Ph.D. and Libby Ethridge, Ed.D., assistant Professors of Early Childhood Education at the University of South Florida at the school during school business hours (between 8AM and 5PM). Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to two hours and was taped using a hand-held recorder to assist with analysis. The interview transcripts were typed into a word processor by a transcription service and saved onto a disc so that authentic voices of the participants would be preserved. The researcher has access to both the audiotapes and the transcripts but intends to analyze the published study. Presently, the audiotapes and transcripts are being held in a secure file in a locked office at the University of South Florida.
Student Achievement Scores

The State of Florida’s Department of Education requires all public schools to participate in the Governor’s A-Plus plan which grades schools by means of high-stakes testing. The statewide assessment includes the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) which is administered in grades 3rd through 11th, the Florida Writing Assessment administered to 4th, 8th and 10th grade students, a norm-reference test also administered to students in the 3rd through 11th grades. Other indicators that contribute to evaluating a school’s success in this state include student attendance, average class size, students with disabilities, certified teaching staff, dropout rate, and finance. This study will include student achievement data from the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and the 2005-2006 school years.

Data Analysis

The data to be analyzed for this study are from secondary sources. The researcher examined the sources individually and used the model of interpretational analysis to look for constructs, themes, and patterns to help describe if this school is successful. Each source was examined to determine if the school meets the requirements for success as defined by the individual source. The combined results of the individual sources were then used to determine if the school meets the attributes of success as defined by research (see Table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Gathered To Answer The Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source (from whom)</th>
<th>How Data Will Be Analyzed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>employee’s perspective on the impact of the structure on themselves, the community and student achievement</td>
<td>Sterling Navigator</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>employee’s perspective on the impact of the school’s leadership on themselves, the community and student achievement</td>
<td>Sterling Navigator and the USF study</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Involvement</td>
<td>faculty, administration and parent perspective on the impact of stakeholder involvement on the school’s success</td>
<td>Sterling Navigator and the USF study</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>faculty, administration and parent perspective on the impact the school’s culture on its success</td>
<td>USF study</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>researchers’ perspectives on the history and validity of the developmental-interaction approach</td>
<td>Published research and writing by Barber Biber, John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Nancy Nager, Jean Piaget, Edna Shapiro and Lev Vygotsky</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there evidence that these aspects positively impact student achievement?</td>
<td>FCAT results</td>
<td>State of Florida’s testing analysis, including student achievement scores</td>
<td>Secondary source – report findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of the present study was to:

1. Determine if the subject of the study was a successful school as defined by research
2. Analyze the ability of this school to achieve a balance between implementing sound pedagogy and meeting its state's accountability requirements
3. Determine the feasibility of replicating key aspects of this school's model on a nationwide scale.

This chapter was designed to determine if the subject of this study was a successful school. The data analyzed for this study were from secondary sources. The intent was to examine the sources individually and use the model of interpretational analysis to look for constructs, themes, and patterns to help describe if this school is successful. Each source was examined to determine if the school met the requirements for success as defined by the individual source. The combined results of the individual sources then were used to determine if the school met the attributes of success as defined by research.

Description of the Subject

The subject of this study was located in Tampa, Florida, in the west-central portion of the state. The subject was a charter school and part of the Hillsborough County School District, the eighth largest school district in the United States. The district served close to 200,000 students in pre-kindergarten through adult programs and realized a growth of close to 6,000 new students a year. There were over 200 school sites in the district in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods. The district had a varied ethnic population in which the minority populations will soon reach the majority. The 2002/2003 District Report to the Community indicated 48%
White, 23% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 6% representing other ethnic groups. This area was also one of the fastest growing in the United States. The Tampa Bay region’s per capita income was slightly above the state average, but below that of the nation. Tampa was considered a secondary market for corporations and was experiencing tremendous real estate growth. The cost of living in the Tampa Bay region was about the same as the national average.

The charter school was located in the western part of the city. The area was predominantly Hispanic. This charter school did not provide transportation, and, therefore, parents must drive or carpool to get children to school. The children that attended this school came from all over the Tampa area. It was not a neighborhood school. The student body was equally split by gender: 49.9% female and 50.1% male (see Figure 1). The schools previously attended by students vary from 21% Catholic schools, 24% private schools and 55% public schools (see Figure 2). The students represented 49% white, 7% black, 41% Hispanic, and 2% other ethnic groups (See Figure 3).

![Student Gender](image)

*Figure 1. Gender of the student body.*
This study's subject was an open-enrollment school. It served children from the age of six weeks to eighth grade. Grades kindergarten through eighth grade were considered part of the charter school and funded by the state. The children attending the family center and early childhood programs were considered private and tuition-driven.

The school's curriculum was based on the developmental-interaction approach, which concentrates on the development of the "whole child" intellectually, physically, emotionally,
spiritually, and socially. The school’s faculty emphasized child development and individual learning styles from the early years.

Class size was capped at 25 students per class in the younger school grades. In the family center and early childhood programs, class size ranged from six to 20 depending on the age of the children in each class. There were assistants in each grade from the six week old through the second grade. The teachers were all state certified. In addition to the implementation of the developmental-interaction approach, the school offered a complement of special classes such as art, music, physical education, Spanish, creative movement, and photography.

Reporting of Secondary Source Data

The data collected for this study were from secondary sources. The researcher used the model of interpretational analysis in examining the secondary data and looked for constructs, themes, and patterns to determine if this school is successful. The data included survey data collected by the Florida Sterling Council; data collected from a larger University of South Florida Stern study on this school, which examined the school’s culture and learning environment; published research and writing by Barbara Biber, John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Nancy Nager, Jean Piaget, Edna Shapiro, and Lev Vygotsky; and student achievement scores.

This data was examined to answer the two research questions:

1. Is this school a success based on specific aspects of its organization, leadership, instruction and stakeholder involvement?

2. Is there evidence that these aspects positively impact student achievement?
Subsidiary questions that were addressed include:

1. Can the subject achieve a balance between the implementation of sound pedagogy and high-stakes testing? And, if yes, then how is this balance achieved?

2. If the subject is found to be successful, can its success be replicated?

The data collected by the Florida Sterling Council and the University of South Florida Study were examined to determine if the school achieved success in the aspects of leadership and organization.

Since 1992, the Governor's Sterling Award (GSA) was given to organizations that demonstrated significant improvement and achievement of performance excellence in the State of Florida. Any organization in the State of Florida was eligible to apply for the award including service, public, health, and educational institutions. The GSA was based on the application of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance Excellence, which was in turn based on the internationally acclaimed Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence.

The Florida Sterling Council offered three levels of assessment tools designed to analyze an organization's level of excellence, provide tools for self-assessment and reflection, identify the strengths and opportunities for improvement, and hone organizations that perform at the highest levels of excellence. The beginning level was the Sterling Navigator, the intermediate level was the Sterling Performance Excellence Challenge and the highest level was the Governor's Sterling Award. An organization self-selected at which level to begin. Since the inception of the Governor's Sterling Award in 1992, no organization was awarded the Governor's Sterling Award without first completing the Sterling Navigator and/or the Sterling Performance Excellence Challenge. The Florida Sterling Council recommended that organizations begin with the Sterling Navigator. The subject of this case study elected to
participate in the Sterling Navigator. Data collected during this process was examined to
determine if the subject met the requirements for success as defined by research.

A key data source from the Sterling Navigator was the set of responses from the Navigator
Survey. The Navigator Survey was an on-line, self assessment survey with 42 questions directly
related to the seven categories of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance
Excellence: leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, measurement analysis
and knowledge management, human resources focus, process management, and organizational
performance results. Each category was assigned a point value between 50 and 170 points with a
total possible score of 990 points (see Figures 4 and 5).

![Subject's Total Score - Breakdown by Points](image)

**Figure 4.** Breakdown of total points achieved by the subject.
Figure 5. Breakdown of point percentages achieved by the subject.

The demographics of the participants and the total points achieved in each category were analyzed to gain a broader understanding of the subject's composite score. The survey participants were chosen to mirror the demographics of the employee population: 7.6% Administration, 10.5% Family Center faculty, 15.2% Lower School faculty, 15.2% Middle School faculty, 16.3% Upper School faculty, 8.6% ESE faculty, 11.4% Specials faculty, 5.7% Maintenance, and 9.5% Office Staff. In total, 36 employees responded to the survey (see Figure 6).
The Sterling Council tabulated the results of the survey and reported the total responses for each question without identifying the respondent. The researchers analyzed the responses within the seven categories of the Sterling Criteria for Organizational Performance Excellence and examined how they relate to aspects of success as defined by research. Specifically, data was examined to determine if the subject met the requirements for the organization, leadership, and stakeholder involvement aspects of success as defined by research.

For the purpose of this study, scores were reported from each subcategory as they apply to organization, leadership, and stakeholder involvement. The category of organization included the subcategories of strategic planning, measurement analysis, and knowledge management, human resources focus, process management, and organizational performance results; the category of leadership included the subcategory leadership; and the category of stakeholder...
involvement included the subcategory of customer and market focus. The overall percentage score in the category of organization was 68.61%, leadership was 75.5%, and stakeholder involvement was 67.38% (see Figure 7). Percentages reflected the average percentage score from the subcategories. A detailed examination of each category's score was included in the corresponding sections of this study. Throughout the examinations, participant quotes from the Navigator survey were represented.

![Pie chart showing percentage scores for organization, leadership, and stakeholder involvement.

Figure 7. Overall percentage scores in categories defined by the researcher.

Between August 2002 and May 2006 nine organizations (four educational and five other organizations), including the subject of this study, took the Navigator Survey for the first time. Only one organization, a public middle school, scored higher than the subject of this case study. Both schools were recognized for having achieved superior scores and the Florida Sterling Council recommended that each institution bypass the Sterling Performance Excellence...
Challenge: moving directly to application for the Governor’s Sterling Award. The GSA can be awarded to multiple organizations each year. Thus, one school’s accomplishment did not diminish the other school’s accomplishment. The mean and individual scores of these organizations were presented to demonstrate how the subject compares to other organizations as well as educational organizations (see Figures 8, 9 and 10).

**Figure 8.** Navigator mean scores from all of the 2005-2006 participants.
Figure 9. Individual Navigator scores from all of the 2005-2006 participants.

Figure 10. Individual Navigator scores from all educational institutions who participated in 2005-2006.
Specific Organization Aspects Leading to Success

The data gathered from the Navigator Survey was examined to determine if the school's organization can successfully support the school's community. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined the following aspects of organization:

1. Strategic Planning: the strategic planning process; planning based on customer and other data; clear strategic goals, timetables, and action plans; key measures/indicators for tracking action plan progress; communication; and deployment of strategic goals, action plans, and measures.

2. Measurement Analysis and Knowledge Management: selecting the right measures and collecting the right data to make decisions; selection and use of comparative data and information; data analysis to assess performance and set priorities; ensuring reliable, accurate, accessible, and timely data; and ensuring reliability, security, and user-friendliness of hardware and software and effectiveness of knowledge management systems.

3. Human Resources Focus: optimizing employee participation and effectiveness; performance management, compensation, and recognition to support organizational goals; recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees; providing training to support organizational needs and action plans; designing and delivering training for maximum effectiveness; providing a safe and healthy work environment; meeting the needs of a diverse work force; and assessing and improving employee satisfaction and well-being.
4. Process Management: key product, program, service, business and support processes; designing and delivering products, programs and/or services; determining business and support process requirements; measuring, managing, and improving key processes; minimizing errors, defects, and rework.

5. Organizational Performance Results: customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction results; product, program, and/or service performance results; financial/budgetary and market results; human resources results; organizational effectiveness results; and governance and social responsibility results.

The subject achieved the following scores in each subcategory of organization: Strategic Planning 68.17%, Measurement Analysis and Knowledge Management 70.9%, Human Resources Focus 68.8%, Process Management 69.72%, and Organizational Performance Results 65.79%. Percentages reflect the frequency with which survey participants believed the subject demonstrated excellence in a specific subcategory.

Strategic planning was designed to enact the leadership’s vision and provide a plan for effective stakeholder involvement and high student achievement. A faculty member addressed this point in the Navigator survey stating, “Our administrative team is extremely effective at communicating goals and expectations.” Another employee explained, “The organization has very clear objectives. Every key decision seems to reflect our objectives.”

The school’s strategic planning was supported by effective measurement and knowledge management. The leadership collected data and implemented sound knowledge management systems. A staff member explained, “[The leadership] look at many different perspectives. They use and seek objectives from their own employees, but they also go outside of our immediate community and talk to others in the field and even look at examples from other
organizations." A faculty member described, "Data is collected on all students yearly. We are notified on areas of weakness and strengths to help us focus our teaching." Another faculty member explained the key knowledge management system at the school as, "Selection and use of comparative data and information are applied here at [the school]. [The school] works very hard with Bank Street school in New York to come up with new things to try and methods of teaching toward the Bank Street philosophy." Finally, one teacher commented, "Data is constantly gathered to assess and make improvements on a daily basis using many different strategies."

Human resources supported the effective hiring, on-boarding, and training of employees. This critical piece of the framework was designed by the leadership to ensure that employees were capable of implementing the school's vision and mission. Employees described human resources at this school as, "available for answering questions, good support," and "helps people become more knowledgeable about the school's philosophy and functions, even the small stuff such as where forms and files go." Regarding professional training, one teacher stated, "I feel that we always have the best trainings and opportunities. We do this by keeping our ear to what is new to our method of teaching." Another teacher explained, "Our school offers a variety of trainings for all of us. They have them mostly on professional days as faculty is here and all excited to attend."

With an effective workforce in place, appropriate decisions, and actions regarding process management were achieved. One teacher described how processes at the school are managed by stating, "I feel we have great plans and ideas and put them in place. When things don't work out we rework the ideas and put new ideas to work." Another teacher described process management more technically stating, "Again team meetings are held on a regular basis"
(one to three times per week) to ensure key processes are done consistently and effectively. We take a proactive approach to management and make changes immediately when necessary.”

Effective process management, strategy development and deployment, leadership, and human resources all impacted the school’s organizational results.

Strong organizational results pointed to the interdependence of each area of the organization. Effective leadership, high stakeholder involvement, and high student achievement affect the ability of the other areas to demonstrate success. A faculty member described leadership at this school as “outstanding in organizational performance because of their ability to act as one unit and motivate their teachers to get the job done and get it done well.” Stakeholder involvement was described as strong. “The PTA that represents the school is a very solid organization, composed by parents that are very involved and active, helping the school to accomplish many of the goals.” Regarding high student achievement, a teacher stated, “I would have to say that the school has established high standards of excellence and an environment for higher learning for their students.”

The data demonstrated this school performed consistently in the category of organization. The percentage difference between the school’s lowest and highest score in this category is 4.71%. This percentage was significant because it demonstrated consistency across the subcategories of organization. It provided evidence that the subject was effectively managing all areas of the school’s organization. Thus, it provided a strong, stable base for a successful school as defined by research.
Leadership Aspects Leading to Success

Data from the Navigator Survey and The University of South Florida study examined many dimensions of leadership to determine if specific aspects of the school's leadership led to success. Data was collected and examined the following dimensions of leadership:

1. Organizational Leadership: setting organizational values and performance expectations; commitment to creating value for customers and stakeholders; establishing and reinforcing empowerment, innovation, and learning; reviewing organizational performance and capabilities, assessing progress relative to goals; accountability, ethical business practices, regulatory, and legal compliance; and community support.

2. Social Responsibility: leadership actively supporting community groups; structured processes are in place to encourage employee involvement in activities and programs that support and strengthen the community, and these processes are evaluated for improvement.

3. Strategy Development: ability of leadership to set, communicate, and use organizational values and to develop strategies.

4. Strategy Deployment: ability of leadership to enact developed strategies by providing employees with direction; obtaining regular feedback on this process and start making changes for improving how they address these areas.

5. Governance and Social Responsibility Results: most key results being reported and addressed most areas of the organization; no adverse trends or poor performance in key areas; there are good to very good performance levels or improvement in most areas when compared to similar organizations and benchmarks.
6. Transformational Leadership: leaders being successful in defining the school’s vision while empowering employees to enact said vision in a focused manner.

Organizational leadership provided the school with a well-defined vision that empowered faculty and honored stakeholders. They regularly assessed progress and held the school community to high accountability measures and ethical standards. One response to the Navigator survey stated, “Understanding our mission, core, and values and principles, help us to have a clear vision of where we are and where we want to be.” Additional teachers explained, “We are expected to adhere to and surpass very high standards, and our leaders are continually reminding us of those standards. This is one thing I admire about the leadership: it pushes us to excel.”

And, “Ethical practices and good citizenship are highly promoted.” Progress was assessed through what employees described as a weekly meeting and continual conversation and reflection.

Social responsibility was reflected in the school’s daily practices. A teacher stated, “Leadership has demonstrated an active role in community involvement through getting the children involved in the world around them.” Another teacher described how the children became involved, “We work closely with different organizations to help our young learners work in the community physically, not just by seeing. Our students learn through doing and learn how to be a good citizen in their community.” One teacher explained how daily interactions reflected how the school is “committed to being involved in the community at large and creating a positive effect on society.”

Key strategies were reviewed weekly during leadership meetings to ensure that they were aligned with the organizational values and effectively deployed. The ability of the leadership to align key strategies with organizational values was evidenced in the employees’ understandings.
Employees explained, "The organization has very clear objectives. Every key decision seems to reflect our objectives," and "We have a solid base in our philosophy of learning. It affects everything we do." The ability of leadership to effectively deploy key strategies was summed up by one employee as, "Once something is defined it gets done."

Transformational leadership was the thread between each subcategory of leadership. It described how the leaders engaged themselves in the school's community rather than what the leaders instituted. The school's leadership was successful in setting a well-defined vision and empowering their employees to enact it in a focused manner. One teacher explained, "The leadership empowers teachers by allowing them to have ownership over their classrooms and make their own decisions rather than standing over their shoulders and too tightly monitoring every decision, idea, and lesson."

The data collected from the University of South Florida study was analyzed to determine if the subject has transformational leadership while the data collected from the Navigator Survey was examined to determine if the subject met the criteria for the remaining dimensions of leadership in addition to meeting the criteria for transformational leadership.

Within the Navigator Survey, the subject achieved the following scores in each subcategory of leadership: organizational leadership was 73.37%, social responsibility was 76.34%, strategy development was 69.70%, strategy deployment was 66.64%, and governance and social responsibility results were 71.52%. Percentages reflected the frequency with which survey participants believed the subject demonstrated excellence in a specific subcategory. The subject's leadership category had a mean percentage score of 75.5%, higher than any other category (see Figure 11).
In addition to numerical data, the survey also generated qualitative data from the participants. These individuals described the leadership at the school as, “empowering teachers by allowing them to have ownership over their classrooms and make their own decisions” and “the administration involves us in many aspects of decision making.” Participants described “the striking feature of the history and current practices of [the subject] are the expressions of ownership and investment on behalf of the families, teachers, and administrator of the school.”

This researcher analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data generated by the Navigator Survey and concluded that both support defining this school’s leadership as transformational.

Throughout examination of the University of South Florida study’s transcripts supported that the school’s leaders have a well-defined vision, which permeated every aspect of the school.
One teacher explained, "What makes (this school) stand out is that regardless of the grade level, regardless of what teacher your child is assigned to, you know it's consistent. Not only are the teachers consistent in their abilities, but also the philosophy is consistent throughout the school. We spend a lot of time talking about our philosophy and about where we've come from. Where we're going and that always keeps it right in front. It's like the sign that [the principal] has to hang around... The sign, the one I'm looking at right now says 'reflect.' You know the signs that we have about as far as quotes from Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the founder of Bank Street. Our philosophy screams at us through the environment and our discussions with [the principal]." (p001). A parent described, "After sitting down with [the principal] and having her explain to me how things were set up, and the Bank Street philosophy, when it was over, I told her, we want to be part of this family, we want to be involved and we know what it was, that's what really makes [this school] work... the parents, we all understand what's going on here." (p001). The leadership's ability to communicate the vision was echoed when another parent stated, "I mean, how many schools do you know that you can walk in, walk up to the principal's office, and have her motion you in to sit down and be able to say, 'I need to talk to you' and have her say 'I need to talk to you too.' She always responds to my questions and makes sure I understand why the school is doing what it is doing." (p002). Based upon these transcripts this researcher determined that the leadership at this school has a well-defined vision that effectively permeates the school's community, but questions, can the leadership at this school be defined as transformational?

Sager (1993) described how a well-defined vision and strong leadership were intertwined in his description of the transformational leader. He concluded that transformational leadership is "...more than simply who makes decisions. Rather it is finding a way to be successful in collaboratively defining the essential purpose of teaching and learning and then empowering the
entire school community to become energized and focused. In schools where such a focus has been achieved, we found that teaching and learning became transformational for everyone” (Sagor, 1992, p.13-14).

Upon examination of the data, this researcher concluded that the subject meets all requirements for a well-defined vision and strong leadership as defined by research. This conclusion was echoed in the USF researchers’ evaluation of the transcripts. The “school began with a common philosophy held by a core group of educators and committed parents and families who were inspired by the Bank Street approach to child-centered inquiry based learning and the leadership of [the principal].” (Ethridge & Quinn, 2005) Thus, the subject’s leadership was transformational as defined by Sagor.

Stakeholder Involvement Aspects Leading to Success

Stakeholders were defined as families, community leaders, and students. (Hoover Commission, 1996; OPPAGA, 2005) and Schorr (2002) concluded that the partnership between the school and parents must be focused on student learning and a safe and orderly environment for a school to be considered successful.

Data extrapolated from the Navigator Survey and University of South Florida’s (USF) study were examined to determine if the subject had high stakeholder involvement as defined by research. For the purpose of this study the following subcategories of the Navigator Survey were analyzed:

i. Customer and Market Knowledge: grouping customers and markets and gathering information on customer requirements; determining requirements for key product, program, and/or service features important to customers and stakeholders.
2. Customer Relationships and Satisfaction: establishing and maintaining customer relationships; determining and deploying customer contact requirements; making it easy for customers to seek assistance, get information, and complain; resolving customer complaints effectively and using them to improve; and determining customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

3. Customer-Focus Results: reporting of key results for most areas of customer/stakeholder satisfaction; having no adverse trends or poor performance in customer-focus; having results that show good to very good performance levels, positive trends, or improvement in most areas when compared to similar organizations or benchmarks.

4. Product and Service Results: reporting of key results for most areas of product and service, having no adverse trends or poor performance in product and service, having results that show good to very good performance levels, positive trends, or improvement in most areas when compared to similar organizations or benchmarks.

The leadership of this school continually gained knowledge about their customers/stakeholders and market in order to build strong customer relationships and achieve high customer satisfaction. Knowledge was gained through consistent contact with the customer. Teachers stated, "We are very good at communicating with the parents. We have many different avenues of communication between parent/student/teacher/administrator," and "faculty and administration have many outlets to express complaints or positive remarks. This is something that brings us closer together." This closeness allowed for high customer satisfaction to occur. A teacher explained, "Establishing and maintaining relationships customer relationships with our families has proven effective as evidenced by parent involvement in the classroom, assisting
teachers with acquiring classroom supplies, participation in the Parent Association, and community events organized by the school. We pride ourselves on this relationship building.”

Customer service results and product and service results were directly related. Stakeholders expressed the greatest degree of satisfaction and investment in the school when they believed the school was successfully educating the students. One teacher’s Navigator Survey response aptly reflected this point with, “Everything we do revolve around the students and parents. We do our job well and they (the parents) do their job well. We support their child’s education, they support their child’s education.” The customer service results and product and service results data collected by the Navigator Survey reflected this teacher’s belief that the school succeeded in these areas.

The subject achieved the following scores in each subcategory of stakeholder involvement: customer and market knowledge was 65.53%, customer relationships and satisfaction was 71.22%, customer-focus results were 66.67%, and product and service results were 70.67%. Percentages reflected the frequency with which survey participants believed the subject demonstrated excellence in a specific subcategory. The survey participants defined customers as stakeholders and product service as community life and academic results (see Figure 12).

In addition to numerical data, the survey generated qualitative data from the participants. These individuals described stakeholder involvement at this school as “our school life is based on the 100% participation and commitment of faculty and staff, families and the community in the integral learning process of the children,” and “[the school is] very good at establishing customer relationships. Many parents and students are very involved with the school, which shows that they support our mission. We know our families and their needs well.”
researchers concurred that the Navigator Survey's qualitative and quantitative data affirmed that strong stakeholder involvement was present at this school.

Figure 1.2: Subject's percentage scores in the category of stakeholder involvement.

Researchers from the University of South Florida published a study of this particular school, *Multiple Dimensions of Success: A Microethnography of a Florida Charter School*. This qualitative study presented phenomenological data from interviews with stakeholders representing the administration, teachers, and parents that created this school. The study focused on uncovering aspects of the school culture and learning environment, which contributed to its success. The interviews were examined and the data extrapolated to determine levels of stakeholder involvement.

The data set included nine interviews. The participants were volunteers who understood that the primary purpose of the study was to understand and share the history and culture of the
school, including the involvement of stakeholders. The primary criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants had been with the school since its inception, or since the first three years of the school’s opening. Of the 61 parents who met these criteria, four were selected. Of the 10 teachers who met these criteria, four were selected. As the sole administrator and founder, the principal was also interviewed (see Figure 13).

![Bar Chart: University of South Florida Study Stakeholder Interviews]

**Figure 13.** Number of participants in the stakeholder interviews from the University of South Florida study.

A successful school, as defined by research, requires stakeholder involvement. Specifically, active parent involvement and a shared sense of purpose between administrators, teachers and parents must be present for a school to experience success (Klug 1989). Significant findings within the USF study met the criteria for a successful school as defined by research. 100% of the transcripts identified high stakeholder involvement at this school and how stakeholders intertwined to meet the needs of each child. One teacher described how this
worked: “When we talk to parents and discuss — they are our partner in this process—when I said I look at where a child is and make decisions about how I would individually work with this child, it’s not done all by myself it’s done with conversations with the parent, with other teachers who have interacted with that child, and the parent is a critical piece. The parents play a critical role and helping them to understand the importance of the work that they do and its impact on what we can do is a very important piece” (002). The principal described parent involvement during opening week at the school. “When it came to putting the tables together and the delivery was coming there was a line of father’s with drills, and trucks were unloaded, tables were put together, it was almost instant that the school was there. The first day — microwaves, televisions, you name it — whatever our needs were came in on the backs of parents that were so excited about this” (001).

Another teacher spoke about the importance of the role parents currently play at this school, stating “I think [parents] are drawn here because they know that this is a place that welcomes families and appreciates their understanding of their children. We honor that, we respect their role in their child’s lives. And a lot of parents are looking for some place that will simply listen to what they have to say and include them in the process, so we end up with a lot of families who want to be included in the process [of educating children]. They’re involved in all aspects— we have an open door policy at the school. Parents are allowed to come in and work with their children, work with other children, and participate in the daily goings on in the classrooms” (003). Finally, a parent expressed how the invitation to become involved drew her to the school saying, “At my children’s other school, they had a [holiday event] and didn’t even invite the parents, and I think that’s a little strange. The parents were never involved in anything
and I wanted to be involved. I wanted to bake cookies, I wanted to do things that were not allowed here, and I'm able to do things here" (p003).

All 100% of the participants stated that parents, faculty and staff, students and the community at large are actively involved in the school. This involvement extended beyond volunteering their time to being actively engaged in the decision making process about how to educate each child. Edhridge & Quinn affirm this researcher's findings in their summary by stating, "While family involvement as a key to academic success is a construct discussed throughout educational literature, this school goes beyond involvement to 'investment'... Not only is there a strong desire to participate on the part of the parents who were with the school from the early years, but there is an understanding of the value of their participation" (Edhridge & Quinn, 2006, p6).

In the examination of the transcripts it was evident that an intense need to be actively involved in the school's development and focused on a shared vision permeated 100% of the interviews. The administrator's transcript stated, "In order for the school's mission to succeed there has to be an investment on the part of all participants as to what is truly important to children. The vision must be the same for all of the founders" (a001). A teacher's response demonstrated agreement with the administrator, "What made the school so powerful is that we were all on the same page: parents, principal, teachers, and kids. We knew that in order for this school to succeed we had to pull together, look to the end of our noses and just focus on doing what is right for children. Working with a group of people that all had the same goal in mind made this school a wonderful place to grow" (g002). The remaining seven transcripts each identified a shared vision as a vital element contributing to success in schools. The continuity
between 100% of the interviews allowed this researcher to concur with the study’s findings (see Figure 14).

Additional findings regarding the school’s culture were evident through a shared sense of purpose that support defining the school as successful. One teacher stated, “We listen to our kids, we listen to our families. The administration listens to the teachers, the teachers listen to each other- we learn from each other. reflect and listen. And that’s really what we do all the time. If nothing else we are slow and steady here-we do a lot of conversation: talking, finding out from all angles how things are working and what is working, then make adjustments knowing that we are constantly a work in progress and we’re never as good as we can be. and hopefully we’re always better than we were” (064).

All of the interviews pointed toward a school culture that was immersed in pedagogy, respect, leadership, and personal investment from every member of the school’s community as the means for achieving their shared vision for student success. Ethridge & Quinn (2005) affirmed this researcher’s findings in their summary by stating, “At [this school] we see practices of democracy in giving voice to those who participate in the school, who are ‘the school’: the students’ voices are heard through child-centered negotiated curricula, the families’ voices are heard through their active participation in all aspects of the school, and the teachers’ voices are heard as trusted professionals who are in a partnership focused on learning. Their story shows us that with the investment and ownership by all stakeholders, autonomous teachers, and a firm belief in child-centered pedagogy, a successful school can be accomplished” (Ethridge & Quinn, 2005, p.41).
Figure 14. Percentage of interview participants who agree that the subject has high parent involvement and a shared sense of purpose among community members.

Examination of the data demonstrated the subject met the requirement for stakeholder involvement and collaborative culture as evidenced by data collected through the Navigator Survey and the University of South Florida Study. Thus, this requirement for the definition of a successful school was satisfied.

Researchers' Perspectives on Developmental-Interaction Approach

A successful school, as defined by research, had a faculty and staff that were committed to a clear mission focused on instructional goals and priorities, spent significant time on instruction, frequently monitored student progress, understood and shared the school's vision, saw instruction as key, defined tasks, and focused on constantly striving to improve their craft (OPPAGA, 2005; Schorr, 2002). This charter school implemented the developmental-interaction approach to achieve these goals. The effectiveness of implementation was demonstrated by the examination of student achievement scores.
The developmental-interaction approach was an enduring pedagogy rooted in developmental psychology and progressive education that formed educational theory and practice since the early twentieth century. It was identified with, but not unique to, Bank Street College of Education. This coherent philosophy focused on human development, interaction with the world of people and materials, building democratic community, and humanistic value. It had an explicit purpose: to educate teachers and children within an educational frame that brings together concepts from dynamic and developmental psychologists, and progressive educational theorists and practitioners (Shapiro and Biber, 1972).

Historically, the civic role of education was to promote democratic values. Dewey believed that education itself should be democratic that schools should be "communities of learning" where individuals make changes that, in turn, restructure society (Dewey, 1958). Vygotsky echoed Dewey by emphasizing the importance of the interdependence between the adult and the child to collaboratively and democratically learn in a social environment, thus, teaching "school concepts" through everyday activities. "Social practices and cultural activities become sources for great thinking" (Shapiro and Nagor, p.26). Piaget added support to the developmental-interaction approach by attributing to children the great role of active constructors of their own knowledge, social participants in their own development. (Cole & Cole, 1993)

Lucy Sprague Mitchel in 1916 established the Bureau of Educational Experiments in New York City. She set out to conduct research on child development in experimental schools. She staffed the Bureau with doctors, psychologists, social workers, and teachers and they set out to study how children learn best. What resulted from this process was a bold new strategy for bringing about change in the field of education: the development of a new kind of teacher for a
new kind of school. The central strategy for effecting educational reform was the development of a teacher education program that would serve as a model to educate the world. The Bureau was called upon to help reform and enhance programs for the New York City Public School System and has continued to do this work today (Antle, 1987).

Out of these experiments with learning and children at the turn of the twentieth century came the development of the developmental-interaction approach. This approach or pedagogy has its roots in developmental psychology and progressive education. It is identified with but not exclusive to the Bank Street College of Education. This coherent philosophy focuses on human development, interaction with the world of people and materials, building a democratic community, and humanist values (Shapiro & Biber, 1972).

The developmental-interaction approach has stressed the importance of the “whole child.” It has recognized and appreciated the continuous entanglement of the cognitive and the social-affective parts of development. Its premise has been that the “whole child” is not only a guiding concept but also a powerful image in the approach.

Six guiding principles of this approach have been basic to understanding it:

1. Development is not a simple path from less to more, and it is not an unfolding, like the unfolding of a flower. Development involves changes or shifts in the way a person organizes experience and copes with the world.
2. Individuals are never at a fixed point on a straight line of development, but operate within a range of possibilities.
3. Developmental progress involves a mix of stability and instability. A central task for the educator is to find a balance between helping a child consolidate new understandings and offering challenges that will promote growth.
4. The motivation to engage actively with the environment – to make contact, to have impact and to make sense of experience – is built into human beings.

5. The child’s sense of self is built up from his experiences with other people and with objects; knowledge of the self is based on repeated awareness and testing of one’s self in interaction.

6. Growth and maturing involve conflict – conflict within the self and conflict with others. Conflict is necessary for development.

A fundamental principle of the developmental-interaction approach was that cognitive growth cannot be separated from the growth of personal and social processes. A school should be an active community, connected to the social world of which it is a part, rather than an isolated place for learning lessons. The school shared responsibility with children’s families and with other neighborhood institutions. To effectively implement this approach, significant amounts of time must be spent on curriculum development, instruction, and the monitoring of student progress through child observation and assessment.

After examining the USF transcripts, it is evident that all stakeholders implemented the developmental-interaction approach with fidelity. The administrator described this determination by stating, “As a graduate of the Bank Street College of Education my philosophy of what’s wise for children to learn is deeply rooted in the developmental-interaction approach. Families became aware of my work as I developed another early childhood program, in the area. Seeing the results in their children, they demanded this program be extended beyond the early childhood years. Therefore, it was with this philosophy in mind that we moved forward with the development of [this school]... To insure that the integrity of the philosophy remains in fact I
have been a bear with my faculty and founding members to help educate our parents about our work and how we accomplish it" (A001). Further examination of the transcripts revealed the leadership used pedagogy as a guiding principle for curriculum and community development. Faculty participated in frequent trainings including observations at the Bank Street School for Children, families were educated in the approach through workshops and conversations with faculty and the administrative team, and the students were collaboratively and socially engaged in the learning process.

How Organization, Leadership, Stakeholder Involvement, School Culture and Instruction Impact Student Achievement

The effectiveness of this school's organization, leadership, stakeholder involvement, culture, and implementation of the developmental-interaction approach was evidenced through the impact on student achievement scores as measured by rigorous accountability standards. This researcher examined the data generated by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) scores to determine if the students were experiencing academic success. The State of Florida tested students in reading and math during their 4th and 8th grade years and in science during their 5th and 8th grade years. Thus, these results were examined and reported to determine if students exiting the elementary and middle school programs at this school are succeeding academically.

Having examined the data it was interesting to note that in 2005 this school increased its student body by 33%. These students represented a cross-section of the community at-large in cognitive ability, ethnicity, and socio-economic standing. The same year, three hurricanes required the school to close 12 days, on three separate occasions, during the first quarter of the school year. A decrease in student scores was evidenced during this year followed by an
increase in most scores in 2006 (see Figures 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20). The only score that decreased in 2006 was the 4th Grade reading scores, which also experienced a decrease statewide. One possible explanation has been the increased difficulty of the test itself (see Figure 15).

Reading Achievement Data

Overall, the 4th Grade reading scores were higher than the state's. It was possible that these scores were a direct reflection of decisions made by the leadership of this school. Given that the developmental-interaction approach was literacy based, the school's principal and board chose to funnel the majority of their curriculum development budget and personnel resources into the development of the reading curriculum. Prioritizing reading from the school's 1999 opening was reflected in the strength of student's reading scores during the 4th and 5th Grade years. 8th Grade reading scores reflected a dip in student achievement during the 2005 expansion year followed by scores that exceeded state scores in 2006 (see Figures 15 and 16).
Figure 15. Subject’s 4th Grade FCAT reading scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida’s FCAT reading scores from the same years.

![3rd Grade FCAT Reading Scores](image.png)

Figure 16. Subject’s 8th Grade FCAT reading scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida’s FCAT reading scores from the same years.

Science Achievement Data

The State of Florida began testing 5th and 8th Grade students in science during the 2004 school year. Each year the subject’s 5th Grade scores exceeded the state’s scores, despite the dip during the 2005 expansion year. It was possible that these scores were a direct reflection of decisions made by school leadership. In 2002, the principal and board chose to concentrate the majority of the curriculum development funds and personnel resources in the development of the science curriculum. The attention given to science was evidenced in the 5th and 8th Grade science scores. Both 5th and 3rd Grade science scores reflected a dip in student achievement.
during the 2005 expansion year followed by scores that exceeded state scores in 2006 (see Figures 17 and 18).

![Graph showing 5th Grade FCAT Science Scores](image)

Figure 19. Subject's 5th Grade FCAT science scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida's FCAT science scores from the same years.
Figure 20. Subject’s 8th Grade FCAT science scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida’s FCAT science scores from the same years.

Mathematics Achievement Data

Overall, the 4th Grade math scores are lower than the state’s while the 8th Grade math scores are higher. One possibility was that these scores were a direct reflection of decision made by school leadership to departmentalize the Upper School (6th through 8th Grade) and wait until 2007 to channel financial and personnel resources into mathematics curriculum development in the Middle School (1st through 5th Grade). Departmentalization of the upper School required that Mathematics Specialists were hired to teach the math curriculum. Faculty in these positions held Florida Teaching Certificates in Mathematics. 4th Grade faculty held Florida Teaching Certificates in Elementary Education. This certificate indicated a broad understanding of many subjects versus a specialized focus in one content area. In January, 2007 a Mathematics Research and Development Specialist was hired to examine Middle School
mathematics instruction and create a curriculum model that aligned with the developmental-interaction approach.

Figure 17. Subject's 4th Grade FCAT math scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida's FCAT math scores from the same years.
Figure 18. Subject’s 8th Grade FCAT math scores from 2004 through 2006 as compared to the State of Florida’s FCAT math scores from the same years.

An examination of the mean test scores revealed additional support for the argument that this school met the requirements for success as defined by research. The mean scores for each test were determined by adding the test averages from 2004, 2005, and 2006 together and dividing by three. This calculation presented a clearer picture of how the subject’s scores compared to the state’s scores. Overall, 85.71% of this subject’s mean test scores were higher than the state’s mean test scores, notwithstanding the 2005 expansion year. Thus, the requirement for high student achievement as defined by the State of Florida has been met.

Summary

Examination of secondary sources individually and the use of the model of interpretational analysis to look for constructs, themes, and patterns helped to determine if this particular school was successful. The school met the requirements for success as defined by
each individual source. The combined data presented a compelling argument that the subject of this study met the requirements for success as defined by research.

In chapter five, this researcher will conclude:

1. If this school is a success based on specific aspects of its organization, leadership, instruction, and stakeholder involvement
2. If there is evidence that these aspects positively impacted student achievement
3. If the subject achieved a balance between the implementation of sound pedagogy and high-stakes testing. And, if yes, then discuss how this balance was achieved
4. If the subject was found to be successful, can its success be replicated?
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined a charter school in the State of Florida to determine if it is a success based on specific aspects of its organization, leadership, instruction, and stakeholder involvement. And, is there evidence that these aspects have positively impacted student achievement. Chapter 5 will present a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and future research and policy.

This case study is of a specific school that was chosen because of its implementation of the developmental-interaction approach, diverse population, and use of the charter movement as a vehicle for creating the school. The findings of this study have shed light on what roles a specific educational philosophy and the charter movement have played in the school’s development. The researcher hopes that this study’s findings will add to the national body of work regarding how the charter movement can be used as a vehicle to successfully implement a progressive pedagogy resulting in high student achievement. It also hopes to effect change on the national level with respect to education reform and student achievement.

The significance of this study is two-fold:

1. It describes what elements such as stakeholder involvement, the developmental-interaction approach, student achievement, organization, and leadership style have led to this school’s success.

2. It examines the opportunities that the charter school movement provides for experimentation in education and what schools around the nation can gain from this experimentation.
By examining the different components that led to this school’s achievements, the findings have added to the greater body of work by exploring roads to success in education. The literature review was utilized to define successful schools and examine a specific pedagogy. Findings relative to the literature suggest the subject of this case study met or exceeded all of the requirements for a successful school, and also achieved the delicate balance of implementing sound pedagogy while meeting the accountability requirements of high-stakes testing.

A successful school is defined by research as exhibiting characteristics that include a culture of high academic expectations, strong instructional leadership, teachers committed to a clear mission that focuses on instructional goals and priorities, significant time spent on instruction, frequent monitoring of student progress, a safe and orderly environment, and partnership between the school and parents who focus on student learning (OPPAGA, 2005). The results from this investigation of the charter school in Florida demonstrate the subject is aligned with the research-based definition for successful schools.

This researcher has concluded that the school has demonstrated the following aspects of success:

1. **Well Defined Vision**: Statement of clear and distinct purpose for an organization’s existence that permeates the school’s culture (Schott, 2007; OPPAGA, 2005).

2. **Strong Leadership**: Individuals that collaboratively define the culture and essential purpose of an organization and then empower all stakeholders to become energized and focused (Sagot, 1992).

3. **High Stakeholder Involvement**: Individuals that share a common vision, have high academic expectations and partner with each other to affect a common goal and culture (Hoover Commission, 1998). They include the following.
a. Families: Partnership with the school is focused on student learning and a safe and orderly environment (Hoover Commission, 1996).

b. Community Leaders: Include individuals from both the public and private sectors.

c. Faculty and Staff: Committed to a clear mission focused on instructional goals and priorities; spend significant time on instruction and frequently monitor student progress; understand and share the school's vision; see instruction as key; define tasks, and focus on constantly striving to improve their craft (Schott, 2002, OPPAGA, 2005).

d. Students: Become educated citizens who are equipped to be productive and supportive players in shared community life (Hoover Commission, 1996).

4. High Student Achievement: Defined by nationally normed measures for reading, writing and mathematics. (OPPAGA, 2005)

The school's leadership exhibits the contemporary view of effective leadership. In the past, a leader was a person who had the capacity to take charge and "get things done." Mitchell and Tucker (1992) explain that this view keeps us from focusing on the importance of teamwork and comprehensive school improvement. Researchers would like us to consider shifting our paradigm of leadership from aggressive action to a way of thinking - about ourselves, our jobs, and the nature of the educational process.

This school's founders exhibited leadership qualities that fell on both sides of the paradigm. They employed the charter movement to create a school and were motivated by their passion to produce a better educational experience for children. The journey from inception to reality was so intense and personal that human nature drove many founders to the misguided
vision that the school was about them and not the children they served. In governing charter schools, founders can become self-serving, taking an aggressive approach to decision-making without considering the impact on stakeholders. The founding leadership at this school found itself in this position and divided into two camps. One group sought to achieve their personal goals and the other focused on addressing the needs of the school community. The former group describe; Mitchell and Tucker's (1992) view that leaders who are focused solely on getting things done often fail to recognize the impact their actions have on the community at large. The later group honors the school's vision while empowering the school community to partner in the vision. This explains "transformational leadership," (Sagor, 1992; Leithwood, 1992) and Sergiovanni (1999) suggest that student achievement is significantly improved when transformational leaders are present. Evidence of transformational leadership at this school was provided by data collected by the Florida Sterling Council and the University of South Florida study. Therefore, the development of this school's community, culture, and ultimate success was dependent on governance by strong, transformational leaders while the remaining founding leaders fell to the wayside. Of the 13 founding board members at this school, five remain active leaders, two moved out of state, two left for personal seasons, and four left during the power struggle between the two leadership camps.

Data examined from the Florida Sterling Council, the University of South Florida study and the literature support the importance of collaboration on the part of all stakeholders in the school's organization. This school is entrenched in the partnerships between families, the school and the community. The importance of these relationships is evident in all of the school's print material. Under every logo are the words, "Education - Family - Community." Leadership has an open door policy, parents feel invested in their children's education and community life and
teachers reach out to parents and the community at large as resources for educating children. A strong partnership exists between parents and educators that work towards following the school's vision and mission. "This shared vision, under the leadership of (the principal), appears to help guide, substantiate, and validate the collective work of the school's stakeholders." (Lethridge and Quinn, 2005, p.25). This collaborative culture supports a shared sense of purpose, focuses on long-term improvement, and supports networks of professionals and parents who share problems, ideas, materials, and solutions. This culture is not easy to develop, but provides a substantial and meaningful setting in which teachers develop craft knowledge, a powerful sense of efficacy, and a deep connection to fellow educators, parents, and students (Klug, 1989).

Research has demonstrated that the developmental-interaction approach engages students in learning, motivating them to achieve and prepares them to succeed in a democratic society. The subject of this study has replicated the developmental-interaction approach. The study's findings have demonstrated that effective implementation of this approach leads to student success on high-stakes test. The most profound evidence is reflected in the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) data. A noticeable decline in test scores occurs in 2005, the same year the school increased enrollment by 33%. Alone, this dip is insignificant. Followed by an increase in score in 2006 the data is more powerful. Students entrenched in the developmental-interaction approach for one year recognized gains in their FCAT scores. This researcher concludes that students' exposure to the developmental-interaction approach and subsequent development as thinkers supported their ability to make gains in a high-stakes testing environment.

This conclusion is significant because the developmental-interaction approach has an explicit purpose: to educate teachers and children within an educational framework that brings
together concepts from dynamic and developmental psychologists and progressive educational theorists and practitioners (Shapiro & Biber, 1972). It recognizes and appreciates the continuous entanglement of the cognitive and the social-affective parts of development. Its premise is that the “whole child” is not only a guiding concept but also a powerful image in this approach. This premise can appear to be at odds with high-stakes testing yet the findings prove that the two can co-exist.

This researcher concludes this school’s successful organization, leadership, stakeholder involvement, culture, and instruction are interrelated and inseparable. Data from the Florida Sterling Council, the University of South Florida study, and the FCAT scores support this conclusion. This researcher also concludes that the subject of this study has achieved the delicate balance of implementing sound pedagogy and meeting the accountability requirements of high stakes testing. In a perfect world pedagogy should drive educational decision making with high stakes testing as one measure of accountability. Sound pedagogy and accountability should be codependent to assure a quality education for students. The subject of this case study has accomplished this ideal codependence.

Recommendations for Practice

Incorporating self-study, a deep understanding of what led to this school’s success, and knowledge of the developmental-interaction approach will allow others to determine what practices are transferrable to their own schools and districts. This researcher cautions practitioners that the developmental-interaction approach and the credo of this school must be implemented with fidelity and in conjunction with strong organization, leadership and stakeholder involvement in order to achieve success.
Recommendations for Future Research and Policy

Much has been written and researched in the educational community about student achievement, leadership, best practices, and pedagogy. Questions remain regarding the impact of sound business practice on student achievement. Data gathered in this case study from the Florida Sterling Council present key components that have allowed this school to be successful that are not included in researchers’ definitions of a successful school. Components such as finance, governance, and process management contribute to this school’s success but are not directly identified in a research-based definition of success.

This researcher recommends further investigation into the impact of sound business practices on student achievement. Questions regarding governance, finances, and charter authorization processes require further investigation. Does the impact of who oversees each school’s operations, how money is allocated and how charter school contracts are awarded and renewed affect student achievement and if so, how? If sound business practices are analyzed to uncover their impact on student achievement, it is possible to determine if the definition of school success should be broadened to include sound business practices.

As the charter movement matures, it is the researchers hope that further study will persuade legislators to consider the following:

1. Statewide equitable funding
2. Charter school authorizers establishing more stringent guidelines in approving new schools
3. Accountability measures that balance qualitative and quantitative data
References


