

Manhood, Scholarship, Perseverance, Uplift, and Elementary Students: An Example of School and Community Collaboration

by

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National policy now mandates that “no child be left behind” in the academic push for a successful American education system. At the core of the nation’s school efforts is the No Child Left Behind movement—a mere reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001)

The federal No Child Left Behind legislation has generated a major issue of discussion among educators in the United States. For example, one such issue is that the new legislation has lofty goals but there is not enough money to support those ideals. There are numerous complaints about the lack of support and lack of clarity of support and guidelines in the legislation (Citizens for Effective Schools, 2004). The essence of the criticism is that the act sets higher standards outside of the social context of the educational setting without providing any support for those standards. Berliner (2004) makes this point:

The students we fail are primarily the urban and rural poor, and in particular, the poor who are minorities. As a nation we have known this for decades. . . .
I suggest that the accountability system we push for be two-way rather than just one-way. The obligation of our schools to be accountable to the communities they serve is matched in equal part by the obligations that the governments of those communities be accountable to their schools. Governments must be held accountable for providing the fiscal and social opportunities for families to raise healthy, high-achieving children, in safe high performing schools. (p. 16)

It is the relationship between the economic supports for the educational mandate that is a key element: The same resources that are not available to schools are also the same resources that are not available to families, thus creating a major barrier to school achievement. Despite these barriers a team of administrators, teachers, and community members at Rowland H. Latham Elementary School have met the spirit of No Child Left Behind movement through the application of the concepts of complementary education, effective schools practices, technology integration, and transformational leadership. They developed what the Latham PTA called the “Latham Way.” This article describes the impact of the Latham Way on the academic performance on Latham students in 2001-2002.

Review of the Literature

Child Poverty and Its Effect on Achievement

Several studies assert the relationship between poverty and academic achievement. It is within this context that the majority of the students at Rowland Hill Latham Elementary School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, demonstrate the effects of duration and severity of poverty on academic ability and socioemotional well-being (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997) and the inhibiting effects on effective parenting in high-risk environments (Rann, 2000). These fragile children and their families are asked to thrive in a statewide climate of high-stakes accountability testing (Finn, 2002) and in a local resegregated school district (Fernandes, 2002).

Statewide Push for Accountability

North Carolina is a national leader in accountability systems that heavily rely on end-of-grade student testing. The ABCs is a comprehensive plan to organize public schools in North Carolina around three goals of strong accountability, an emphasis on the basics and high educational standards, and an emphasis on providing schools and school districts with as much local control as possible (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004).

The accountability model rewards schools for growth in student achievement and for overall percentages of students performing at or above grade level. The ABCs model focuses on the individual schools' performance. First implemented in 1996-1997 for elementary and middle schools and in 1997-1998 for high schools, the model has had some modifications over time to more accurately reflect performance across the state.

The fundamental element of this model is the amount of growth that students make each year. There are four levels of student performance in this system: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 (grade-level performance), and Level 4 (above grade-level performance). Table 1 summarizes the model. The scores are rated by the percentage of students who are performing at or above grade level (i.e., Level 3).

Additional Recognition, Incentive Awards, and Sanctions

The state of North Carolina has two additional categories of recognition. They are the 25 Most Improved K-8 schools and the 10 Most Improved High Schools (those that attain the state's highest values on the high-growth composite).

Incentive awards are as follows. In schools attaining the high-growth standard, certified staff members each receive \$1,500, and teacher assistants receive \$500. In schools attaining the expected growth standard (but less than high growth), certified staff members each receive \$750 and teacher assistants receive \$375.

Sanctions occur when a school does not meet the expected growth standard and has a performance composite of less than 50%. It is subject to the statutory requirements regarding parental notification, state assistance, personnel, and other matters. Beginning in 2004-2005, a

school that does not meet the expected growth standard and has a performance composite of less than 60% would be subject to these requirements. The implementation date of 2004-2005 coincides with the first graduating class subject to the Exit Exam of Essential Skills.

Table 1
Accountability Guidelines, North Carolina

Performance Level	Academic Growth	
Based on Percentage of Students' Scores at or Above Achievement Level III	Schools Making Expected Growth or High Growth	Schools Making Less Than Expected Growth
90% to 100%	School of excellence	No recognition
80% to 89%	School of distinction	
60% to 79%	School of progress	
50% to 59%	Priority school	
Less than 50%	Priority school	Low performing ^a

Note: Based on state Board of Education approval on May 2, 2001. School status labels were effective with the 2001-2002 school year.

a. The term *low performing* applies to a school that does not meet the expected growth standard and in which less than 50% of students are performing at or above achievement Level III.

According to the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), the single most important factor in predicting minority student achievement was the social characteristics of a school. This fact remains true in schools today. Forsyth County, North Carolina, has been implementing neighborhood schools for several years, and, consequently, it is rapidly resegregating the district schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2002). Throughout the district, Forsyth County identifies schools that have a minimum of 25% of students on free or reduced lunch as Equity Plus schools. These social characteristics describe the Latham student body such that in 2000-2001 the composite reading and mathematics score at or above grade level was 67%. Given the poverty and ethnicity of the student body, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction predicted that approximately 40% to 50% of the students would perform at grade level for the academic year 2001-2002.

Sociopolitical Context of Student Achievement

Boger (2003) states there are three major sociopolitical characteristics of North Carolina schools and of the American South that affect student achievement. These characteristics are (a) student resegregation by ethnicity and socioeconomic class, (b) high-stakes accountability measures, and (c) continuing disparities in school resources and finances. According to him, North Carolina's ABCs of education is noted as among the best in the nation. However, Clotfelter et al. (2002)

note the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County (WS/FC) school district as a “rapidly resegregating” district. The WS/FCS school district has implemented a controlled-choice plan.

The WS/FC Board of Education uses a “controlled-choice” plan to assign students to schools. The plan gives parents and students a choice between their residential school and several others within the same zone, with each school offering a special theme or program. All schools teach the basics, as outlined by the Standard Course of Study (WS/FC Schools, 2005a, para. 1).

According to Boger (2003), the controlled choice of the WS/FC district produces socioeconomic and ethnic resegregation in the system. Thus, the district retains European American students at the price of this accelerated resegregation.

Relationship Between Poverty and Achievement

Teachman (2000) and Rann (2000) describe two decades of growing inequality of income in American families compared with other developed world nations. According to them, American children compose 40% of the poor population. In addition, Americans have the highest rate of child poverty (of the 17 highest-ranking nations in the world): one in four. In their view, children “at the intersection” of two or more dimensions of minority status (e.g., ethnicity and gender) are more likely to suffer the most severe and long-lasting effects of poverty. An example of this is a Latino child living in a female-headed household.

Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) and Rann (2000) note that of particular concern to families and educators of elementary school children is the empirical evidence that duration and severity of poverty impairs the young children’s physical and mental growth, academic ability, and socioemotional well-being, inhibits effective parenting, and increases the chances that children will attend inferior schools and live in high-risk environments.

Allington (2001), in looking at the 30-year history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, makes this point: “American schools currently work better for children from certain sorts of families” (p. 7). In addition, the Rand Reading Study Group (2002) emphasizes the importance of understanding reading comprehension from a sociocultural, socioeconomic perspective in teaching poor children.

Although the leadership team at Latham Elementary School could not address the socioeconomic context of the impoverishment of children in the most affluent nation in the world, they were able to address its effects on academic ability, socioemotional well-being, and effective parenting. Their effectiveness was demonstrated in the much-improved scores of the students at the school.

School Achievement Across Multiple Contexts

By definition, cultural psychology is

a study of the way cultural tradition and social practices regulate, express, and transform the human psyche that result in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion. The study of the

way subjects and objects, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context make each other up. (Schweder, 1990, p. 1)

Cultural psychology has two aspects. The first aspect is that humans are highly motivated to gather meanings and resources from a sociocultural environment that has already been arranged to provide them with the meanings and resources. (This relates to the effective schools model.) The second aspect is that the sociocultural environment is an intentional world—a human artifact—that exists only as long as there are people whose beliefs and other mental representations both are directed by it and are influenced by it (Powell, 1996). This relates to the type of leadership in the organization.

Transformational Leadership

Robinson (2000) makes this point,

From the behavioral standpoint, transformational leadership begins with self development and extends to the coaching and developing of others. It is about making sure that the people around you have the tools and resources they require to do their best work. It is about taking personal responsibility to remove the barriers that inhibit the optimal sustainable performance of people who follow you. This kind of leadership is about recognizing the explicit and implicit value of individuals, networks, and relationships and providing energy and inspiration for others to achieve the mutual aim of the enterprise. (para. 12)

Dr. Larry D. Fields created a leadership team and faculty who believed in data-based decision making to support the implementation of their instructional strategies (Schmoker, 1999a). Dr. Fields had worked in the military, the federal government, law enforcement, city government, and the private sector in leadership positions. He theoretically and practically understood the difference that leadership and organizational culture can make in the effectiveness of an organization and the quality of life of the people in the organization. He helped the faculty, students, and community members believe that they could become actors who could actually shape their own lives. They had resources that they could mobilize (Gamson, 1987). The success of Latham Elementary School documented the power of that belief. Although it was on a small scale, they became a highly successful social movement as a result of successful transformational leadership.

Project Computers Helping Instruction and Learning Development (CHILD)

This instructional model was pilot tested in Florida in 1991 (Butzin, 1992). It has developed a record of effectiveness (Butzin, 1997). The Center for Educational Performance and Accountability (2005) reports that Project CHILD is considered an effective instructional model. Project CHILD seeks to modify the school structure and create classroom conditions conducive for learning with technology, create cohesive units of work that foster strategies for thinking, and realign curriculum for reading, language arts, and mathematics. It provides a system for fully integrating technology into reading, math, language arts, and classroom management techniques for using computers and hands-on learning. It also offers strategies for teaming, cooperative learning, and parent involvement (National Diffusion Network, 1995).

School–Home–Community Connections (Complementary Learning)

Coffman, Post, Bouffard, and Little (2005) point out two key elements of the definition of complementary learning: (a) both school and nonschool contexts are critical to children’s learning and success and (b) learning opportunities and contexts should complement each other. Elementary school children live in and have relationships with multiple people or systems. These systems or worlds of childhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) are family, friends, school, and work. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), parents and families are under pressure and are facing the challenges of juggling work (or lack thereof) and family. This may take the form of multiple jobs in the family or no jobs. Families may also be coping with *havoc in the home*, a term he uses to express the stress of a hectic household so typical in the United States.

The main danger, as Bronfenbrenner (1986) refers to it, is that the external havoc (conditions and context) of the household, for some parents (i.e., family members) and children, may become internal havoc (psychological and behavioral). He suggests that support and challenge is needed to counter the “risks” of this havoc. He also states that key to counteracting this process is connections, or links, among home, school, work, and community. Three of these links are present in the work at Latham Elementary School: home, school, and community. Bronfenbrenner also states that schools are in the best of all positions of the U.S. institutions to both initiate and strengthen these linkages that support children. He suggests three main ways. The first way is by creating an American classroom (i.e., schools where children understand what schooling is, what a school is supposed to be, and how it is different from other places and institutions). The second way is by establishing a curriculum for caring (i.e., the behavioral aspect of this schooling). Children learn moral- and character-building lessons about themselves and others. They are treated well and therefore learn (when they at school) how to treat others well. The third way is by providing mentors—people with skills that they wish to teach to a younger person—are present. According to Bronfenbrenner, “To be a true mentor, the older person must be willing to take the time and to make the commitment that such teaching requires” (p. 435). The children of Latham Elementary School learned these life lessons from fraternity members of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. These African American men transmitted values and skills in their roles as both mentors and tutors.

In summary, when the leadership team at Latham Elementary School correctly implemented the linkages that Bronfenbrenner (1986) suggested, they helped to ensure a successful year, as indicated by end-of-grade scores. The leadership also implemented a model from which other schools could learn.

Effective Schools

Edmonds (1979) found in his analysis of the effectiveness of urban schools that some schools were effective in the education of poor urban children. He made this point: “There has never been a time in the life of the American Public School when we have not known all we needed to in order to teach all those whom we chose to teach” (p. 16). Edmonds noted several common characteristics of effective schools: (a) strong instructional leadership, (b) high expectations for everyone, (c) a school atmosphere conducive to instruction, (d) student learning of basic skills as

the top priority, (d) focus on the objectives of learning, and (e) frequent monitoring and assessment of learning.

Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) reviewed 50 years of research on the factors that affected student learning. Their analysis indicated that student ability (i.e., what students already knew) was the most important factor. However, classroom instruction and climate were almost as important.

When averaged together, the different kinds of classroom instruction and climate had nearly as much impact on learning as the student aptitude categories, which is the most influential category. Classroom management includes group alerting, learner accountability, smooth transitions and teacher “with-it-ness.” Effective classroom management increases students’ engagement, decreases disruptive behaviors, and makes good use of instructional time. (Wang et al., 1993, pp. 75-76)

Sanders’s (1998) study of teachers in Tennessee found that teacher effectiveness was the major factor in student success, especially in the early grades; that is, poor teaching in the early grades creates a deficit that is very difficult for a child to overcome in his or her career in public schools. Twenty years after Edmonds’s (1979) groundbreaking work, Schmoker (1999b) reported on the common characteristics of schools that effectively educated more minority children: (a) setting clear, compelling, measurable improvement goals, (b) having teachers collaboratively work to address shared problems and issues, and (c) using data from assessments to guide action and zero in on the area of greatest need.

What this literature has been telling us for a generation is that all students can learn if we appropriately teach them (Comer, 1988; Edmonds, 1979; Sanders, 1998; Schmoker, 1999b; Wang et al., 1993). This is the viewpoint that the administrators and faculty brought to the students and parents at Latham Elementary.

The Latham Way

The Latham PTA president calls this viewpoint or the “resource mobilization” that emerged at Rowland H. Latham Elementary School the Latham Way. This program integration has several philosophical and programmatic characteristics that the authors believe make the Latham Way an effective model for the educational and social success of poor minority children and their families. The characteristics of this model include,

- Research-based instructional strategies that are continually evaluated.
- Personal educational programs for every child that are collaboratively developed and monitored by groups of teachers.
- Commitment to the continual growth and education of staff and parents that constantly focused on the improvement of student performance.
- Continual two-way communication with all stakeholders.
- Frequent assessment and data analysis that guides instruction and focuses on problem areas.

In addition, the transformational leadership of the administrators, the skill and the commitment of the teachers, the strong support of the men of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, and the facilitation of Maya Angelou Institute for the Improvement of Child and Family Education at Winston-Salem State University demonstrated Edmonds's (1979) basic point about effective schools for the urban poor: It is a matter of political will, not pedagogical knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the Latham Way on the 83% composite score for reading and mathematics in 2001-2002.

Method

This is an archival research study. Data examined are public documents and personal documents. The primary source of the public documents is the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction. The principle elements of this complementary learning (Coffman et al., 2005) project are the students and their families, the fraternity tutors, and the teaching and administrative personnel of Rowland H. Latham Elementary School.

Students

The Latham school student body had an ethnic composition of approximately 60% African American, 20% Latino, and 20% European American. Latham Elementary School is an Equity Plus school because it is in the inner city and because the majority of the students come from impoverished households. The school is also designated as a Title I school because more than 80% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

Community Tutors (Psi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity)

Omega Psi Phi fraternity is one of five Greek fraternities established by the descendents of African slaves in America. Founded in 1911 by three Howard University undergraduate students with the assistance of their faculty adviser, the name Omega Psi Phi is derived from the initials of the Greek phrase meaning "friendship is essential to the soul." The phrase was selected as the motto. Manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift are the cardinal principles of the organization.

Psi Phi Chapter is the local entity of the international organization. Membership of Psi Phi Chapter consists of approximately 75 active and financial brothers. In 2002, Psi Phi Chapter was recognized as chapter of the year in the district that includes North and South Carolina. This award is given on the basis of adherence to mandated programs and social action efforts in the community. About 20% of the members participated in this project. Psi Phi Chapter monetarily contributed in support of field trips and other activities at the school as well.

Procedures

According to the North Carolina Department of Instruction, the 120 students eligible to participate in the state end-of-grade tests were expected to score in the recognition category of low performing (40% to 50% proficiency). The administration and staff of Latham used the analysis of student scores on the end-of-grade tests in reading and mathematics in 2001 to identify a group of 30 Level I students who had not been successful on those tests. The members of Omega Psi Phi worked with the 30 students who had tested at Level I on the previous year's end-of-grade test. Tutoring sessions were done twice a week for 1 hr on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Intervention

During the 2001-2002 academic year, the Latham Way could be described by these characteristics:

- Family level (high levels of volunteerism and support for teachers and administrators, respect for diversity, high levels of commitment to achievement, strong PTA).
- Teacher level (high commitment level, cultural competence).
- Administration level (continual evaluation, release time, professional-development opportunities, external funding, development and cultivation of community partners, examples of commitment).
- Community level, including university (promotion of best practices, collaboration on funding opportunities, support for cultural projects, academic resources and technological support) and fraternity tutors (extra hours).

Table 2
End-of-Grade Reading and Math Scores, 1999 to 2002

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Grade 3	60.3	60.6	57.1	75.6
Grade 4	67.9	60.5	64.7	84.4
Grade 5	73.9	63.8	74.2	93.8

Results

Latham elementary school tested 120 students in end-of-grade tests in reading and mathematics in spring 2002. Given the ethnicity, poverty, and transitory nature of the student population, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction predicted that 45% of the student would be proficient in reading and mathematics. Despite these macro-systemic effects (including local resegregation), proficiency at Latham was as follows:

- Composite score of 67% for reading and math for 2000-2001.
- Composite score of 83% for reading and math for 2001-2002.

This means that all 30 students performed at grade level, Level III, after working with their tutors. Table 2 summarizes 4 years of composite scores for Latham Elementary School.

The chi-square analysis of the reading and mathematics scores for Grades 3 to 5 in 2001-2002 are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. The difference in both areas between the expected numbers of proficient students and actual numbers of proficient students was significant ($p < .0001$). The intensive tutoring from the local fraternity chapter enhanced the 2002 proficiency scores allowing Latham Elementary School to become a “school of distinction,” as recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education. Given its status as an Equity Plus elementary school (schools in which 75% of the student enrollment is on free or reduced lunch), Latham Elementary School also became the first Equity Plus school in the district to achieve this distinctive status. Furthermore, given the increase in scores from 2001 (65.5%) to 2002 (82.8%), Latham Elementary School students were unique to the district by receiving statewide recognition as the number one school of the 25 most improved schools in the state.

Table 3
Chi-Square Analysis, Reading End-of-Grade
Latham Elementary School, 2002

	Expected	Observed
Grade 3	18	37
Grade 4	14	27
Grade 5	14	30
X ²	35.50	
P	< 001	

Note: X² = sum of ((expected – observed) · (expected – observed)) | expected; df = (row – 1) · (column – 1) = 2.

Table 4
Chi-Square Analysis, Mathematics
End-of-Grade Latham Elementary
School, 2002

	Expected	Observed
Grade 3	18	26
Grade 4	14	31
Grade 5	14	33
X ²	49.98	
P	< 001	

Note: X² = sum of ((expected – observed) · (expected – observed)) | expected; df = (row – 1) · (column – 1) = 2.

Conclusions

The visionary, hard-working, and conceptually grounded principal (the late Dr. Larry D. Fields) gave leadership to the application of an effective school movement at Latham Elementary School. This research-based initiative changed the normative culture of the school in six ways: (a) continually evaluating the instructional strategies, (b) providing personal educational programs for every child that are collaboratively developed and monitored by groups of teachers, (c) committing to the continual growth and education of staff and parents with the constant focus on the improvement of student performance, (d) using frequent assessment and data analysis to guide instruction and to focus on problem areas, (e) maintaining continual two-way communication with all stakeholders, and (f) redesigning the structure and flow of the delivery of the curriculum. These strategies also changed attitudes and beliefs of all members of the elementary school community. Together, these six strategies expanded the boundaries of the school so that it has become the motivating force in creating true membership in an outstanding family-school-community partnership (see the appendix).

Things drastically changed at Latham after the untimely death of Dr. Fields. WS/FC Schools (2005b) indicates that Rowland H. Latham elementary School has been performing below standard for 3 consecutive years. Noteworthy contributing factors to this trend are the absence of the fraternity tutors, no connection with the public service center at the university, a shift from effective schools strategies (i.e., the reliance on research based strategies and continual formative assessment of instructional practice), and a departure from transformational leadership (i.e., the emphasis on self-development, coaching, and the development of others). Clearly, the remaining factor (Project CHILD) is not enough to sustain prior student achievement levels in this elementary school. Thus, the elements of complementary learning are validated, as demonstrated by the successful achievement scores of these elementary school students. Teachers, administrators, other school personnel, university schools of education, family members, and community partners can learn much from this standard of excellent collective achievement and decline.

Appendix

Latham Elementary School Awards

1994 National Blue Ribbon School

2001 Scholarship Award, Psi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi fraternity

2002 North Carolina PTA Blue Key Membership Award, 100% Faculty Membership by October 15, 2002

2002 Piedmont Triad Consortium Signature School Award

2002 Uplift Award, Psi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi fraternity

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Larry D. Fields, PhD, died in September 2002. He was principal at Rowland Hill Latham Elementary School for 10 years before his death. He earned his PhD in instructional leadership from the Graduate School—Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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