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Baby boomer and Genx elementary principals : differing perspectives on schooling

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BABY BOOMER AND GENX ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS:
DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOLING

An Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Victoria L. Robinson, Committee Chair

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May 2010

ABSTRACT

Studies on generational analysis inform us that each generation is shaped by the influences they share during their formative years. The common experiences and historical circumstances experienced during this time influences their generational identity and results in a world view that is unique to that generation. This world view and generational identity impacts their belief system and practices as they emerge as leaders in mid-life.

While the current structures and policies that guide today's educational system were established by the Baby Boomer generation, we could see significant changes as the Baby Boomer behemoth begins to leave the workforce. Around the year 2014, school administrators from Generation X are expected to be the dominant generation in school leadership positions, significantly impacting educational policy and practice.

The primary focus of this study was to investigate differences in the way in which Baby Boomer and GenX elementary principals view the system of education. In examining the defining events and the social and educational context in which each of these generations came of age, it is clear that the context in which each generation formed their world view was quite different. This has resulted in differing leadership styles and differing perspectives toward schooling.


The research offers a number of implications for educators. The study illuminates the impact of generational identity on the cycles of school reform and surfaces differing assumptions between the current and emerging generation of schools leaders around the function, structure and process of education. Surfacing these assumptions is important to

understanding their beliefs toward current and proposed reform efforts and is integral to impacting any kind of sustained reform efforts.


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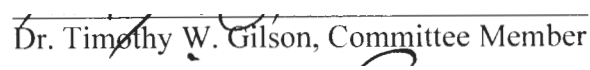
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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Background Information

“We never have any collaboration time because they don’t ever stick around after school to meet!” complained a 49 year old teacher as she spoke about her young teaching colleagues. “They’re lazy,” she continues, “and they are never in the building past 4:00.”

“I look out the window at 4:00 and the parking lot is empty!” sighs an AEA Chief Administrator mournfully. “How are we going to get the work done if nobody stays around to do it?” she asks rhetorically, adding “It’s a ghost town here past 4:00.”

“The kindergarten teacher is really struggling to keep up.” shared a member of my teaching staff. Not having seen evidence of such I asked her how she knew that. “Well I don’t really have any solid evidence,” she said, “but she leaves the building every day by 4:00 so she can’t possibly be keeping up with her work.”

These types of complaints expressed by Baby Boomer educators toward their younger colleagues are becoming more prevalent in our schools. Their concerns are directed at their colleagues, who are members of Generation X. To listen to the conversations occurring in the break rooms and hallways, one might conclude that our next generation of school leaders, members of Generation X, will be nothing more than cynical slackers who have little interest in collaboration, no desire to make a real contribution to their workplace, and no intent to stay at school much past 4:00.

Do GenXers really think that much differently than Baby Boomers I wondered. If so, are their beliefs so distinctly different that one should be concerned about the future

direction of education? I began to reflect back to the beginning of my own administrative career in education. Were my beliefs different from that of my veteran colleagues as I began my career in school administration?

After deep reflection, I came to realize that my initiation into the world of school administration was indeed fraught with ideological battles between myself and my “elder” colleagues. What was at the root of these differences, I asked myself. Were they due to personality differences or were they generational in nature?

The term generation can be defined as the aggregate of all people born over roughly the span of a phase of life who share a common location in history, and hence, a common collective persona (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 15). In other words, a generation is an age cohort that comes to have social significance by virtue of constituting itself as cultural identity (Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p. 7). Currently two generations dominate the schools today: The Baby Boomer generation who were born between 1943 and 1960 and Generation X who were born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The generation gap between these two generations is beginning to surface, causing dissention in the schools as GenXers begin to challenge the status quo.

Did I challenge the rules of my predecessors as I began to establish my footing in the arena of school administration I asked myself. At the time I was in my early 30s, fresh out of graduate school, and hungry for administrative experience. With some degree of trepidation, I accepted the responsibility to provide the leadership to become one of the first districts in the state of Iowa to transition from a top down organizational structure to a participative one by moving to site-based management. This challenge was

a dream opportunity for me as I fully embraced the concept of participatory management and shared decision making. I was naively impassioned by the task that lay before me.

After completing an intense training program to learn how to facilitate such a process, I excitedly shared my plan with the district superintendent, who was a strong advocate and supporter of shared decision making. I was extremely motivated to begin the work as philosophically I knew that having those who worked closest to the student help make decisions about the direction of education in the district was key to improving student achievement. Working together as teams in each building to share in the decision making and accountability was sure to motivate our teachers, who would enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to be involved. I couldn't wait to begin leading the change.

It didn't take long before my idealism turned to disappointment. While I had anticipated that this change would be readily embraced by the teachers and administrators in the district, I quickly discovered that there was much resistance and skepticism. "I'm here to teach students" I would hear, "not to make decisions about the district." Another common response was, "If I wanted to make decisions about how my school should function, I would have become an administrator. I just want to be told what I need to do so I can do it." I was deflated. How could anyone be opposed to working as a team to make decisions and influence change that could result in improved student learning?

As I continued to provide leadership to move the district in this new direction, I was constantly perplexed by the pockets of resistance and differences in philosophies I encountered. Many of my elder colleagues and I did not view education in the same way. After repeatedly hearing the question, "We tried that several years ago and it didn't work

then so why would we try it again?" I arrogantly determined that it was time for my more veteran, seasoned colleagues to leave the field of education.

Discouraged, I continued to lead and guide the change efforts over the course of the next two years. As a district we spent a great deal of time engaged in teambuilding, learning about strategies to manage conflict, and practicing making decisions by consensus. While there were still pockets of resistance, the momentum was gaining strength and some of the buildings had active leadership teams engaged in shared decision making. However, the momentum and progress the district made was threatened once the superintendent left the district.

The outgoing superintendent had wholeheartedly embraced the concept of shared decision making and had allocated great support and resources to the initiative. This level of enthusiasm was not embraced by the incoming superintendent. Having spent two years building a culture of trust and open communication among members of our district and building instructional leadership teams in the buildings, we had gotten to the point where we were able to share our opinions with one another and openly engage in friendly educational discourse. This was about to change when the new superintendent came onboard.

During our first district vertical team meeting with the new superintendent, a confrontation immediately arose between him and a teacher who disagreed on the direction the district should be going relative to the concept of shared decision making. The two engaged in a heated discussion. While the team had effectively engaged in much discourse over the past two years, this conversation resulted in great tension and the meeting ended poorly.

An hour after the meeting the superintendent called me into his office. He and a Board member who was part of the team had been discussing the meeting. “That was insubordination!” he cried referring to the dialogue that had occurred between himself and the teacher. “I’m going to write her up for that.” he said. The Board member nodded in agreement. I was mortified!

“You can’t do that!” I emphatically suggested. “We spent two years building a team environment where it was safe to openly express our opinions, and if you do this it will destroy all that we have accomplished thus far.” He reluctantly agreed to take my advice.

The year was filled with many challenges. The new superintendent did not embrace the same attitude toward shared decision making and community collaboration as the previous one had. The current superintendent’s practice was to tell the constituents of the district what was needed, not to seek input to reach decisions by consensus. Decisions should be made by the administration,” he would say. “We are the leaders of the district.” His style was very top down.

At the time I assumed the dissimilarities between the two superintendents and the differences I was experiencing with my colleagues was simply a result of diverse personalities. But after several years of researching generational differences, I have come to realize that the conflicts that arose as the district moved to a decentralized decision making model was a result of the differences between what was valued by the older and the younger generation as opposed to differences in personality. In other words, the conflicts were a result of generational differences.

Generational Analysis

Much has been written about the influences of historical and societal circumstances on shaping the belief system of generations as they move through their lifecycles (Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Eisenstadt, 1956; Mannheim, 1952; Riesman, 1961; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke, Raines & Filipezak, 2000). “Although concepts such as ‘the baby Boomers’, the ‘sixties generation,’ the ‘generation gap’ and ‘generational conflict’ are fundamental to popular thinking, sociology has largely neglected generation as an analytical principle” (Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p. 2). However, current literary studies recognize the importance of generations on shaping social, cultural and political change. The focus of these recent studies is a sharp contrast from the past, where sociology has generally considered generational differences and inequalities as relatively unimportant as compared to social class.

The history of generational analysis in the social sciences most notably originated with Karl Mannheim. In his essay, “The Problem with Generations” (Mannheim, 1952), Mannheim argues that people in the same age group share a common location in history similar to the way in which people of the same class share a social location. This common location predisposes them to a “certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291).

Mannheim’s focus was on the way age groups acted as agents for social change to become ‘the carriers of intellectual and organizational alternatives to the status quo.’ As a

result of the social reality members of a common age group experience during critical formative times, an outlook or world view is formed that is unique to that generation. Mannheim identified those critical times as between the ages of 17 to 25.

Additional studies have demonstrated the ways in which culture (the collective memory) is transformed and transmitted through socialization and internalization across generations. Eisenstadt (1956) in his book *From Generation to Generation* emphasizes the impact of shared influences on generational behavior. "In all societies age groups are formed at the transitional stage between adolescence and full adulthood, and are oriented towards the attainment and acknowledgment of the full status of their members" (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 183). These shared experiences and influences shape their beliefs and value system, impacting the way members of each generation interact with one another. "This strong emphasis on common experience, common values and mutual identification is found in every type of age group, and serves as the essential driving power for its individual members" (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 184).

The mutual identification that occurs and the strong bond that develops between the members of these generations result in a strong solidarity driving the power of the group. Whatever the composition of the group, "the common symbols of its identification and its values and ideology bear a strongly universalistic flavor, emphasizing as they do the universal attributes and image of an age, an image common to every member of the society" (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 184).

Mannheim's theory of generational identity was confirmed in a more recent study conducted by Harold Schuman and Jacqueline Scott in 1989. Conducting a study on collective memory, they discovered that the generational character created by the events a

cohort experiences during its youth will influence their behavior and values later in life (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Like Mannheim, they identified the primary period in which this “generational imprinting” occurs as during adolescence and early adulthood.

In their book *Generations, Culture and Society* (2002), Jane Edmunds and Bryan Turner demonstrate that generations, rather than classes, have shaped contemporary cultural, intellectual and political thought. Arguing against the traditional sociological view of intellectuals as being shaped primarily by their class location, these researchers suggest that intellectuals are determined not by class, but by generational location and the effect of generational experiences.

Edmunds and Turner reason that the traumatic events that create generations also generate national consciousness and are critical to the formation of active generations and generational consciousness. “In turn, these active generations through intellectual articulation, play an important role in shaping national consciousness” (Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p. 121).

A generation can be defined in terms of a collective response to a traumatic event or catastrophe that united a particular cohort of individuals into a self-conscious age stratum. The traumatic event uniquely cuts off a generation from its past and separates it from the future. The event becomes the basis of a collective ideology and set of integrating rituals that become the conduit for the commemoration of the traumatic experience (Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p. 12).

These generational studies have demonstrated how generational location strongly shapes the way in which we see life. As an educator who experienced the ways in which these differences can impact a reform initiative within a school district, I was inspired to learn more about the differences between the two generations of educational leaders who are leading schools today. This inspiration led to the purpose for this study.

Purpose for Study

The Baby Boomer generation is the dominant generation leading our schools today. According to data from the 2000 U.S. Census, the “Boomer” moniker consists of at least 82,826,479 people. Current school administrators in this cohort range in age from 45 to 63 so this demographic behemoth will begin to exit the workforce around the year 2014.

As Baby Boomer power begins to recede, concerns regarding the next generation’s work ethic heightens. The Boomer rumblings toward their successors is not surprising.

Generational conflict and comments about unacceptable behavior on the part of another generation often stem from a particular group’s notion that it gets to make the rules and that the other group has to follow these rules. If the rules are being challenged, so too is the superior position and stature of the people who believe they get to make the rules that others often have to follow (Deal, 2007, p. 11).

The conflicts I experienced as I made my foray into school administration was between members of the more veteran staff who were from the Silent Generation, and the younger staff, who were members of the Baby Boomer generation. The superintendent who practiced a top down approach and opposed soliciting feedback from community members was a member of the Silent Generation. The superintendent who had embraced the concept of shared decision making and allocated district resources to decentralize the governance structure was from the Baby Boomer generation.

The Silent Generation, born between 1925 and 1942, were impacted by two traumatic events: the Great Depression and World War II. As they were coming of age,

they were expected to conform during a time of food rationing, sacrifice, and financial family stress.

Applying generational theory helps us to understand the management style of this generation. Influenced by the World Wars and the military style of leadership, they practiced a top down management style of command-and-control, establishing organizational hierarchies. “In politics and business, the Silent have been a proven generation of bureaucratizes” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 285).

This is different than the styles of the Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1960, grew up nurtured and indulged by parents of world war and depression. As they were coming of age, they rallied together opposing or supporting the Vietnam War, leading the civil rights movements, and fighting for equal rights. Influenced by their collective success in influencing the culture wars, this generation embraces collaboration and teamwork. Unlike the command-and-control style of the Silent Generation, “they are genuinely passionate and concerned about participation and spirit in the workplace, about bringing heart and humanity to the office, and about creating a fair and level playing field for all” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 79).

In short, the leadership style of the Baby Boomers is collegial and consensual. “They are the ones who advocated turning the traditional corporate hierarchy upside down” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 79). This was a deep contrast from the Silent Generation who had established the top down, bureaucratic structure.

What I experienced as I led the change to a decentralized governance structure was a generational conflict between the ideals and beliefs of the Silent Generation versus the Baby Boomers. As members of the Silent Generation began to diminish in numbers

and power, the Baby Boomers were growing in strength, jockeying for power, and attempting to change the established governance system.

“Each new generation, when it attains power, tends to repudiate the work of the generation it has displaced and to reenact the ideals of its own formative days” (Schlesinger, 1986, p. 30). This was clearly evident as the Baby Boomer superintendent was attempting to change a governance structure that had been in place for many years by attempting to decentralize the district’s Central office. When he left, the Silent Generation superintendent that took his place reverted to the default culture with which his generation was accustomed, taking steps to maintain a centralized, hierarchical structure characterized by control and command.

“Generational identity through the twentieth century was fundamental in shaping national consciousness” (Edmund & Turner, 2002, p. 121). In tracking school reform cycles from 1925 through 2008, it is evident that there have been several shifts in the national consciousness toward education. The research of historians William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997) link the changes in national consciousness with changes in the generational constellation. In examining the socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions throughout four centuries of American history, they have demonstrated that a generation is shaped by the influences they share during their formative years between the ages of 10 to 18.

Arguing that each generation of people belongs to one of four generational archetypes that repeat sequentially in a fixed pattern (Strauss & Howe, 1991), they identify a recurring sequence of four generational archetypes that have appeared throughout all of the saecula of American history. The four archetypes comprise a

constellation that always appears in the same order over an average length of 23.4 years. Each of these generational archetypes has its own distinct personality, revealing social similarities from one cycle to the next.

“When historians of education look back at the late twentieth century, they will almost certainly describe it as a critical period of changing policy perspectives on public education in the United States” (Elmore, 2004, p. 44). These shifts have occurred each time a new generation of leaders move into midlife. The shift I experienced in moving from a centralized form of governance to a decentralized structure was one of the first reform efforts of the Baby Boomer generation.

While the current educational structures and policies that guide our educational system were established by the Baby Boomer generation, we could see significant changes as over one third of Iowa’s current administrators are eligible for retirement over the next five years. Principals are able to retire under IPERS with full benefits when they are at least 55 years old and their combined age and experience is at least 88 years. According to the 2006-2007 Annual Iowa Condition of Education Report published by the Iowa Department of Education in December of 2007, the average age of full-time principals in Iowa was 50.4, with 43.6 percent of principals reported as 51 or older (p. 93) of those principals, 32.6 percent had a combined age and experience interval of 81 or more (p. 94).

In 2003, The Wallace Foundation commissioned three independent research efforts to analyze the current labor market for principals, pinpoint the extent and root causes of the problems some districts and schools are experiencing in attracting

candidates for the principalship, and indicate how policies and practices might better address those problems. The research concluded that there is

a serious, unsolved dilemma in the labor market for the principalship: many credentialed or would-be candidates, both inside and outside the education field, either are not seeking jobs in the districts or schools that most need them — or are shunning leadership positions altogether. The stressful working conditions, inadequate job incentives, ineffective hiring practices, and increasingly formidable expectations for success, are deterring prospective candidates from entering the field (The Wallace Foundation, 2003, p. 8).

In their policy brief developed to share knowledge aimed at strengthening the ability of principals and superintendents to improve student learning, the report identified a concern that improvements will be needed in job conditions and incentives in public education to attract quality leaders.

After more than 20 years of concerted but disappointing reform efforts, states and districts are gradually coming to recognize that it takes skilled leaders to orchestrate the changes needed to support better learning for every child. What hasn't been as widely-grasped is that it will require improvements in job conditions and incentives in public education to draw enough high quality leaders to the schools that need them most (The Wallace Foundation, 2003, p. 11).

In an analysis of data on the national supply and career paths of school administrators conducted by RAND Education, the concern of administrators leaving the principalship is exasperated as a result of hiring practices. Due to the reluctance of schools to hire principals under the age of 40, newer principals to the profession will reach retirement age after having spent only a few years in the labor force. This is found to be a "particular concern in the public sector, where principals appear to be much less likely to remain on the job after 55" (Gates, Ringel, Santibez, Ross & Chung, 2003, p. xiv).

These statistics are particularly disconcerting in light of the fact that research over the past decade has demonstrated the linkage between strong principal leadership and student achievement. A meta-analysis of research on school-level leadership conducted by McREL resulted in a major finding that supports the claim that school-level leadership matters in terms of student achievement (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005).

Around the year 2014 we will begin ushering in a new generation of leaders who have demonstrated different sensibilities and priorities than the current generation. As educational leaders from Generation X enter midlife, the influences of the common experiences and historical circumstances that took place during their formative and young adult years will impact the ways they respond to the forces driving education during their era of leadership. As the Baby Boomer generation begins to leave the field of education, one can't help but to speculate on changes that might take place once they are replaced by the next generation of leaders.

Will GenX leaders repudiate the work of the Baby Boomer generation and strive to reenact the ideals of its own formative days? For sustained improvement to occur, members of an organization must embrace change and work together to achieve it as "organizations that improve do so because they create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving, and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile" (Elmore, 2004, p. 73). Knowledge of the transforming events that have influenced the belief system of our next generation of administrators and an understanding of their perspective on the current system and future direction of schooling is needed to truly create and begin to nurture agreement on what is worth achieving.

As a new generation of school leaders is expected to move into the dominant position of power by the year 2014, it is important to look holistically at the underlying assumptions they hold about the business of education. Because of this, I was inspired to conduct a study to understand the differing perspectives held by Baby Boomer and Generation X elementary principals toward schooling.

Education and System Reform

Our future leaders have a challenging task before them. They will inherit an educational system that has been patched through failed and unsustainable efforts toward school reform, resulting in significant discrepancies between what schools produce and what society needs.

Part of the problem with educational reform is that efforts have focused on changing parts of the system, rather than addressing problems holistically. Holistic thinking means seeing the inter-relatedness of all the parts that create a whole. This ability to see the inter-relatedness is key to understanding and designing social systems (Ackoff, 1999). This study then looks at differences in the ways in which Baby Boomer and GenX principals view the *system* of education.

There is a strong cry to redesign the current education system in America. To do so we must view education as a holistic system, examining the relational organization of the concepts and principles representing the context, the content, and the process of the system. “This is crucial as staying within the existing boundaries of education constrains and delimits perception and locks us into prevailing practices” (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004, p. 53).

Additionally, “systems philosophy seeks to uncover the most general assumptions lying at the roots of any and all systems inquiry” (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004, p. 39). As a new generation of leaders begins to emerge, it is imperative that we surface the assumptions of these two generations as “the power of the dominant culture is argued by many leading social system and leadership thinkers to be the primary constraint in successfully changing, transforming, reforming, or restructuring organizations” (Pickering, 2006).

In order to understand the importance of utilizing system’s theory to reform education and appreciate the way in which this study is organized, an understanding of system’s thinking and how the system of education has evolved is important.

A short description of the evolution of the system of education follows.

A system can be defined as “a set of two or more elements that satisfies the following three conditions” (Ackoff, 1999, p. 16).

1. The behavior of each element has an effect on the behavior of the whole.
2. The behavior of the elements and their effects on the whole are interdependent.
3. However subgroups of the elements are formed, each has an effect on the behavior of the whole and none has an independent effect on it.

In other words, we cannot change a system by dividing it and improving independent parts. Like the human body suffers if an organ or body part is removed, so too will a social system suffer if essential properties are lost, which occurs when a system is taken apart.

There are three distinct mental models that have guided the ways in which people and organizations attack problems within a system: mechanical, biological, and socio-cultural. The belief that everything in the world could one day be explained through science, through careful analysis of small parts, gave rise to mechanical thinking. In the mechanical view understanding is derived from taking a system apart and examining each part, explaining how the parts behave separately, and then aggregating the understanding of the parts into an explanation of the whole. This type of thinking was used to create America's powerful and prominent industrial nation (Pickering, 2006).

In the mechanical mental model, success is defined by efficiency and the organization's ability to break down tasks to ensure mindless repetition (Ackoff, 1999; Gharajedaghi, 1999). We can see evidence of mechanical thinking in the ways in which our schools organized in response to rapid industrial development and dramatic urban growth in the early twentieth century.

The influence of mechanistic thinking began with the work of the Committee of Ten. This committee was appointed to establish a standard curriculum to meet the demands of traditional educators who believed high schools served as college preparatory institutions as well as those who believed that schools should serve more as a people's school offering practical courses. The goal of their work was to prepare all students to do well in life, contribute to their own well-being and society's good, and to prepare some students for college. As a result, schools were broken down into eight years of elementary education and four years of secondary education. A curricula appropriate for high school was defined, resulting in subjects equally beneficial to students who were college bound or terminal.

This thinking led to a new vision for American secondary education. The new vision was described in the “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education” (Bureau of Education, 1918) report, often called the “Kingsley Commission” issued in 1918. This report advocated for a more comprehensive high school; one that offered a differentiated secondary curriculum for students from all backgrounds attending the same schools. The report outlined seven major objectives: health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocational education, citizenship, worthy use of leisure and ethical character.

Schools were being led during this time by the “administrative progressives” a term dubbed by Historian David Tyack (1974) to describe the individuals who were interested in the ways educational institutions were arranged. Unlike earlier generations of educators who were interested in developing commonality and fellowship in schools, the administrative progressives were more concerned with creating schools that would prepare students for the labor market or for a social role or occupation.

The need to further prepare students for the expanding array of occupations and social roles led to the expansion of vocational education. Additional programs such as home economics and clerical trainings were added to the High School curriculum and by the 1920’s, high schools were becoming much more comprehensive, offering a variety of vocational programs and differentiated curricula.

These new approaches became known as Progressive Education and marked a time where schools became an even more important link to the economy. “All of these occurrences were manifestations of social change, and they made education especially

important as a way of certifying a person's knowledge, abilities, and even moral character" (Rury, 2005, p. 7).

To organize schools to meet the demands of a growing, specialized labor market, administrative progressives created "differentiation," committing to distinguishing between different goals for students. This change resulted in the classification of students and a management technique labeled as "social efficiency."

Social efficiency meant organizing a system of education that would prepare graduates to play future roles as productive workers and capable members of the community. It meant sharply differentiating the curriculum and the whole school experience, so that schools would mirror the differentiated patterns of work and life. And it meant aggressively testing student abilities in order to place them in the correct subjects and at the correct ability level in that subject (Labaree, 2007, p. 6).

With the addition of many new courses, it was especially important that administrators become more efficient in managing their schools. An administrator who was socially efficient was able to provide a school structure that would sort students according to their achievement levels and provide them with the knowledge and skills appropriate to their level. Thus management as a science and the mechanical mental model influenced progressivism and terms such as efficiency, management and vocationalism entered management vocabulary. This prompted the use of I.Q tests as a way to sort students.

In the public schools, the I.Q. tests offered a seemingly scientific basis for assigning students to varying curriculum tracks, allegedly in keeping with their "needs." Psychological experts believed that the tests were the acme of educational science and that they would make the schools more efficient and rational in their use of resources (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 67).

To manage schools that were socially efficient, differentiated to meet the needs of students, and able to prepare students for the wide array of roles that were emerging, a new form of management was called for. Centralization it was argued, would lead to the specialization of functions, which would naturally produce accountability. Reformers who thought school governance was too decentralized turned toward business practices for guidance on reshaping school governance. "A new breed of reform-minded educators, attracted to the higher social status that corporate leaders had attained, saw strong parallels between running a business and a school system" (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 176).

The involvement of business and professional elites on school boards in the early 20th Century further influenced the practice of running a school like a business. "By 1930, this wing of progressive reformers had converted most school boards into smaller, businesslike operations with modern managerial practices divorced from partisan politics" (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 176).

Policy elites, people who managed the economy, who had privileged access to the media and to political officials, who controlled foundations, who were educational leaders in the universities in city and state superintendencies, and who redesigned and led organizations of many kinds, gained a disproportionate authority over educational reform, especially during the first half of the twentieth century (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 8).

In moving toward a centralized approach to managing schools, bureaucracy was born, creating a preoccupation with efficiency and finding solutions to educational and organizational problems that would allow skills necessary to an urban industrial economy. "The administrative progressives devoted most of their attention to matters outside of the classroom on questions related to the organization of schools, the purposes

of various curricula, and the large-scale measurement of student learning” (Rury, 2005, p. 147). This preoccupation with efficiency continues to inform the administration of public school administration today.

While the mechanical system was successful in propelling our nation toward success and creating solid school systems, a new form of thinking emerged in mid-twentieth century. This system, a biological mental model, described organizations as living systems. The difference between the mechanistic view and the biological view stems from the understanding that a biological system, like the human body, has a brain that makes decisions based on feedback from the parts. In a biological model, each part of the system has a clear and specific function, which is to function as effectively and efficiently as possible and provide feedback to the brain so that decisions can be made in the best interest of the organization. This organizational theory then views a system as no longer mindless, but uni-minded (Pickering, 2006).

The divisional structures found in organizations are a result of a biological view. In these systems, leaders are empowered to dictate and control the various systems of the organization. This leads to a paternalistic business culture, where success is determined by growth and the organization strives to become bigger and bigger (Gharajedaghi, 1999).

This command-and-control structure was challenged when the Baby Boomer generation began to assume dominant roles of leadership in the schools. The Boomers, strong supporters of participatory management, believed that school reform could occur through a process that involved several brains in decision making. Implementing a decentralized move to site-based, shared decision making would improve student

achievement as those closest to the students would be involved in the decision making process.

While this process involves many stakeholders in decisions made about schooling, this type of system's thinking is flawed in the sense that we still continue to separate the system into individual parts when focusing on reform efforts. As a result, these efforts have not produced any sustainable large scale improvements.

The third generation view, the socio-cultural model, is the mental model that should guide our school systems today. The socio-cultural model, defined by Gharajedaghi, is "a voluntary association of purposeful members who themselves manifest a choice of both ends and means" (Gharajedaghi, 1999, p. 12). This view is different from the mechanical mental model in several ways.

In the socio-cultural model, system performance is a product not of the actions of the individual parts but of the interaction of those parts (Ackoff, 1999). Therefore, the interaction of the parts plays an instrumental role in understanding and improving a social system. Since education is a socio-cultural system in which people have choices in both the ends and the means to achieve, a mechanical model which treats humans as mindless machines or a biological model capable only of providing feedback will not result in the systemic change needed to reform the educational system.

While first and second generation systems thinking fails to consider the importance of interdependencies, choice, and the power of the organization's embedded culture, defined as a set of shared beliefs and values, third generation systems thinking posits that without careful and complete consideration of the current context and assumptions that drive the culture no substantial and lasting change can occur (Pickering, 2006).

In a socio-cultural system, success is measured by how the organization and its members develop. In this model, no solution is context free. If we are to reform the public school system, we must examine the underlying assumptions that drive the model as it is these assumptions that create, by default, repetition of the same solutions and results (Ackoff, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Gharajedaghi, 1999; Pickering, 2006). Since generational analysis informs us that each generation has a world view unique to the members of that generation, we cannot reform the educational system without a clear understanding of the assumptions that guide the belief systems of those leading change.

It is apparent to many that our current design of education is in need of change. Reform efforts over the past century have been mechanical in nature, despite the fact that education is a socio-cultural system. The current practice of improving one part of the system, say for example changing the management structure or improving literacy skills, only results in flawed attempts to improve the system as a whole. The main problem “is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects” (Fullan, 2001, p. 109). Utilizing a mechanical approach to improving education is not producing the needed changes.

Notwithstanding the tireless work of today’s best educators, current school reform efforts have little chance of creating systemic, sustainable improvements in America’s schools. Most current reform models, exemplars, and formulas systematically fail to synthesize the changing environment in which American schools operate or expose and challenge the implicit assumptions of both the culture and the function of American schools. The result is an incomplete or inaccurate sense of the current “mess” confronting American schools and, consequently, poorly designed solutions for resolving schooling issues (Pickering, 2006).

System’s Scientist, Bela Banathy, constructed three models that portray education as a system. The three models serve as “lenses” to look at the education system and

understand, describe, and analyze them as open dynamic and complex social systems (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004). At the root of those models lies the assumption that the process of educational inquiry should:

1. Describe an educational system in the context of its community and the larger society (Systems-Environment Model).
2. Describe the goals of the system, identify the functions that need to be carried out to attain the goals, select the components of the system that have the capability to carry out the function, and formulate the relational arrangements of the components that constitute the structure of the system (Functions/Structure Model).
3. Concentrate our inquiry on what the educational system *does* through time (Process/Behavioral Model).

This inquiry then surfaces the assumptions held by Baby Boomers and GenX elementary principals about the system of education, specifically their beliefs about the function, process and structure of education. Surfacing the assumptions of the next generation of leaders is important as uncovering the implicit assumptions at work in the system is integral to impacting any kind of sustained reform efforts.

This study paints a picture of the context in which these two generations formed their world view and illuminates the differences in how Baby Boomers and GenXers view the system of education. A description of their formative years and the educational system experienced by both of the generations in the context of their community and the larger society is described in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 examines the differences in their perspective toward leadership and work/life balance. Chapter 4 describes the changes

Baby Boomers have made in the educational system and identifies the two generation's differing beliefs about the function or purpose of education, the structures in place to carry out the purpose, and the processes used to educate children. A summary of the findings is described in Chapter 5.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was employed to learn how elementary Baby Boomer and GenX principals differ in their perspectives toward schooling. This study utilizes thick description to construct meaning from the responses of participants to specific questions regarding their beliefs and experiences. The aim of thick description ethnography is to draw large conclusions from dense, yet small facts to support broad assertions about the role culture plays in the construction of collective life (Geertz, 1973).

Qualitative research is inherently a multi-method, multi-dimensional approach so data was collected through multiple methods utilizing case studies of eight elementary principals from urban school districts. I chose to conduct case studies as my intent was not to discover a universal, generalizable, truth or look for cause-effect relationships, but rather explore and describe what I learned from the participants.

To find the candidates, I asked the superintendents from five urban school districts to provide me with the names of practicing principals in their districts who were between the ages of 30 and 35 and 55-60 and had been practicing for at least two years. I chose administrators who had some experience as opposed to those brand new to the profession as I wanted principals who had actually practiced the profession and could realistically reflect and question some of their practices. This was important in

discovering what they actually believed versus what they have been conditioned to believe about education.

Five male and three female administrators were chosen randomly from the names supplied by the superintendents (no minority representation met the criteria). Four of the principals were from the Baby Boomer generation and four of them were from Generation X. Participants were assured complete confidentiality in the final reporting of the findings of this research, thus the names of the individual participants were changed for the purpose of the case study.

By conducting case studies I could hear in their own words and observe in their actions and artifacts what they truly believed about education and the influences they identified as having impacted their beliefs. Each of the case studies included in-depth interviews, field notes from shadows, and review and analysis of documents supplied by each principal to reflect their beliefs and practices.

To conduct the interviews, I used guided in-depth questions asking each person the same set of questions but allowing each of them the opportunity to make any observations they felt were relevant. "Questions may emerge in the course of interviewing and may be added to or replace the established ones; this process of question formation is the more likely and the more ideal one in qualitative inquiry" (Glesne, 2006, p. 79).

Each principal chose to conduct the interviews in their offices during the school day. The questions asked in the interviews centered around three major areas: defining moments, belief about education and reform, and beliefs about the future of education. I audio taped each of the interviews and recorded my own observational notes of reactions

and non verbal responses that would not be present in an audio recording. The audio tapes were transcribed.

Within two to three weeks after the interviews, I conducted shadows of each administrator in their natural setting. The shadows gave me the opportunity to directly observe each participant, gather more contextual information, and to provide opportunities for further conversations. In addition to the field notes of my direct observations of the principals in action, my notes contained information about artifacts displayed throughout the participant's office and school along with a review of the professional reading each participant identified from their bookshelf as significant in impacting their beliefs and practices as a principal. This thick description of human behavior explains not just the behavior, but the context as well, such that the behavior becomes meaningful to an outsider. I also used this time to conduct follow-up questions from the interviews and clarify any lingering questions. These observations served to reinforce the themes that came forward during the individual principal interviews.

In addition to the interviews and direct observations, I asked the principals to provide me with documentation or artifacts that would further reflect their beliefs about education. These documents varied amongst the participants, but contained documents such as their building improvement plans, philosophy and beliefs about education, communications to stakeholders, and handouts of presentations they had made.

The collection of multiple types of data assisted me in identifying recurring themes and sub-themes around the differences in each generation's perspective toward schooling. Following transcription of the interviews, I used triangulation as a means of

analyzing the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glesne, 2006), which was coded using broad categories to capture emerging themes.

“In the early days of data collection, coding can help you to develop a more specific focus or more relevant questions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 150). As the process continued and the analysis became more complex, the data was further classified and categorized through code words or phrases to create an organizational framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glesne, 2006). Continued coding occurred to identify concepts or central ideas that supported the central question of this research study. The coding categories fell into the following families: defining moments, leadership styles, beliefs about the function of education, beliefs about the structure of education, and beliefs about the process of education. To check my own subjectivity and ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of my findings, a member check was conducted.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING THE BOOMERS AND THE XERS

How different was it growing up during the 60s as compared to growing up in the late 80s? To capture the spirit of the times in which each generation came of age, a series of snapshots is presented to illuminate the influences that impacted their world view. This series of snapshots paints a picture of two very different eras, resulting in the formation of each generation's world view that is more dissimilar than similar.

The Baby Boomers

Born between 1943 and 1960 in a generational cohort of over 80 million people, the Baby Boomer generation dominates American culture today (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The four Boomer participants in this study were born between 1949 and 1954, with ages ranging from 55 to 60. The experience level of each principal varied from 10 to 18 years; collectively they have served as elementary principals for 57 years. These principals came of age in the 60s. Following is a brief description of each participant.

Vicki. Vicki is a 60 year old elementary principal who has been in that role for 15 years. Raised in a middle-class family by parents that remembered the depression and experienced "how it was not to have anything," she was raised to work hard and not waste money. Her father was deeply involved in the union movement and the family placed a great emphasis on education. When she graduated from college in the mid 70's with a degree in education, there were no teaching jobs available so she began her career as a substitute teacher before leaving education to open up her own business. She then returned to education and has been with the same district for 21 years. She decided to become a principal after experiencing one that caused staff members to cry, knowing that

she would never lead that way. She was influenced by one of her college professors who encouraged her to further her education to attain a PhD.

Jack. Jack is a 55 year old elementary principal who has been in that role with the same district for 14 years. Prior to becoming a principal, he taught first grade for 15 years and fourth grade for five. Jack recalls the focus his family placed on volunteerism and education. His mother, who was a Head Start teacher, provided him with the opportunity to work with the children in her program. When he was in high school she told him to get a job or she would find one for him, giving him the choice of working at a job or volunteering. Jack chose to volunteer by joining a group similar to the Peace Corps. This experience gave him the opportunity to go to a different state to build bridges and work with families who had much less than his along with the opportunity to work on homes for inner-city kids and work with mentally handicapped children. This experience encouraged him to go into education. Although he never thought he wanted to become a principal, he loved to learn and decided to concentrate his continuing education courses in one area, so he chose administration. He became a principal after his superintendent convinced him that this was where he could make the most impact.

Betty. Betty is 59 years old and has been with the same district for 25 years. She started her teaching career as an elementary physical education teacher and has spent the last 10 years as an elementary principal. She grew up in a family that made sure the children valued education, sharing that while her parents did not have the opportunity to go to college, her mother instilled in them that they had to go to college. During her college years, she moved around a lot, attending three colleges both in and out of Iowa. These moves helped to define her as she was able to change scenes, meet new people and

establish relationships, all of which made her comfortable looking at different possibilities. She began her teaching career in the same district in which she plans to retire. While content as a classroom teacher, the tipping moment that motivated her to become an administrator was the district move to site-based decision making. Her experience with shared decision making as a teacher provided her with a broader look at things, and the opportunity to participate in a democratic system that sought input from all areas and collectively make decisions toward the “greater whole” spurred the transition from the classroom into administration. Betty was influenced by two men to become an administrator, her principal and her superintendent.

Richard. Richard has been an elementary principal for 18 years and is 57 years old. He grew up in a small town where he got to know most everyone in town and believes those relationships amongst members of that community were important in defining who he is today. He taught for 17 years in two different schools at three different grade levels prior to becoming a principal. He has been a principal for 18 years in two different town and four different elementary schools. Divorced and a single father who raised an infant child, Richard learned how to assume the role of a traditional father while assuming the female role as well. He is a born-again Christian and became a principal because he wanted to have an impact on a greater amount of students.

Defining Events

The era in which these Baby Boomers came of age can be described as a time of optimism and growth. As they were growing up, family incomes increased rapidly and the middle class expanded, narrowing the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Families were strong and the nation viewed the government as a powerful and effective institution.

Farm houses were being replaced with lush homes with unlocked front doors in safe and orderly suburbs while children attended newly built schools, which were a major factor in economic growth.

Growing up during a time of prosperity, most Baby Boomer children came home from school greeted by mothers who did not work outside of the home. “For me and a lot of family friends, fathers worked and mothers stayed home,” recalled Richard. As children they enjoyed the safety of their community, and spent much of their free time playing with neighborhood children, roaming freely as they explored and created. The evening began with dinner as the entire family gathered around the kitchen table to enjoy a large meal and engage in conversation about issues of the day.

While they grew up during bountiful times, they were constantly reminded of the need to “waste not, want not” from parents who remembered the struggles they encountered during the Depression years of their childhood. Raised by over-protective, over-indulgent parents who wanted to provide opportunities to their children that they only dreamed of, Boomer children were raised with high expectations to succeed.

Despite growing up in an era of indulgent parenting and prosperous times, their childhood was shadowed by the fear of nuclear destruction. “School children listened to Bert, an amiable animated turtle, who sang ‘Duck and Cover’ to instruct them in the event of nuclear catastrophe” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 25). Richard identified those drills as a defining moment in his life.

I can remember sitting in 5th grade and we were doing drills to avoid atomic bomb damage. We ducked under our desks and things like that. So when we do drills at school, it’s not that I question them but I try to put them in perspective for the kids.

Other historical events defining the Boomer generation include the election and assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and the Peace Corp. Richard recalled being confused about his mother's reaction to the election of Kennedy. "I can remember sitting at home when John Kennedy was elected," he shared. "My mother was concerned that everybody would be turning Catholic. She was concerned and I didn't quite understand what that was all about," he added.

While some of the principals in this study were too young to actively participate in many of the 1960s "movements" and while none of them fought in the Vietnam War as did many of their elder Boomer colleagues, the war impacted them greatly. Their generational cohort was divided between those that fought willingly in Southeast Asia and those that actively protested American involvement, taking steps to keep themselves out of the war. This has created a chasm in the generational cohort that exists yet today.

In addition to the historical events that have impacted the Boomer generation, so too have they been impacted by the high expectations placed upon them. As they reflected on the significant moments in life that defined them, high expectations to work hard, do well in school, respect authority, and change the world were recurring themes across their responses. These high expectations came not just from their parents, but from the community in general.

"I am from parents that remembered the depression," shared Vicki. "It was work really hard, don't waste money because you have parents that really remembered how it was not to have anything. So hard work was defined," she added.

The expectation to work hard and do well in school was coupled with the expectation to attend college. "We came expecting that we were supposed to do our

personal best.” stated Richard. “We were expected to succeed and do what we were supposed to do.” While he believes the majority of students come to school today with that same expectation, he does not believe it is as high of a percent as it was when he was growing up. “The expectation in that town was that you went to college,” he adds. “Many people did. If it wasn’t college, then it was a trade school.”

Vicki’s family had high expectations for a good education as well. Raised in a middle-class family that put a great emphasis on education, she shares:

I’m actually living my mother’s dream. My mother wanted to be a teacher really bad and she had a full scholarship to go to Teachers College, but her parents didn’t have the money for books so she didn’t get to go. So it was a very happy day for my mother when I got that degree.

These same expectations were echoed by Jack who was raised in a family that valued education highly, although very few of his parents’ generation had the opportunity to go to college. “I grew up knowing I would go to college. My parents told me that I could go to college wherever I wanted to,” he shared.

A recurring expectation of this generation was to respect authority, something they believe is lacking in today’s children. “One of my biggest fears as a kid growing up was what would my father do if I got in trouble in school?” shared Jack. “Even in college I was concerned about what my parents would think of the grades I got.” That’s changed he believes. When he was growing up, parents seriously regarded the calls that came from school. “Now it’s almost 100% belief of what the kid tells you is happening rather than accept the word of what the school says is happening,” he explains.

Vicki also spoke to the expectation for respectful behavior. “If I got in trouble at school, I was in more trouble at home,” she shared. She doesn’t believe that parents today hold children to the behavior standards she was held to when she was in school.

There was a strong expectation for this generation to change the world. In fact, “expectations for this generation were so high that, in 1967, *Time* magazine actually gave its coveted Man of the Year award to the Baby Boomer Generation, proclaiming them the generation that would clean up our cities, end racial equality, and find a cure for the common cold” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 66).

This expectation for change was seen in the activist behavior exhibited by this generation. “We could change the world,” said Jack, who had volunteered with a group of Peace Corp like volunteers that went to Kentucky to build bridges and work with families in need. As a teenager, Jack spent numerous hours volunteering his time to work with inner-city kids and mentally handicapped children. It was these types of experiences that defined him. “That’s why the Peace Corp was so cool. We thought we could change the world.”

The expectation for change was also seen in the rebellious behavior of this generation. As they came of age, they “questioned the ideals of their parents’ generation and protested the status quo, pushing for change in the areas of civil rights, women’s rights, reproductive rights, and even the rights of Mother Earth, giving birth to the ecology movement” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 22). This rebellious behavior also impacted changes in the educational system as “the turmoil of the 1960s, far from weakening intellectual output, was especially fertile for the development of new paradigms in social thought and for influencing the shape of new social movements”

(Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p. 42). These changes in the educational system are described in the next section.

Schooling

The word the Boomers used to describe the educational system when they went through school is traditional. “It was a lot of lecture in high school, a lot of I’m going to give you the information and you tell me the information back,” states Jack.

“It was pretty traditional,” recalls Richard. “There wasn’t a lot of hands-on, not a lot of projects. A lot of reading out of the book and answering the questions at the end of the section.”

“Very traditional,” described Vicki. “We had workbooks. I learned on Dick and Jane. I loved my principal and my mom was involved in the school. I came from a real traditional 50s-type education.”

The 50s-type traditional system described by the Boomers developed in response to industrialization, urban development and the growing complexity of modern life following World War II. A significant trend impacting education occurred with a shift in the population of African Americans to urban areas. Moving from the South to work in the war industries in the North, race became a significant issue as large public school systems in urban districts became racially differentiated. Despite the ruling in the 1954 *Brown vs Board of Education* decision that resulted in changes to the practices of racial exclusion, inequalities in the quality of education were prevalent in the metropolitan schools.

The War had changed the mindset of Americans, spurring a change in previously prevailing attitudes toward inequality and intolerance. The previous attempts of the

administrative progressives to differentiate on the basis of race came under attack during the civil rights movement, where concerns for social and educational equality provided momentum toward a more egalitarian disposition. “The cry for greater integration and equal education was, at least in part, the very antithesis of the progressive era preoccupation with highlighting distinctions of background and achievement (Rury, 2005, p. 19).

During the 50s, progressive education became linked to school failure, and critics believed a return to authority and traditional values was needed. One such critic of Progressivism was historian, David Riesman, author of *The Lonely Crowd* (1961), believed that the schools’ past emphasis on intellectual ability shaped “the inner-directed” character. “The source of direction for the individual is ‘inner’ in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals” (Riesman, 1961, p. 15).

Riesman was concerned that as a result of progressive education, teachers were paying more attention to the social and psychological development of students rather than their intellectual prowess. He believed teachers had become responsible for insuring conformity to urban American middle class through the socialization of students’ friendships, tastes and interests. The message to children then was that what mattered was their adjustment to the group, not their hard work. This change in focus caused them to become “other-directed”. Other- directed people, he contends, “seek direction from their contemporaries, either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted through friends and through the mass media” (Riesman, 1961, p. 21). Popularity and friendliness then become more important than intellectual growth as “the

other-directed child is taught at school to take his place in a society where the concern of the group is less with what it produces than with its internal group relations, its morale” (Riesman, 1961, p. 65).

The rapidly changing economy that followed World War II produced a demand for people who were well educated in the professions. A good education was more essential now than ever if one hoped to be successful in a competitive economy. Parents of the Boomers worried that their children would not have the education needed to succeed. This insecurity sparked an even greater need for an academic curriculum.

“Consequently, there were calls for return to traditional teaching methods, and a renewed emphasis on core academic subjects such as history, mathematics especially algebra and geometry), English, and the sciences” (Rury, 2005, p. 192). The need for higher standards for academic achievement emerged, particularly in mathematics and science, as the launch of Sputnik embarrassed America’s national pride. The resultant passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 placing emphasis on subject-centered disciplines was a major step toward the expansion of federal aid to schools.

While there was “a dramatic liberalizing of attitudes about race and discrimination, there also was a pronounced turn toward traditional ideas concerning instructional practices” (Rury, 2005, p. 193). This was reflected in the descriptions provided by the Boomer principals when they described the educational system they experienced as “traditional”.

The education they received was effective for most students, they felt, but not adequate for all. “It was effective for a student like me,” shared Vicki, who recalls her mother being very involved at the school. This was not the case for Jack.

I struggled. I didn't like to read until I was out of college. I could go back and pinpoint probably four or five teachers who made a difference in my life and yet the educational system did not serve me that way that I hope we are serving kids here. I was told in high school that I should go to trade school because I'd never make it to college. That grates at me sometimes when I think about that.

He said that he learned okay in the system, but he didn't learn well that way all of the time. He describes the system that he grew up in as working for 75% of the students, with nothing in place for the other 25% who were not successful.

I didn't get it, so you go to summer school and you get the same instruction you would have gotten through the year because we're going to give it to you more. If you didn't get it, it's not our fault as teachers, it's your fault as a kid for not getting it.

While Betty felt as though the system was adequate for her, she too did not feel it was effective for all students.

It was effective for 50% of the children. I went through school not terribly dedicated to my education and yet I feel like I was adequately supplied. I didn't think a lot about the diversity, didn't think a lot about struggling learners because it didn't affect me. I don't think our school at that time addressed it. I would say 50% of the population was not probably served well in public education.

The traditional system they experienced began to swing more to the progressive side however, beginning in the late 60s. This swing began to occur when the Boomers became young adults immersed in spiritual self-discovery, questioning established assumptions and practices.

In the mid-1960s, tumultuous events began to occur with such rapidity as to create a sense of relentless social crisis. American society seemed literally to be falling apart amid civil rights protests, antiwar demonstrations, campus upheavals, black separatist demands, and zany counter-cultural happenings (Ravitch, 2000, p. 383).

The rebellious behavior of the Baby Boomer generation was not the expected behavior to see emerge from a generation that had been nurtured and indulged by optimistic adults. The essence of this rebellious behavior "is that changes which they

advocate and struggle for from youth are more or less synonymous with rebellion against the 'old' order and rejuvenation of national and social spirit" (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 311).

The rebellious behavior against the family, a symbol of the existing social order, was also a rebellion against the traditional educational system in which they had grown up.

The rebellion against the family, and the intensification of conflicts between generations in terms of an overall social rebellion, are also strongly connected with a negative attitude towards the school system in these societies. Quite often the school systems are of a very traditionalistic pattern, strongly emphasizing the social and political hierarchy of their countries and supervised by their main centers of authority (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 315).

Accordingly a shift in education was occurring. "By the mid 1960s, educational priorities had shifted back again toward the progressive side" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 15). This change occurred as school leaders from the Silent Generation, born between 1925 and 1942, reached the peak of their midlife power in the mid 60s.

This generation, who grew up overprotected and stifled during the Great Depression and World War II, were expected to conform during a time of food rationing, sacrifice, and family financial stress. These events formed their worldview and as adults, they "became the risk-averse technicians and professionals as well as the sensitive rock 'n' rollers and civil rights advocates of a post crisis era in which conformity seemed to be a sure ticket to success" (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 135).

As a result of their shared influences, this generation, described by William Manchester as "withdrawn, cautious, unimaginative, indifferent, unadventurous and silent" in his book, *The Death of a President* (1967), became lax school leaders, lowering academic expectations and backing away from acting *in loco parentis* when confronted

with violence and discipline problems in the schools. The reactions of the lax Silent generation administrators to the highly spirited behavior of the Baby Boomers resulted in many changes during this era.

Confronted with violence, disciplinary problems, and litigation, school officials backed away from acting *in loco parentis*. In an effort to reduce conflict, academic demands were minimized. Students were increasingly left to fend for themselves, without adult guidance (Ravitch, 2000, p. 386).

The leadership (or lack of leadership) of the Silent Generation school administrators strengthened a shift toward the individual child. “To placate students’ demands for freedom, high schools reduced their behavior expectations and their willingness to act *in loco parentis*” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 402). High schools cut back on graduation requirements and expanded electives as dress codes were eliminated and disciplinary rules eased. Grade inflation and lower academic expectations reduced student desire to work hard, devaluing effort, diligence and perseverance. This paved the way for the educational system experienced by Generation X. The differences in the context in which they came of age as well as the school system in which they were schooled is described in the next section.

Generation X

School administrators from Generation X are expected to be the dominant generation in school leadership positions, significantly impacting educational policy and practice around the year 2014 when the Baby Boomer behemoth starts leaving the workforce. While the range of years in which this generation was born vary among sources, Generation X is frequently defined as the cohort born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The four principals in this study were born between 1975 and

1977, with ages ranging from 32 to 34. Each participant served at least two years as a principal, but have been in that capacity less than six. Collectively they have served as elementary principals for 15 years. They came of age during the late 80s and early 90s.

Christine. Christine is a 34 year old elementary principal. Not only was she born in the city in which she currently lives, but she attended the same elementary at which she is now the principal. She attributes her desire to go into education to the great education she received as a child and wanted to have that same experience for her own children. Her daughter now attends the very same school. Christine shared that she really didn't want to become an administrator when she initially began her career, but was influenced by her former principal, a female who was a great model in terms of impacting students and families. Christine taught third and fourth grade for eight years prior to returning to school to obtain her administrative degree, and has been a principal for two years.

Jason. Jason is 34 years old and in his fourth years as an elementary principal. He served as a K-8 principal for two years prior to his move to his current school district. Prior to becoming an administrator, Jason taught third grade for five years. He was strongly influenced by his former principals, who have remained close friends. Jason chose to become a principal after having the opportunity to view education from a systems perspective in a class he had taken on leadership. It is in this role that he believes he can be a greater influence.

James. Like Christine, James is now the principal at the elementary in which he attended school. He is 34 years old and has been a principal for six years, two of those years in his current district. He began his educational career teaching third and fourth

grade and served as a classroom teacher for five years prior to becoming an administrator. James chose to move into administration as he very much enjoyed teaching and felt he could make an impact at the building level if he were a principal. He also shared that it was an economic decision as well as he realized that he needed more money to raise a family.

Andy. Andy is a 32 year old elementary principal who is in his third year as an administrator. Like Jason and James, Andy has been a principal in two different districts. Prior to becoming an administrator, Andy taught for seven years in the building in which he is now the principal. He shared that he decided he wanted to be a principal after his second year in that position, as he questioned whether he had made the right decision in moving out of the classroom during his first two years as a building administrator. Having observed changes from the work he did with his teams and after witnessing the ways in which he has been able to influence the culture of the building, Andy decided that he is in the right spot as a building principal.

Defining Events

Contrast the era in which the Generation X principals came of age with that of the Boomers and it's easy to understand why their view of the world is so different. Unlike Boomers who came of age during a time of growth and prosperity, GenXers "grew up during the late 1980s wave of reengineering and downsizing that left their parents pink-slipped from companies that once seemed to promise lifelong employment" (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 56). This marked the end of reciprocal loyalty between the employee and the organization, leaving this generation skeptical and distrustful of corporate America.

On the family front, dramatic increases in the divorce rate tripled forcing many mothers into the workforce. At the same time, many women were launching their own careers outside of the home, establishing themselves as contributing and valuable employees in a workforce heavily dominated by men. Conversations amongst working mothers centered around “quality of time” versus “quantity of time.” It was the quality of time a mother spent with her child, many argued, not the quantity of time that was important. The argument became justification for career oriented mothers to maintain her career without feeling the guilt of leaving her children with a daycare provider.

Unlike the Boomer children, many Generation X children came home from school to an empty house with no adult supervision. Left to fend for themselves, the characters on the television became their friends and role models. “When I was a kid I remember rushing home from school and putting the TV on,” recalls James. I would get home at 3:00 and watch Scooby Doo through the end of Family Ties or whatever the show was at 5:00.” This was a daily occurrence for James. “I would watch for that period between 3:00 and 5:00 the entire time every day after school. It was my routine.”

Labeled “latchkey kids,” their time at home alone led them to think, act and make decisions independently, resulting in a generational cohort characterized as self-reliant. While they became accustomed to being alone, feelings of abandonment shape their psyches. Yearning for real attention from their parents, the concept of quality time rang hollow with them (Zemke et al., 2000).

Historical events defining this generation include the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, Camp Adventure, terrorist attacks, Columbine and 911. Unlike the Boomers who formed their world view during a time of growth and optimism, Generation

X formed their world view during a time where opportunity was limited and fear was widespread.

While the Boomers were told, “You can be anything you want—even President of the United States,” Generation X was told, “Be careful out there. It’s a dangerous world.” And so they are careful and guarded in their personal and professional relationships, withholding their optimism and excitement for fear that things won’t work out quite as planned (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 102).

This post-Vietnam generation is also defined by the divisiveness in the Boomer generation. One of the GenX principals I interviewed spoke extensively about this, pointing to the political divide caused by the Vietnam War as something that has impacted him. The Boomer generation, he feels, is divided by whether one leans more to the right or more to the left on the issue of the Vietnam War, stating that his family would have been on the left of that, protesting the war.

“There was a big wedge,” he states, referring to the way in which his parents’ generation viewed the War. “I think a lot of that translates into bitter partisan politics that we’ve seen over the past years since maybe Clinton through George W. Bush years,” he says. He believes the bitter divide among the nation today can be traced back to the Boomers feeling as though they “kind of had to pick which side of this you are on.” This deep division “wound up manifesting these last twenty years in American politics,” he added.

I think people of my generation really don’t operate that way. I don’t think that wedge is there and that’s why you see that translating now to our generation being pretty responsible for helping Obama get elected. I really don’t know anyone my age that has extreme views either way. Obviously, there are people but I think the majority of people from my generation are maybe more pragmatic in their approach.

The belief that this generation is more pragmatic than that of the Boomers is a common perception of the GenXers. “They look at themselves as pragmatic, quick, sharp-eyed, able to step outside themselves to understand the game of life as it really gets played” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 320). They believe that pragmatism allowed them to survive growing up and to thrive beginning their careers, and that this pragmatism will impact the way in which they mature as leaders and the way in which they will advise as elders in their old age.

Not only do GenXers describe themselves as independent, resourceful and pragmatic, but having witnessed the divide amongst their parents’ generation due to conflicts around issues of war and religion and having experienced the break up of family due to divorce, GenXers are more open minded and accepting of diversity they say. “We’ve grown up more accepting or open-minded of post-racial strife, post anti-war movements.” shared James, who believes his generation does not take extreme views against issues of war and religion like the Boomers have done.

Andy also believes that he is more accepting of diverse opinions than his Boomer parents, recalling the controversy caused as a result of his parents’ differences in religion.

I always think back to the story about when my mom and dad got married and the fact that my dad was Catholic and my mom was Lutheran and how big of a deal that seemed at that point in time. It seems kind of unfathomable, but that would be something that would cause people not to talk to one another or to be that upset about.

Being a child of a divorced family has also contributed to his ability to look at issues from differing perspectives according to Andy, identifying the divorce as being a defining moment for him. “Having parents separated I think in a way helped me understand the significance and importance of being able to take a look at an issue from

two different perspectives,” he shared. He said that he was seven at the time of the divorce, and while it was difficult during Junior High and High School, he believes now that “it was actually maybe a benefit to see both perspectives,” he said.

The 911 terrorist attacks were also identified by Andy as a defining moment and one that he believes contributed to his ability to see issues from multiple perspectives.

When I asked what influence the event had on him, he stated:

Again, I think coming back to always wanting to see both sides of things. For awhile, a lot of our society maybe jumped to conclusions about different groups or stereotyped different people and I think wanting to just personally hear both sides of a story knowing there’s maybe one perspective isn’t necessarily the right perspective or the way things should be done.

Christine, a 34 year old principal, identified the Challenger as something that impacted her. She recalls sitting in an elementary classroom watching the event and thinking about the wonderful experience this was for a person in education. While it ended up being very tragic, Christine said that having had the opportunity to see the progress that had been made for women in education had a defining impact on her.

When I asked her if it had anything to do with her going into a leadership position or into a career as a woman she responded, “Definitely, absolutely.”

While hard work, respect and a good education were keys to success for Boomers, GenXers learned that the keys to success were to exercise caution, distrust big organization, and rely on themselves. Not only was the social context in which they were raised different, but so too was the educational context, which is described in the next section.

Schooling

Moving away from a traditional education to bring back progressive education as a new teaching philosophy, a new concept emerged as Generation X was coming of age: open education. This movement became “a full-blown crusade with hordes of avid followers. State education departments, federal agencies, schools of education, magazines, foundations, and schools enlisted in the cause of freedom for the student” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 397).

Not surprisingly, this form of education was hailed by supporters of progressive education as an open school emphasized the same practices of progressive education: projects, student initiated learning, and activities. The role of the teacher was viewed as a facilitator of student learning as opposed to transmitter of knowledge, students no longer gathered in traditional classrooms, but in open spaces, and affective learning was valued more than cognitive learning. “In high schools, the requirements for graduation were reduced, course electives were expanded, and traditional subjects were broken up into minicourses” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 397).

The GenX principals spoke about their education with much more warmth and excitement than did the Baby Boomers. Attending elementary and middle school during the 1980s and early 1990s, they were part of the system that resulted from the progressive reform movement incited by the Silent Generation leaders who reduced standards and requirements in response to the Baby Boomer rebellions of the 70s. Unlike the Boomer principals who grew up in a traditional system that they described as effective for some but not for all, the GenXers were part of a system that they believed was very effective: one that emphasized projects, activities, and student initiated learning.

Christine described the system as very, very good. “The teachers were always challenging you to try new things, to broaden your horizons,” she shared. She fondly recalls the many opportunities she had to learn about different cultures and different occupations. “We also did many cultural days, learning about different races, ethnicities, countries,” she continues. “There was a lot of opportunity to try different things academically as well as socially through athletics and programs and it was wonderful.”

With a gleam in his eyes, James described the system in which he learned as extremely effective. “I just have lots of great memories about it!” he reflects enthusiastically. “It was never boring.” A highlight in his education was the opportunity to engage in projects.

I remember the workbooks and doing our basics and everything, but I had teachers that had wonderful project ideas and I can remember so many neat things from creative teachers where we would get to do a research report or some way to make it come alive. I remember how much fun it was to do those types of things.

He remembered studying the northeast region of the country in third grade where he created a newscast, recalling the experience of each member of his group as they assumed the job of reporter covering various topics. “I thought it was the greatest thing in the world!” he exclaimed.

“Growing up, school was a great thing as far as I was concerned,” shared Jason. Jason felt his education was “pretty cutting edge,” referring to the project experience he had. “We had a school newspaper that was actually done on the computer so that was a neat deal,” he recalls. “We were one of the first schools that put in an ICN room,” he adds.

Andy also thought the system was effective. He went on to explain that he didn't know anyone who went through the special education system and he knew that college was not the end for everyone so he reflected on his definition of success stating, "If it's academics and feeling good about yourself, it was good for me."

Summary

The national mood was very different when the Boomers came of age. Figure 1 summarizes the context in which each of these generations formed their world view. Raised during optimistic, prosperous times, the Boomer were part of a generational cohort that can be described as

the cadre of other sons and daughters of the optimistic post-World War II era, who prayed in school, gathered around the first television in the neighborhood to watch the 'Mickey Mouse Club,' and ate TV dinners. They watched the iron curtain descend, marched on Washington, and watched on prime time Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon. They joined the Peace Corps and fought in Vietnam—or didn't. They benefited from a prosperous economy, tremendous medical advances, an explosion of scientific research, and a school system that was overcrowded but in fine fettle (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 76).

While Boomers grew up in an era of optimism, GenXers grew up in an era of skepticism (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They experienced first hand the fall out from failed marriage and the economic hardships forcing mothers into the workforce, they watched in horror as the Challenger exploded on national TV, they observed the political chasm and extreme views that existed within their parent's generation, they learned not to trust institutions, and they learned to be cautious in a world threatened by terrorism.

Xers have been marked by *skepticism*. They grew up seeing every major American institution called into question. From the presidency to the military to organized relation to corporate America, you name the institution and the Xers can name the crime. Combine that with a U.S. divorce rate that tripled during the birth years of Generation X and you have a generation that distrusts the permanence of institutional and personal relationship. As a result, Xers tend to

put more faith in themselves as individuals and less faith in the institutions that seem to have failed them time and again (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 25).

The educational system experienced by both generations was also different.

Boomers were part of a traditional system that emphasized academics. As they moved through the system, they rebelled against it demanding freedom and less discipline. Their spirited behavior forced changes that resulted in reduced academic demands, increased electives and lowered graduation requirements. Dress codes were eliminated and school officials backed away from acting *in loco parentis*. This gave way to the system GenXers experienced.

The GenXers were not raised on Dick and Jane, but were part of a progressive system that emphasized open education and student initiated learning through projects. They attended high school during a time where course electives were expanded, and the traditional subjects were divided into minicourses.

Enjoying a sense of student freedom that the Boomers had rebelled for, GenXers recall their schooling with great warmth and enthusiasm. However, the nation did not look upon their educational experiences as positively, characterizing the GenXers as a generation that had:

survived a “hurried” childhood of divorce, latchkeys, open classrooms, devil-child movies, and a shift from G to R ratings. They came of age curtailing the earlier rise in youth crime and fall in test scores—yet heard themselves denounced as so wild and stupid as to put *The Nation at Risk* (<http://www.fourthturning.com>).

Understanding the context in which both of these generations came of age provides insight into the ways in which they lead today. Their differing views on leadership will be discussed in the next chapter.

Baby Boomers—Born 1943-1960

Social Context

A time of optimism and growth in a prospering economy
 Strong family & community support
 Over protective parenting and stay at home mothers
 High expectations to succeed
 College highly valued

Educational Context

Traditional schooling-Dick and Jane/Workbooks
 Focus on an academic curriculum
 Mothers highly involved at school
 Sputnik-- high standards in math and science
 Teacher as transmitter of knowledge
 Graded for teamwork

Defining Events

Atomic drills
 Election & assassination of JFK
 Vietnam, Watergate
 Protests, Human Rights Movement
 Peace Corp
 Suburbia
 Space race

Core Attributes

Optimistic
 Hard Working
 Advocates for a
 good education
 Idealistic
 Competitive
 Question Authority
 Patriotic
 Defensive of
 American values

GenX—Born 1961-1981

Social Context

A time of reengineering and downsizing
 Unemployment and limited opportunity
 Divorce rate tripled
 Mothers returning to the workforce
 Latch key children
 Sesame Street, MTV
 Game Boy/PC

Educational Context

Progressive education/Open classrooms
 Projects and student initiated learning
 Teacher as facilitator
 Affective learning valued over cognitive learning
 Traditional subjects broken into minicourses
 Graduation requirements reduced/electives expanded
 College is assumed

Defining Events

Explosion of space shuttle Challenger
 Camp Adventure
 Terrorist attacks/911

Core Attributes

Skeptical
 Pragmatic
 Resourceful
 Self-reliant
 Accepting of
 diversity
 Distrustful of
 Institutions
 Highly Adaptive to
 Change &
 Technology

Figure 1. Core Attributes

CHAPTER 3

DIFFERENCES IN HOW THEY LEAD

When each principal described their leadership style, their word choices would lead one to believe that there is no apparent difference in their styles. Both generations used the words collegial, collaborative and non-authoritative to describe their styles and spoke of their strong belief in working together as a team. As they spoke more in depth about their beliefs about leadership, about what it takes to be a successful principal and whether their work and life are in balance, it became evident that differences do exist. The differences can be seen in their leadership focus, the ways they balance work and life, and their practices around teamwork.

Leadership Focus

Both generations believe that a leader should be an instructional leader, but as they described their leadership styles, it became clear that they emphasize their role as leaders differently. The focus for the Boomer principals is on their role as facilitators and supporters of teachers, while GenXers focus on the students. In essence, Boomers are teacher leaders where GenXers are student advocates.

The Boomer focus on supporting teachers surfaced often. Richard referred to servant leadership when describing his leadership style, sharing that he believes his role is to “help facilitate all of these things that go on, whether it’s in the classroom teaching, interactions between people, or something to do with money. It’s just helping the things that need to get done, get done.”

Becky too sees her role as a supporter of teachers:

First of all I see myself as a supporter of teachers and a team player. I always feel like I'm probably not real authoritarian. I like to put heads together in decision making. I like to bring all of the people to the table that need to be there and make those joint decisions that are supported by everyone.

Jack too focused on his role in supporting teachers as he shared that he hoped his style would be viewed as "the openness to change, the willingness to look at new ideas. The leadership style is not teacher leaders, but it really kind of is," he adds.

The legacies the Boomer principals wanted to leave also focused on their impact on teachers. Betty wanted to leave the legacy that she hired teachers that continue to be good teachers. Jack's legacy would be that he got people to use data to make decisions, that teachers would use assessment information to make sound instructional decisions. Vicki wanted to be remembered as being too kind and caring of people and Richard hoped that the schools where he had been would feel he did what he could to help the school or help the kids do their best.

The Gen Xers emphasize their role as supporters of students when they describe their leadership styles. In fact, throughout the interviews the GenXers used the word child, children or kid 354 times as opposed to the 219 times used by Boomers.

When asked to describe her style, GenX principal Christine readily answered, "I'm not a top down leader. I definitely try to be as collaborative as possible. I really like to have my staff involved in many of the decisions that we make, making collaborative decisions as a staff together." As she continued to talk about the work her building is

doing around Professional Learning Communities, her advocacy for students surfaced as she summarized her beliefs as a leader:

I would say that I am very open minded, very much into looking at the child individually and what I can do to help each child individually. How to make this school a community and incorporate families and make every child excited to come to school and want to learn and want to be here because they feel it's a safe and fun atmosphere.

Christine's focus on the child is also reflected in the hallways of the school. "The school should reflect the kids, see the kids artwork rather than just a bunch of motivational things I put up." When I asked her to share what artifacts reflected her beliefs about education, she told me *Character Counts* was important, so there was information about character building hanging in the hallway along with newspaper articles of students who made the paper. She told me that when she first came to the school the hallways were cluttered, and she tried to create space for student artwork since schools should reflect the kids.

Jason too talked about the importance of his leadership style in supporting students. He used the word "open" to describe himself, informing me that while the door was closed for our interview, it is seldom closed otherwise. He described himself as an approachable leader who believes strongly in teamwork, sharing that with experience his belief in working together as a team has become stronger and stronger. His passionate commitment to students also surfaced.

No matter what it takes, we're going to do it if it's good for kids. Being creative to find resources to do that is a never ending struggle sometimes, but you can tell anybody if it's good for a kid, we're going to do it here, no matter what.

Andy too is an advocate for students. He described his style as “positive, laid back, child centered.” When I asked him to tell me more about what he meant by the term “child-centered,” he shares:

We have to think about the decision. Is the decision what’s best for kids versus what’s easier for us as adults? I don’t think it’s fair to kids to say we’re going to make this decision because it doesn’t challenge me. I think we need to do what’s best for kids.

This focus on the child was also reflected in Jason’s and Andy’s desired legacy. “If I had to be remembered by something, I would want people to know the kids meant the most. That’s why we’re here,” shared Jason. Andy’s legacy would be that “I tried to do things with honesty and integrity and do what’s best for kids.” Christine shared,

I’d like to some day have a student come back and say you really inspired me, and I’d like families to say that we felt a huge part of Hennings Elementary...it was community and we felt very welcomed and part of the decision making of our child’s educational career.

Why is there a difference in the ways in which these two generations focus their roles? If we reflect back to the context in which each generation came of age. Boomers grew up during a time of over-indulgent, over-protective parenting. They were nurtured and coddled in safe and orderly homes, where for the most part fathers worked and mothers stayed at home.

Boomers were part of a generation that had high expectations placed upon them to change the world, and they rallied together in teams to fight for civil rights, women’s lib, and equal employment opportunities. Teamwork for Boomers is the means to an end, so their focus is on the means. If they as principals provide teachers the support and resources needed, and they work together as a team to deploy those resources, they will impact the ends, or the students. This strong belief in the power of collective individuals

working as a team to impact change prompts them to focus their efforts on the teacher as opposed to the children.

This is not the same for Generation X. They did not experience the same safe and nurturing environment as the Boomers, but rather grew up as abandoned “latchkey kids,” yearning for attention from their parents during a time when children were left to fend for themselves. Having felt abandoned by adults as they were growing up, GenX principals are focused on protecting and nurturing children and giving them the attention they never had. Given those differences, it is not difficult to recognize why GenX principals are so focused on the child, nor will it be difficult to understand why GenXers balance their lives differently, which will be described in the next section.

Work/Life Balance

The belief to work hard and the propensity to work long hours and weekends surfaced in the Boomer responses to the question, “Do you feel as though your professional and personal lives are in balance?” Jack, who was completing his fourteenth year as a principal, told me he was typically at school by 5:15 a.m. and leaves around 5:30 p.m. Does he feel as though his personal and professional life is in balance working 12 hour days?

Because I put in a lot of time, I think I balance it. My daughter doesn't think I do. I get up and leave very early before they get up, and I do it intentionally because they are not up. I usually get home by 5:00 to 5:30. Is that balance? Probably not, but to be really honest I have a real hard time being an educational leader and the only way to do that is to keep up on the reading and the only way to keep up on the reading is to spend time doing it.

He went on to tell me that he gets a lot of administrative work done between 5:15 and 6:30 a.m. before the first teachers come in as well as between 3:30 and 5:30 at the

end of the school day. He jokingly blamed his work hours on his brother-in law. "It's his fault," he states laughingly, "he goes to school about 4:30 a.m."

Richard, another Baby Boomer elementary principal, also spends many hours at school. In reflecting on the balance between his professional and personal life he states, "If my wife were here, she would not need much time to think about this. She would claim there is not necessarily the balance, that I put in a lot of time at school, the lawn's not mowed, and this and that." He went on to share that he would have to say she is right in saying there isn't even now an even balance in their lives, even though all of their children are grown and gone. When I asked him why he felt there was not balance he said,

You can be away from the job but you're still reflecting on decisions that were made, things that happened. It's almost like in the principal position you're in the moment but you're trying to be thinking and planning ahead. It's difficult for me to turn off that principal part of me when I get home.

Contrast Jack's workday described above with the day described by GenX principal, Jason, who is in his fourth year as a principal. "I get up in the morning with my son and I take him to daycare. A lot of times I still pick him up so I leave the house at 7:00 and I'm home by 4:30 so that's a pretty good balance, I think. When I'm home, I'm with him and my wife."

A bit surprised that a principal in his fourth year felt he could accomplish his work between 7:00 and 4:30, I clarified his response by saying, "So you typically leave here before 4:30?" His response was, "Yes. It's the beginning of a ghost town here by then."

Despite what appears to be a conflict in values between the two generations, the reality is that the both generations highly value the same thing--family. What is different is the way in which they express those values. While members of the Boomer generation “are likely to say that they value their family by working long hours and making a lot of money so that their families can have what they want” (Deal, 2007, p. 26), Xers are more likely to express that value by spending more time with family and less time at their workplace.

This was evident in Jason’s routine of being home by 4:30 every night and spending the night with his wife and son. This was also the routine of Andy, who shared, “We still have young girls at home and so I try to put this away at the end of the day and I try to stay out of here on weekends.” His focus on balancing work and family is reflected in the artifacts in his office as well. When I asked him what was in his office that spoke to his beliefs, he pointed to the pictures of his family. The pictures were to remind him of the importance of balancing family and work.

Christine echoed the same need to spend time with her family at the end of the day. “I try to sneak out of here after school at 4:30 so I can spend some good time with my kids before they go to bed.”

The work patterns of these Generation X elementary principals are definitely different than those of the Boomer principals as they began their careers as school administrators. Betty, a 59 year old administrator who has been a principal for ten years, put in much more time as she began her career. “When I first started, I was not in balance at all. It was 24-7. I felt like I needed to put that much time in to keep a handle

on it.” Vicki, a 60 year old principal completing her fifteenth year in that position shared that when she first became a principal, she would be at school every weekend.

Why is the Boomer orientation to time so different than the GenXers? Although the economy was booming during the time the Boomer administrators were growing up, they remembered their parents’ stories about the struggles they experienced during the Depression years. This was instrumental in instilling a strong work ethic in them. Recall Vicki’s statement when she said she was from parents that remember the depression. “It was work really hard and don’t waste money because you have parents that really remember how it was not to have anything, so hard work was defined.”

Additionally Baby Boomers were born amidst a time when the birth rate was over four million per year. As a result, they are part of a generational cohort of over 80 million people who found it necessary to work long hours in order to compete for the opportunity to advance in their jobs. With large numbers of employees competing for a limited number of positions, those aspiring to advance in their careers found it necessary to set themselves apart from their work colleagues.

They did so by working long hours and weekends. “In the 1970’s the term ‘workaholic’ was coined to describe their work ethic. In the two decades since they joined the American workforce, the average time spent at work has increased one full month per year” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 85).

The Boomers grew up in an era of opportunity, expansion and optimism at a time when community was strong. The strong message to work hard coupled with the high expectations for success placed upon them as they were coming of age have contributed to the Boomer drive to prove their worthiness and define themselves through their jobs.

“For this generation, ‘work ethic’ and ‘worth ethic’ are synonyms” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 77). This has led them to balance work and life differently than do the members from Generation X.

Generation X has a non traditional orientation toward time. Having seen their parents dedicate their lives to work, spending more time at the office than at home, devoting evenings and weekends to work issues, members of Generation X are not interested in repeating the same lifestyle. “In the word, as of many an Xer, their parents ‘lived to work.’ Xers simply want to ‘work to live’” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 99).

GenXers’ nontraditional orientation about time impacts their need to use time efficiently. I was told by a GenX administrator that her generation “can get so much more done in much less time because we know how to use technology to be more efficient. “We don’t need to be here until 5:30 every night to get our work done!” she stated emphatically.

This impacts their orientation toward space as well. Their attitude is such that as long as the work gets done, it doesn’t matter how and when it gets done. “The great thing about technology is I’m only a click away from being near everything I need.” shared Jason. In general, GenXers:

show up late, leave early, and appear to be “slackers” because they are keeping their eye on what they think is the ball—getting the work done. If they do it at home, at odd hours, in the car on the cell phone, or while telecommuting, they think that’s their business, not their supervisor’s. They don’t come close to understanding “line of sight” managing (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 100).

The differences in how each generation focuses their attention along with their differing perspectives towards balancing life and work impacts their practices around

teamwork. While both generations strongly support the philosophy of working together as a team, the way they lead teams is different. Those differences are discussed next.

Teamwork

While both generations believe teaming and collaboration are important, Boomers prioritize peer consensus and teamwork over efficiency (Zemke et al., 2000). This is different for GenXers, who learned to be self-reliant and who place such a high value on efficient use of time. Because they are more focused on efficiency, they are not as concerned about peer consensus as the Boomers.

The Boomers pride themselves on their sense of teamwork and believe strongly in soliciting input and working together as a team to accomplish common goals. “I do believe in a democratic site-based process,” shared Betty, who describes herself as a leader who stops and considers things before making decisions. “Even though it maybe isn’t quite as popular as it once was, I think that the key is getting ground-swell support and getting ideas and trying to work toward a solution,” she adds.

Jack too believes in the power of working as a team, emphasizing that he believes all teachers need to work together. “You have to believe that we are all doing this together--it’s not your kids, my kids.” In this, he talks about the importance of seeking the support of staff.

I learned very quickly that change can happen if you get the support of a couple of key players. Those key players are the teachers. The first year I tried to do something without that support and failed miserably.

Bill too believes in the power of teamwork. In his office hangs a piece of art work entitled *Teamwork*. On the canvas reads the words: *many hands, many minds, one goal*. As we talked about the artifacts in his office that depict his beliefs, he points to the

picture and says, “It’s not coincidence that you can see the picture as you walk down the hallway (towards his office). It’s all about teamwork.”

This sense of teamwork is not surprising given that Boomers were graded on their ability to share and work with others during their schooling days.

In school and at home, the Boomers learned about teamwork. There were so many of them, like puppies in a pile, that they had to collaborate and cooperate, sharing texts and sometimes desks. They were the first generation to be graded on their report cards for “shared materials with classmates” and “works with others” (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 67).

Vicki’s practice reflects her strong belief in soliciting input. She shared with me that while there are times when a leader just needs to make a decision, she tries to get input from staff on decisions that affect the whole school. “Even when I’m doing a really important letter to go home, I’ll send it out to all staff first and say, ‘Give me feedback, this is a draft.’” She shared that she honestly believes that the more heads you put together on an issue, the better off you are.

While GenXers also identify themselves as strong believers in collaboration and teamwork, they view the practice of collecting extensive input prior to making decisions a waste of time. This is because they are not interested in spending time on activities that are not central to their priorities and values. In fact, “GenXers prefer to work toward defined objectives and resent management that prioritizes time-consuming process over results” (Salkowitz, 2008, p. 144).

Thus if it’s important to a GenXer, they are going to do it whether or not there is peer consensus. “There are certain things here that are important to me that we’re going to do,” shared James adamantly. “I set that direction and we do those then. It’s not really something that we decide together.” He continued to expound upon the need for people

to feel valued, but never identified the use of consensus as part of his style. In his perception, ownership is about feeling valued.

I think people just simply have to feel ownership in what they're doing for it to be strongest. I go back to the idea where we're a team and I try to make sure everyone knows they are appreciated and valued and they have lots of opportunities to do their own creative ideas or that type of thing. I think everybody on our staff has something very valuable and wonderful to offer the school.

When I asked James if his leadership perspective had changed at all since becoming a leader, he shared that as time has passed he has become more confident. His confidence is around making independent decisions as opposed to collective decisions. "You need to feel it's okay what you're doing, you're on the right track. It's okay to trust your instincts on certain things and not worry if that's exactly the way someone else would do it." He continued to say that while he believes in striking a balance between what he believes is important versus what others believe is important, "I try to be myself. think about what seems right to me and do it."

This same self-reliant attitude was reflected by Jason, who earlier described himself as someone who believed strongly in teamwork. But as he described his belief that "you can tell anybody if it's good for a kid, we're going to do it here, no matter what," it is evident that his perception of working together as a team occurs in the doing, not in the deciding of what to do.

Christine, who described herself as a non-authoritarian leader, pointed to the book *What Do Great Principals do Differently?* by Todd Whittaker when I asked her about professional readings that resonate with her. "What really grabs me is his belief in the way effective schools are run and how top down management is not effective," she

explains. "I never want to be top down. I always want to involve the teachers in core strategies." Yet when I asked her how the initiatives for her building were chosen, she shares that she chooses them. "I look at the needs and make a list of the needs I see. We have had a lot of turnover with new teachers so I thought we could spend a year on guided reading and differentiated instruction." Adding as an afterthought that she also involved the staff, she describes that involvement as "the guided reading came from three or four new teachers who said they needed more on guided reading."

The tendency for GenXers to place less of a value on peer consensus was also illuminated in a discussion I had with a Boomer administrator of an education service agency. The administrator informed me that she was having conflicts with the GenXers on her team, sharing that they didn't think she made decisions quickly enough. She explained that her practice was to call a meeting to solicit input from them and then spend a couple of days gathering additional data before making an informed decision. While she felt she was making decisions quickly, she shared they continually criticized her for taking too much time.

The attitude that decisions can be made without extensive input is reflected in the practices of Michelle Rhee, a 37 year old GenX school chancellor who has launched a massive reform in the District of Columbia Public schools system. In the September 2008 issue of *District Administration*, Rhee's leadership style is clearly depicted in her actions and comments. Shortly after taking over the position, Rhee hastily dismissed 36 principals of poorly performing schools and shuttered 23 schools, all without significant community input. She was criticized for acting too imperiously, angering parents who believed they should have been involved in the process and should have had a say in the

decision. Despite the criticism, “Rhee continues along those lines, and still holds to the credo ‘You don’t turn around an organization or a school district by committee’” (Schachter, 2008, p. 35). At a CEO gathering sponsored by the Wall Street Journal, Rhee stated her belief that “collaboration and consensus building are quite frankly overrated in my mind” (Turque, 2009).

Why are the Boomers more concerned about soliciting input and gaining peer consensus than GenXers? Some of it can be attributed to their belief toward fair treatment. The Boomers were strongly impacted by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, which had a profound impact on their generational personality. This has resulted in their strong beliefs toward fair treatment, whether it be persons of color, gays, or those with disabilities (Zemke et al., 2000).

The move toward peer consensus emerged early in the Boomer’s administrative career through the form of shared decision making. The belief in soliciting input and making decisions through consensus ensures that opinions and ideas represent all stakeholders fairly and equitably and aligns with their strong belief in teamwork.

As GenXers were growing up, they learned to be self-reliant and independent decision makers. This is reflected in their practices and differences in beliefs about the need to solicit feedback to make decisions. Their pragmatism leads them to believe that they are able to step outside of themselves and see life as it really is, lessening the need for input. Their strong desire to balance work and life, and not abandon their own family as their workaholic Boomer parents did lead them to focus on children and to use time efficiently on matters central to their beliefs. Thus their orientation toward use of time and teamwork is different than that of the Boomers. See Figure 2.

Baby Boomers—Born 1943-1960

<p>Social Context Time of optimism & growth Prospering economy Strong family & community support Over protective parenting/stay at home moms High expectations to succeed College highly valued</p>
<p>Educational Context Traditional schooling-Dick & Jane/Workbooks Focus on an academic curriculum Mothers highly involved at school Sputnik-- high standards in math and science Teacher as transmitter of knowledge Graded for teamwork</p>
<p>Defining Events Atomic drills Election & assassination of JFK Vietnam, Watergate Protests, Human Rights Movement Peace Corp Suburbia Space race</p>

<p>Core Attributes Optimistic Hard Working Advocates for a good education Idealistic Competitive Question Authority Patriotic Defensive of American values</p>

<p>Leadership Styles Strong work ethic Long hours Peer consensus Collaboration Teamwork Teacher leaders</p>
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Generation X—Born 1961-1981

<p>Social Context A time of reengineering and downsizing Unemployment and limited opportunity Divorce rate tripled Mothers returning to the workforce Latch key children Sesame Street, MTV Game Boy/PC</p>
<p>Educational Context Progressive education/Open classrooms Projects and student initiated learning Teacher as facilitator Affective learning valued over cognitive learning Traditional subjects broken into minicourses Graduation requirements reduced/electives expanded College is assumed</p>
<p>Defining Events Explosion of space shuttle Challenger Camp Adventure Terrorist attacks/911 Columbine</p>

<p>Core Attributes Skeptical Pragmatic Resourceful Self-reliant Accepting of diversity Distrustful of Institutions Highly Adaptive to Change & Technology</p>

<p>Leadership Styles Work/life balance Efficiency over peer consensus Independent decision makers Focus on students</p>
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Figure 2. Leadership Styles

Summary

It is apparent that the differences in the contexts in which both of these generations came of age has impacted their leadership styles, specifically the way they focus their time, the way they balance their lives, and the ways in which they lead teams. While the Baby Boomers are more apt to focus their attention on the teachers, put in longer days and hours at school, and solicit input to make and implement decisions as a team. GenXers are more apt to focus their attention on the students, spend less time at school, and work as teams to implement decisions, but not necessarily to make decisions. The next chapter views the perspectives of each generation's beliefs about the system of education, and examines the current educational system that has been put in place by the Boomers.

CHAPTER 4

DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS

The educational system in place today has been influenced by the beliefs of the Baby Boomer generation, who have instituted a number of reform efforts. Their attempts at reform have been based on a biological system's model. In a biological model, each part of the system has a clear and specific function, which is to function as effectively and efficiently as possible and provide feedback to the brain so that decisions can be made in the best interest of the organization.

While this approach was an improvement over the mechanical, command and control approach of the Boomer predecessors, reform efforts have continued to separate the system into individual parts. This has resulted in fragmented, small scale reform.

In a socio-cultural model such as education, system performance is a product not of the actions of the individual parts, but of the interaction of those parts (Ackoff, 1999). Therefore it is important to address the interaction of the parts as opposed to separating the system into parts and analyzing the components separately. To understand the system requires synthesis of the whole by identifying the sub systems of which the system being examined is a part, explaining the behavior of the whole system itself, and then explaining the system's roles or functions within the greater whole (Gharajadaghi, 1999). This requires a careful examination of the implicit assumptions at work in the system.

To uncover the general assumptions held by both the Boomers and the GenXers toward the system of education, this section describes the differing beliefs of each generation toward the function, structures and processes guiding the educational system today. Understanding each generation's belief about the system of education is important

as the power of the dominant culture is the primary constraint in successfully transforming and reforming a system (Ackoff, 1999; Banathy, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Gharajedaghi, 1999; Pickering, 2006).

To capture their assumptions about the system of education, I have organized their responses around the function, structure and process of education. This section then differentiates their beliefs about the function or purpose of education, how they believe the delivery of education should be structured, and the processes needed to deliver it. As their assumptions surfaced, it was not difficult to understand how the context in which each generation came of age impacted their differing perspectives.

Function of Education

The function of a system describes the purpose or the goal of the system. The vision statement of the Iowa State Board of Education reads “Iowa students will become productive citizens in a democratic society and successful participants in a global community” (<http://www.iowa.gov/educate>). Inherent in this is the belief that the function of education is to produce citizens who productively contribute to a democratic society as well as a global economy. One might expect then that these same words would be used by principals when asked what they believe about the purpose of education. However, while this was the case for the Boomer principals, it was not the same for the GenXers.

It is not surprising that the Boomer principals in this study chose the same language when describing their beliefs about the function of education. After all, the vision of education has been established by their generation.

“The purpose of education is to get kids to use the skills they’ve learned, to access the information they need for a productive life--to help people be productive members of society,” shared Joe. Betty was short and concise in stating her belief about the purpose of education, using the same terminology. “The focus of the kids should be productive citizens, being able to make it in the world. That’s the bottom line.”

To be productive members of society requires students be prepared for the world of work. Thus the function of education should be “to work with parents to educate our kids so they are prepared for their job as an adult,” states Richard. As in the words of Vicki, “create life-long learners, contributing citizens, the kind of people you want to live next door to you.”

While the GenX principals would not argue that students need to be prepared for the world of work, they do not share the same focus as their elder colleagues about the purpose of education. In fact, the GenXers did not even use the words *productive* or *contributing* to describe what they believe the purpose to be. They used the words *respectful* and *how to get along with others* in their descriptions of what education should produce. While Boomers are focused on providing an education that develops productive citizens, GenXers believe the function of education is to produce respectful citizens.

Education needs to “help people, help instill that sense of community, that sense of learning social norms, learning how to get along with others, learning how to work together,” summarizes James. He believes that education should promote the well-being of society. Referencing Thomas Jefferson, he shares his belief that we have gotten away from the foundation of education, which is to promote the well-being of society. In this he believes the purpose of education is:

to keep our democracy and society going whether that's making sure kids are civic-minded, making sure kids have a sense of responsibility to each other, making sure they have people skills to work with each other. That we are again helping children find what is special about them, what is their gift.

The belief that the purpose of education is to produce respectful citizens is also reflected in Andy's beliefs.

I think maybe this comes back to all of those methods classes, but we want to create responsible citizens. Maybe this goes back to more of a 70s philosophy, but I think people that are respectful and responsible are kids that are empathetic, more in tune to what's going on in the community and the world around them.

Why do the two generations differ in their beliefs? Why do Boomers believe the purpose of education is to produce productive citizens while GenXers believe education should produce respectful citizens?

Generational analysis informs us that the attitudes of individuals are shaped by personal experiences as well as by collective historical events (Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Eisenstadt, 1956; Mannheim, 1952; Riesman, 1961; Salkowitz, 2008; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). Traumatic events that occur during the formative years are critical to the formation of active generations and generational consciousness (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, Edmunds & Turner, 2002). These traumatic events create a sense of fear that drives the belief system of the generational cohort, resulting in a survivalist mentality. If we look back to the context in which each generation came of age, we will see the impact of traumatic events on their beliefs about the function of education.

As the Boomer children grew up, the country was rebounding from the devastation and loss from war. There was an atmosphere of fear; fear of another depression, fear that the nation was falling behind in space exploration, fear of future

nuclear attacks, and fear of the spread of communism. Baby Boomers heard over and over again about the importance of rebuilding and strengthening America.

The message sent to Boomers as they were forming their world view was that the key to the nation's survival was to fix a failing democracy and educate its citizens. While attending school they experienced the proliferation of new schools and were instilled with the need to get a good education. Thus the function of education, as captured in the descriptions provided by the Boomer principals as well as in the vision statement of the Iowa State Board of Education, is to produce students who will become productive citizens in a democratic society, and successful participants in a global community (<http://www.iowa.gov/educate>), or as stated by Joe, "to get kids to use the skills they've learned, to access the information they need for a productive life--to help people be productive members of society."

The message sent to GenXers was very different. Forming their world view during a time where opportunity was limited and fear was widespread, GenXers recall terrorist attacks and 911, internalizing that the world is a dangerous place. The Columbine High School attacks in 1999 also left its mark on this generation's world view, reinforcing their fear of a dangerous world.

To GenXers then, there is a need to create a safer America. To create a safer America, we must focus on building a sense of community where children have learned how to respect and get along well with one another, to be more empathetic.

Social psychologist, Elliot Aronson, wrote about this in his analysis of the Columbine High School massacre. In his book entitled, *Nobody left to Hate* (2000). Aronson points to a lack of empathy as a root cause for the massacre, offering a solution

that building empathy will result in an understanding and acceptance of diversity to the degree that there will be “nobody left to hate.” To GenXers, building a strong community of respectful students who know how to get along with one another and are able to work together is a critical role of education.

The function of education to a GenXer then, is to produce respectful citizens. Respectful citizens as defined by Andy earlier as “kids that are empathetic, more in tune to what’s going on in the community and the world around them.” Students who have been instilled with “that sense of community, that sense of learning social norms, learning how to get along with others, learning how to work together,” as described by James. The type of person that Christine wants to be remembered by as described in the legacy she hoped to leave. That of a principal who was “inspiring, a role model, kind, caring, easy to talk to, encouraging and continually setting high expectations for students and staff.”

The differing world views and assumptions held by each of these generations drives their beliefs and behaviors as leaders. The beliefs each generation holds about the purpose of education drives their decisions and actions about how schools should be structured and the processes that should be used to deliver instruction.

The structure of a system defines its components and their relationships. In the educational system, the structure defines how schools are organized to produce results. Structures are the operations and procedures which impact student experiences such as teacher assignment, placement or grouping, and resource allocation. The difference in the generational perspectives toward the structure of education can be seen in their beliefs

about the school calendar, sorting students, resource allocation, and charter schools. which is described in the next section.

Structure of Education

The current structure of education has been established by the Boomers. The Boomers have been focused on strengthening democracy by providing an education that produces productive democratic citizens. While the structure has remained relatively unchanged since the beginning of the 20th Century, Boomers have been intent on structuring schools to provide an academic environment that focuses on achievement. This has resulted in changes to the school calendar.

School Calendar

The current focus on academics and achievement in today's schools began as Baby Boomers emerged as critics against the progressive education system incited by their predecessors (Silent Generation leaders). The Silent Generation leaders had reduced standards and requirements in response to the Baby Boomer rebellions of the 70s, bringing back progressive strategies. As the Boomer generation became the dominant culture in our schools, they began to exert their influence by refocusing education on academics.

This movement toward a focus on academics was reflected in a *Newsweek* story published in 1975 by Merrill Sheils (1975). The cover story entitled *Why Johnny Can't Write* heated up a debate over literacy and the back-to-the-basics movement, ushering in a new direction of school reform. Critics complained about the progressive strategies,

“arguing that these liberal reforms in pedagogy and curriculum and emphasis on educational opportunity had eroded authority and standards” (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 17).

Another indicator of a shift in the national mood toward stronger academics strongly revealed itself in the educational arena when the National Commission on Excellence in Education released their publication, *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983. The report depicted the schools as substandard, calling for higher standards and a return to academic excellence. Because of declining academic achievement scores, education was said to be failing the country. The report strongly supported higher academic standards and the development of student academic competencies.

The report also prompted discussions around the structure of schooling. The attitude toward experiential learning and the belief that progressive strategies were no longer producing the education needed prompted changes to the system that emphasized projects, activities, and student initiated learning.

“Following publication of *A Nation At Risk*, state after state increased high school graduation requirements, lengthened the school year, and added more tests” (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 174). The drive for higher test scores forced schools administrators to move to a new school structure. “Once-flourishing progressive classroom approaches such as portfolios, project-based teaching, and performance-based testing that blossomed between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, have since shriveled under the unrelenting pressure for higher test scores” (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 180).

In moving away from progressive strategies as a way to refocus academically, Boomers have modified the school calendar, introducing the concept of year round

schooling. This concept has been implemented sporadically as none of the principals in this study have year round school. However, the Boomer principals believe that there is not enough time to accomplish what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning and therefore advocate for calendars that provide more time for both teachers and students.

“We keep piling more and more on teachers and we don’t give them the time they need to learn new things, to be a part of professional learning communities,” complained Vicki. Her solution is more days in the year for teaching and learning.

I think the year round calendar is a good thing. Because I’m an elementary person, expanding the day doesn’t really work because little kids get tired and worn out and after 3:30 nobody is learning very well. So a longer day I don’t think is the solution. I think more days of school is the solution. We don’t need the summer to bring the crops in any more.

Jack too spoke of the need for more time for teacher learning. He believes we need to engage teachers more in conversations around teaching and learning, stating that he would love to be in a school where the staff could sit around and discuss trends in education and dialogue about the need of the students they teach and what can be done differently. While he believes that something needs to be done to prevent kids from losing learning during the three months of the summer, he doesn’t know if the answer is year round school as he believes that both teachers and students need time to recharge their batteries.

Betty believes that we need both a longer school year and longer school days, but those days would not necessarily need to be within the current structure of the day or even in the school building. What is important she believes, is that “kids need more learning time to be able to get the skills they need.”

Richard too believes the structure of the school day could look differently than it does now. Opening up the school night and weekends would happen in his ideal school, which would have connections to city activities or social activities. Betty's ideal school would also have connections to real life learning environments, such as parks, lakes and music.

Surprisingly enough GenXers are not as focused on academics and achievement as are the Boomers. GenXers, whose focus is to create a safer America by producing respectful citizens, are more focused on creating a safe, happy and harmonious environment. Only one of the GenX principals spoke to the possibility of changing the school calendar, but did not share a belief that more time was needed. In fact, one of the pluses he identified for a year round calendar was not centered around academic time, but focused on safety.

I think we need schools doing research to find out what is working and what isn't working. Is there something else we should try? Four day schools...longer days? Until we've had a little research it's hard to say it will fix it or won't. Year round has its pluses and minuses and the district was right to implement where they did...the schools needed it to keep the students safe.

Sorting Students

Little has changed in the ways in which students are grouped in our public systems. While the Boomers believe strongly in flexible grouping by ability and interest and all agreed that students can benefit from sorting, schools continue to group students primarily by chronological age. The most common sorting practice today is in the area of guided reading, with some grouping beginning to occur in math.

I thought perhaps with the strong belief in flexible grouping that they might advocate that schools be organized by something other than chronological age, but this was not the

case. Both Betty and Vicki believe that students should be organized by chronological age into grade levels.

“Right now our curriculum is so complicated and so full that I think the best thing is to leave student leveled by grade because the stress it causes on teachers to master curriculums at multiple level lowers the academic standards in that classroom.” stated Vicki. Betty’s beliefs are similar. “I think socially students still need to stay within their physical age.” she said.

While the GenXers were a little more supportive of grouping students in multi-age levels, they did not advocate for changes in the ways in which students are currently organized. In fact, they didn’t question the current structures at all, but rather looked for ways in which to provide flexible grouping within the established structures. Jason shared his beliefs about sorting students.

We’re a big believer in guided reading. Well, we put students in different and similar guided reading levels and what that does...it allows us to instruct at their instructional level where we can do the most good. So that kind of thing is great. Whether you...in my opinion...is whether you like it or not, you need to do some of that ability grouping, sorting if you want to call it. It would be great if we could take the kids as they are and teach them all together. but that’s just not feasible.

Christine too believes in sorting students for flexible grouping, but is careful in ensuring that the sorting mechanism does not become a standard form of ability grouping. “I think you need to have some parameters....the same age group I think is beneficial.” she shared. “I just think if you did it solely by ability, you could really have quite a span of age in a classroom.” She believes sorting can have a negative affect.

I believe you do have to differentiate instruction and sometimes when you’re differentiating instruction, you are sorting children because you are ability grouping them...whether it’s into that certain reading group so that they can learn.

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I believe you do have to differentiate instruction and sometimes when you’re differentiating instruction, you are sorting children because you are ability grouping them...whether it’s into that certain reading group so that they can learn.

But hopefully when you're doing that you're continually assessing and reassessing those kids so you are not saying you are always in this group, you are always with these kids.

I was a bit surprised that the ways in which students were organized for learning was not something that any of the GenXers had given much thought to. When I asked James if he thought the way we grouped student with age group was appropriate, he responded, "I've never really thought about that."

In short, the Boomers did not express opposition against the current structure of school other than the need for an expanded calendar of some sort. Both generations believe the structure of schooling should continue in a way that allows for flexible grouping of students by both interests and abilities, but believe the current structure of organizing students by physical age was appropriate. The main difference between the two generations around the structures of education was in the way in which resources are allocated.

Resource Allocation

One of the biggest differences between the Boomers and GenXers lies in the way in which they believe resources should be allocated. The Boomers have placed a high percentage of resources toward struggling students. In doing so, they believe student achievement can be improved by providing an academic curriculum focused on student need.

The Boomer focus on student needs can be seen in the legislation of No Child Left Behind and the current initiatives focused on Response to Intervention (RTI). In a recent book published by Richard Allington, *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention: Research-based Designs* (Allington, 2008), Allington presents eight

research-based principles he believes would provide the foundation for effective reading intervention programs.

Providing an overview of what struggling readers need to become proficient readers, Allington asserts that at least 30 additional minutes of focused reading instruction per day should be provided to the youngest struggling readers to accelerate their reading development to a point in which they can read at an adequate level. For students beyond second grade, additional intervention time is needed for struggling readers.

This type of intense intervention and the percentage of resources directed to struggling learners prompt GenXers to believe the allocation of resources are askew, focusing too much on student need at the expense of student interest. This they believe has been damaging to education.

James is particularly disconcerted as he believes that undue resources are being placed in the areas of reading and math. “Other important areas are suffering as a result of that in terms of instructional time given in the day,” he says. He fears that NCLB has caused us to place the lion’s share of resources, time, and energy on a segment of the student body.

We are putting ungodly resources into this little game we’re playing to try to get kids from the 38th percentile to the 43rd percentile, over that magic line that someone picked, 41% in Iowa. NCLB has caused us to get out of balance.

James believes that NCLB is causing the schools to focus too much on a child’s deficiencies and not build on his/her strengths. In other words, it forces the focus to be based on student needs at the expense of student interest. He also feels that we have to be careful so that we don’t take the subject that is hardest for a student and “make him bang

his head against the wall with it all day long.” This intense focus on deficiencies along with the fear of the sanctions placed on schools is prompting schools to lose creativity and energy.

This fear of being in need of assistance and being on that list and all of the rigamarole you have to go through when you are identified as SINA or DINA, I think has forced us to go overboard. What’s happening is we’re losing people’s creativity and energy for great teaching.

Jason believes that schools should not be held 100% accountable with the amount of resources required to do so.

The theory behind we need to do everything we can to get our kids to read and write is great, but to hold the schools accountable for 100% of that is not right. And then with no resources we’re going to cut 1.5% across the state...and our building doesn’t have enough to run. Out PTO, the parents, are pouring money at us whenever we can use it just so we can have the things we need to survive. And we’re a fairly well-to-do school district. So it’s scary that way.

He believes all of the resources required to get students to that level of accountability puts a lot of pressure on student.

Back growing up you didn’t know anybody who had any of these problems or diagnosis...health wise, whether mental or otherwise...and then the pressure the kids have on them. Growing up...you didn’t know if somebody couldn’t read, eventually they were going to read. Now...we put all of these resources into getting everybody up to snuff so to speak, and all the testing we have...I think sometimes it’s a lot of pressure on kids

Andy believes that there are not enough resources available to provide opportunities to student beyond the academic curriculum. He expressed his frustration of not being able to fund more field trips, and articulated his desire for expanded experiences for students when he described his ideal school.

We might be heavy on academics in the morning...I think in the afternoon then we have opportunities to engage in music, athletics, arts, and at least, we take one day a week or something of that nature and do some community service project or

we'd partner up and learn how to get around on public transportation, learn how to order a meal at a restaurant, how to open doors for each other

Christine is also concerned about resource allocation being focused too much on student need, sharing that she does not believe resources are distributed equitably at the different buildings within her district.

I think it would be nice to have those resources available in all buildings....we're a more affluent building so we have one resource teacher and a half-time counselor where some buildings have multiple resource teachers and Title I...and a family resource center so it's really kind of inequitable in that its based on the needs of the students. But in every building there are students that need that stuff! You just might not have a large enough population to do that. So that's a struggle that I have.

Like James, she is also concerned that resources allocation based on student need prevents them from expanding on student interest. She believes that one of the things missing in education is the ability to look at the interests of children and provide time and curricular experiences that expand on what the students would like to learn.

Focusing so many resources on student needs challenges the ability of these principals to provide the type of environment they believe children need, an environment in which children feel safe and happy and can explore their interests without focusing too much on their deficiencies. Having been part of a progressive educational system that each spoke warmly about, they are less focused on academics and more intent on providing an emotionally safe school. This focus surfaced in their beliefs about education, in the way they described their ideal school, and in the legacies they hope to leave.

For example, James' legacy focuses around creating an emotionally safe school as opposed to a legacy that focuses on student achievement. "We have a saying, we want to

be the best school in the great state of Iowa. Period,” he shares. When I asked him to define what it is to be the best school, he said that he wanted anyone who came to visit the school to think, “Wow, I have never been in a school that’s had a better feeling. It’s alive with kids who are learning and happy.” He said he wants to have that reputation before he leaves.

My idea is always, if we can, achieve this wonderful climate here of children feeling excited and proud of their school, treating each other respectfully, nobody is being picked on or teased, nobody wasting time having to worry about coming to school and something bad happening to them.

James shared with me that the best school in the state of Iowa is one where both parents and student believe it is. “A lot of it is customer service and satisfaction,” he adds.

Charter Schools

Education Secretary Arne Duncan has made it clear that charters schools are central to the Obama administration’s commitment to improving education through innovation. In fact, states that do not have public charter school laws or place caps on the growth of charter schools are considered hostile and will be jeopardized in their applications for the Race to the Top fund.

The perspectives around Charter Schools do not appear to be divided among generational lines. Interestingly enough, Iowa is considered a hostile state in its legislation toward charter schools, and most of the principals in the study espoused similar attitudes.

While both the Boomers and GenXers are strong advocates of the public school system, the Boomers readily identified the public school system as one of the main things

that should not change in education. One of the principals even spoke strongly of the need to retain the neighborhood school concept, advocating that Iowa maintain the same number of districts as we have now.

Only one GenX principal believes that charter schools may be another route to consider as he is “not opposed to anything that will help the whole system.” Unsure as to how it would work, he does believe we can make the system better somehow.

Some of the principals were deeply concerned about charters. “Vouchers and charter schools, I think, are really scary,” shared GenX principal, Christine. “Especially when you know that with each child comes the funding, and when you start pulling those children out of there, you’re pulling that money to provide the services and resources to make that school a better school.” She said that she is not at all an advocate of vouchers or charter schools.

Boomer principal Vicki is not in favor of charter schools either and is also opposed to vouchers. She shared her belief that public schools are important and that we should not sell out to private schools as everyone should have equal opportunity in public schools.

Overall, there was little thought given by either generation to the structure of schooling. When given the opportunity to share their ideas about their dream school, structure was barely addressed. In fact, when I asked the GenXers to share their thoughts about their dream school, there was hesitation in their responses with replies such as “I’ve never really thought about that.”

Process of Education

Process defines the sequence of activities and the knowledge and skills needed to produce the desired outcomes (Gharajedaghi, 1999). To surface assumptions held by the principals about the processes used to educate students and hold teachers accountable, I categorized their responses according to their beliefs about curriculum, standards and benchmarks, accountability, and performance pay.

The Baby Boomer education reform efforts were clearly defined after the signing of the historical No Child Left Behind Act by President George W. Bush. The legislation made it clear that excellence in education is measured by test scores in math and reading and that holding teachers accountable through standards and testing was key to achieving excellence. Academic achievement and accountability then have been driving forces behind the practices of the Baby Boomer generation, who have defined the processes used today to deliver education.

As a generation, Boomers have focused on providing an academic curriculum that centers on the needs of children. Their focus on achievement and accountability has driven their leadership practice and was not only a shift in practice from their predecessors, but a shift from the traditional system they had rebelled against as they came of age.

The same generation that once demanded ‘unconditional amnesty,’ pass-fail courses and a ‘don’t fold, spindle, or mutilate’ anti-computer ethos is now imposing zero tolerance, more homework and a wide array of tests on their own children (Strauss, 2005, p 1).

This shift was not expected. As a generation, the youthful Boomer activists from the 1960s moved into their mid-life power shedding their rebellious characteristics and

united to bring back the type of education they had rebelled against. The best explanation for this unexpected change in behavior is described below:

As these rebellious and revolutionary movements are successful in overthrowing the existing social order and creating a new one, the nature of this youth group is quickly transformed. As soon as a new social hierarchy and family structure are established which identify themselves with the new social order, these youth groups entirely lose their rebellious, deviant characteristics and usually become transformed into legitimate, collectively organized groups (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 315).

The differing beliefs around achievement and accountability are subtle at first glance, but the focus of GenerationX principals is different. It's not that GenXers are unconcerned about academics, but GenXers are less enamored with the drive for accountability than are the Boomers. Unlike Boomers who have focused on student needs, GenXers are more interested in providing a curriculum that focuses on student interest. Their differing attitudes toward academics and accountability can be seen in their perspectives about the process for delivering content (curriculum and standards and benchmarks), the process for measuring and reporting student progress (accountability), and the process for rewarding teachers (performance pay).

Curriculum

How do you define a successful principal? "By looking at successful elementary kids," responds Boomer principal, Jack. "If you have successful kids, there's got to be a reason for that," he adds. "How do you define a successful kid? By looking at academic achievement."

The Boomer belief that educational success is measured by academic achievement has been a driving factor behind their leadership. In this, they have been focused on providing a core academic curriculum designed to increase student achievement for all.

The current focus on an academic curriculum was a shift from the progressive strategies implemented by the Boomer predecessors, the Silent Generation leaders.

As described earlier, the Boomers inherited a progressive system of education that emerged under the leadership of the Silent Generation, who had shifted educational priorities toward the progressive side. Under their leadership, the Silent Generation leaders lowered academic expectations and backed away from acting *in loco parentis*, reducing graduation requirements and expanding electives. See Table 1

Table 1

Reform Agendas

1964-1984	1984-2008
<p>Dominate Generation of Leaders: The Silent Generation (born 1925-1942)</p>	<p>Dominate Generation of Leaders: The Baby Boomer Generation (born 1943-1960)</p>
<p><i>REFORM AGENDA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Return to Progressive Strategies -Open education -Affective learning valued more than cognitive learning -Graduation requirements reduced -Course electives expanded -Officials backed away from acting <i>in loco parentis</i> -Dress codes eliminated 	<p><i>REFORM AGENDA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A Nation at Risk (1983) -Push for a meaningful curriculum (Allen Bloom's <i>The Closing of the American Mind</i>) -Core knowledge curriculum (E.D. Hirsch book <i>Cultural Literacy</i>, 1987) -Standards and high stakes testing (<i>Nation at Risk</i> and <i>Goals 2000, 1994</i>) -Uniform core curriculum (No Child Left Behind, 2001)

The shift back toward an academic curriculum intensified as critics reacted to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which prompted a change in attitude toward the progressive strategies and experiential learning. Concerns surfaced about the quality of the curriculum used to educate children and the subsequent lack of knowledge and intellect.

Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) identified problems with higher education as a contributing factor to failing democracy. Concerned with students' lack of intellectual engagement, Bloom placed blame on a curriculum devoid of meaning. "The new consensus was there is an essential body of knowledge, and this generation wasn't taught it" (Strauss, 2005, p. 3).

This was evident when E.D. Hirsch (1987) urged schools to focus on knowledge, identifying a core body of knowledge that all students needed in order to become culturally literate. His book, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) led to the development of a curriculum of "core knowledge" and the establishment of "core knowledge" schools.

The Boomers have continued to focus on core academics. While they support electives in school, academics is clearly their priority. "I think there ought to be a set of core things we take and if you have that core stuff, then take electives," shares Boomer principal, Jack.

Richard too supports electives, but not if providing electives takes away resources from core instruction. "Unless you do it a different way you would be taking money away from some core courses, and I don't think that would benefit anybody to do that," he states.

Vicki feels the same about electives. Basing her perspective on the experience of two of her own children, she shared that she "had one child who took too many electives and that made college a real struggle for her because she hadn't taken enough of those basic courses that make college easier."

Of the two kids, I noticed that the one that stayed with the more advanced math, science and language arts seemed to do okay. College was easier for him. So I don't think electives should be eliminated, but I also think you need to stay with those core amount of courses you need that prepares you to be a reader, a speaker, a writer, and a mathematician as you leave high school.

Recall from Chapter 2 that the Baby Boomers grew up in a traditional system that emphasized academics. While their rebellious, spirited behavior forced changes that resulted in reduced academic demands, increased electives and lowered graduation requirements, they brought back the same focus on an academic curriculum during their leadership, replicating a system very similar to the system in which they were educated.

Recall also that the Boomers felt as though their educational experience was good for some, but not for all. They believed the system failed struggling learners. Under their leadership they have replicated a traditional system in which they experienced success and enhanced the deficit areas by focusing on achievement and accountability measures that would ensure success for all learners.

Unlike the Boomers, GenXers are more supportive of a curriculum that provides electives and expanded opportunities for students. As James explains, we need to help our graduates fill all the different roles in the community, not just academic roles. "So therefore," he states, "it does not make sense that our sole purpose would be academic within the school."

As described in Chapter 2, the GenX principals attended elementary and middle school during the 1980s and 1990 and spoke about their education with much warmth and excitement. They were part of the progressive system that they believed was very effective, one that emphasized open education and student initiated learning through

projects. They attended high school during a time where course electives were expanded and traditional subjects were divided into minicourses.

Christine had described the system as “very, very good.” She shared that the teachers were always challenging students to try new things and broaden their horizons. James had described the system as extremely effective sharing that he had many great memories about it and that it was never boring. Jason shared that school was a great thing, indicating that he felt his education was cutting edge due to the experiences he had with student projects. So it is with great fondness for the system in which they grew up that they aspire to replicate.

GenXers are concerned that the current focus on academic achievement and accountability has come at the expense of student interest. They believe strongly that the curriculum should focus beyond the academics, and provide a character education component that teaches students how to be respectful and caring individuals.

Andy believes that “exposing kids or allowing kids time to do musical activities, to do PE, to do art” is important. While he believes this is becoming more difficult when the state law says you can’t ask for money for field trips, he believes in the importance of “getting kids experiences about the community and learning by doing.” In this, he believes strongly that “getting out on field trips, exposing kids to cultural events, taking them to places like Hancher” are things that need to continue in education.

He also shared his strong belief that education needs to take advantage of technology to connect with the world to start to understand other cultures. “I can’t believe we don’t have, with all the research out there that talks about language

continued learning but they shouldn't be lessened in any way and children should be exposed to as much as they can so they make an informed choice about what they feel they will be best suited to do.

Jason and Andy too believe in choices and electives, placing a lower value on a college education than do the Boomers. "Maybe the university isn't the end goal for students who go through a public school system or any school system," shares Andy. He believes that education needs to "have different avenues and opportunities for those kids to be successful."

Jason too speaks to providing alternate paths that don't lead to a college education.

Not everybody is going to the U of I to be a doctor or whatever so they still need channels, choices to have. Some people don't know what they want to do and I was one of those. I took all of the things to prepare myself for a four-year college, but I didn't know what I wanted to do and that's not going to go away. So I don't think there's a mold that everybody can fit into. I think you need to have those electives.

His belief that education should focus on providing an education to serve the individual interests of the child was also reflected in his beliefs about the purpose of education:

It should be to have every child that enters a kindergarten room finish the 12th grade system to meet their potential and/or exceed it. Hopefully exceed what we thought their potential was. Get them ready for whatever future they want to have. It's still a democracy; it's a free country to do what you want and hopefully we've prepared you to be able to do that.

Like the other GenX principals, James too believes children need many opportunities. "I think the more options you have to offer children, the greater the chances are that they are going to get hooked into something that they love doing and

they feel successful at, and I believe the more opportunities for kids to be a part of things, the bigger interest the better.” He then adds, “I can’t imagine how anyone can argue that!”

Why are the Boomers so focused on providing an academic curriculum? By focusing on an academic curriculum, whether it be basic or minimal standards or competencies, education is used as a mechanism to instill in members of society the basic skills and competencies needed to survive. The connection of survival to a basic education can best be explained in an article written by H.S Shapiro entitled *Curriculum Alternatives in a Survivalist Culture: Basic Skills and the “Minimal Self”* (1986).

In this work, Shapiro connects the study completed by Christopher Lasch in 1984, *The Minimal Self*, to the basic skills phenomenon. Using Lasch’s argument that a survival mentality is the product of people who have lost confidence in the future, Shapiro believes:

there are strong connections between Lasch’s survivalist mentality/culture and some of the assertions found in conservative educational discourse—especially centered around the demand for a ‘return to basics’ in matters of curriculum. Such discourse can be understood as a response to, and an expression of, survivalism (Shapiro, 1986, p. 295).

Shapiro goes on to describe the connection between the need to return to basics and the need to survive:

The development of individual capacities through the acquisition of appropriate knowledge or skills at school becomes, in short, the vehicle for human survival in contemporary American society. The perspective of ‘basic skills’ and ‘minimum competencies’ asserts, ultimately, an individualistic world-view in which personal effort and ability, not structural change, becomes the means to deal with the present harsh reality (Shapiro, 1986, p. 297).

A guiding principle of generational analysis is that each cohort's basic values and outlooks are shaped by shared historical experiences during their formative years. In response to the events that members of the Baby Boomer generation experienced as they formed their world view (the Cold War and the Vietnam War) and the message they received to rebuild and strengthen America and democracy, this generation refocused on an academic curriculum as a means to survival.

A survivalist mentality also underlies the beliefs of Generation X, who grew up in an era of limited opportunity during a time of reengineering and downsizing. They have grown skeptical of institutions and believe they need a myriad of skills in order to be prepared to travel new roads should the road they are traveling meet a dead end. Thus education should provide a curriculum that allows for students to pursue individual interests and expand their knowledge and skills to travel down any path they choose. This equates to a curriculum that does not focus solely on a set of core subjects, but a curriculum that provides many opportunities to learn through electives. College is not a necessity then, but just another path to choose from.

GenXers also formed their worldview during a time when terrorism was on the rise. They have learned that while the world is not safe, school can be. Survival in a safe world is contingent upon the ability of people to accept diversity and work together. In this, the curriculum must provide opportunities to build character and trust and provide students with the skills to work together and respect one another. Thus GenXers believe that schools must provide experiences that move beyond academics and provide students with a safe environment.

in the 1990s agreed that something had to be done. The answer was to impose standards and high-stakes tests to direct curriculum, demand certain levels of performance, and insist on penalties if the standards were not met (Marx, 2002, p. 4).

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, urged President George Bush to create a national system of standards and assessments. While Bush funded the creation of national standards, controversy around the reading and history components caused the movement to fail.

This prompting led to the enactment of Goals 2000 in 1994. This was the first major education legislation enacted by President Bill Clinton, a member of the Baby Boomer generation. Goals 2000 (1994) provided funds to states for the development of standards and assessments, authorizing a new federal board to certify national and state standards. Clinton proposed the creation of a national test to measure the nation's progress in 1997 and in 2001, the No Child Left Behind legislation was enacted mandating standardized testing and attempting to ensure a uniform core curriculum (<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbreference/page.html>)

Having a national test assumes we have national academic standards, because agreement is first needed on what should be known before a test can be administered. Congress—this time controlled by republicans—rebuffed Clinton by placing restrictions on the use of federal funds for any national test. Much of the opposition was rooted in a fear of federal control of education. Thus, the idea of a national test and related standards was killed a second time (Jennings, 2009).

Despite failed attempts by both President George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to establish national standards and tests, the Obama administration is endorsing more challenging standards and the call for common national standards as a way to improve schools. Given the controversy surrounding standards I was curious as to how these administrators viewed them, wondering if any of them espoused the views of Alfie Kohn:

It has taken some educators and parents a while to realize that the rhetoric of "standards" is turning schools into giant test-prep centers, effectively closing off intellectual inquiry and undermining enthusiasm for learning (and teaching). It has taken even longer to realize that this is not a fact of life, like the weather -- that is, a reality to be coped with -- but rather a political movement that must be opposed (www.alfiekohn.org).

My main curiosity was whether the dissention around standards was generational in nature, whether one generation embraced them while another opposed them. What I learned is that while both of the generations say they are strong believers and advocates for standards and benchmarks, they appreciate them for different purposes.

The Boomers' fondness for standards stems from their belief that standards serve the purpose of focusing teacher attention on important skills and holding them accountable. The GenX fondness stemmed from their beliefs that standards provide a guide for student learning, not because they hold teachers accountable. In fact, GenXers expressed concerns that standards and benchmarks resulted in a curriculum that stifled teacher creativity and flexibility, focusing too much on student need at the expense of student interest.

The Boomers did not express any concern about standards stifling teacher flexibility. Rather, they believed they were necessary in helping to focus teachers. "I think it gives you the things that you need to focus on," shared Richard. "It focuses the teachers and then of course, the learners' attention on what's important: skills that the kids need to get rather than what people enjoy teaching."

Vicki too felt that because they let teachers and students both know what they are aiming for, "they're a good thing that way in that they hold everybody accountable for what needs to be accomplished." Jack also believes strongly that standards and

benchmarks are important. Unlike the GenXers, he believes that standards do allow for teacher flexibility.

If you don't know where you're going, how do you get there? There are a lot of ways to get from point A to point B, but you better know you're going to get to point B. If you don't have point B in mind, I'm not sure as a teacher how you get there. So I think that standards and benchmarks have to be out there to let us know how we're going to get to a certain point and what we expect kids to be able to do. I think there's a tremendous amount of opportunity for teachers to do different things to get to that point. I had a kindergarten teacher that told me one year I was taking the fun out of teaching. I said, 'why?' She said because you're telling me I have to teach this. And I say, 'No, that's when you become a good teacher by taking what you know you have to teach and making it fun for the kids.' She didn't like my answer.

GenX principal, James, believes standards are crucial to knowing what should be taught at every grade level, but has concerns about the restrictions they could potentially place on teacher choice.

I would love to see a high degree of flexibility and creativity for individual teachers to get to practice their craft within the guidelines of making sure what they are doing is addressing the standards and benchmarks so that children are getting the education that they should be getting.

Christine also believes that standards and benchmarks are good in that they provide a guide for teaching and learning. She also feels it is good to have direction and consistency for all students so that one classroom isn't teaching one thing while another classroom is teaching something completely different. However, she too worries about the restrictions placed on teacher flexibility and the lack of opportunity to focus on student interest. This concern was expressed when she spoke of the purpose of education.

"The purpose should be to educate the child as a whole academically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and to view that through a variety of modalities as well as through a variety of curriculum and opportunities." She went on to say that while she felt

we were working towards that end, she did not feel education was at that point yet. What is missing is:

looking at not the needs, but the interests of children and bringing those into the curriculum and expanding on those, taking the time to if a child wants to learn more about our solar system. I can't do that. We're on this pace--we have got to move on. We can't go there. We can't do this big end-of-the unit culmination activity because I have to teach this in so many weeks.

While both generations of principals felt standards were good, they appreciated them for different reasons. The GenX concerns that education focuses too much on the needs of children at the expense of student interest is also reflected in their beliefs about accountability.

Accountability

Standardized testing has become a political issue, with many arguing that such accountability is a necessity. Standardized tests, it is argued, provides an objective means of measuring student achievement. The No Child Left Behind Legislation, enacted and supported through the leadership of the Baby Boomer generation, supports this argument.

I asked each generation how they felt about No Child Left Behind. While the Boomer principals I interviewed felt that NCLB was in need of changes, they were much more supportive of the legislation than the GenX administrators. This is not surprising given their belief about the purpose of education and their focus on achievement and accountability. The Baby Boomer administrators were much more positive about its impact as they all felt that NCLB had many good parts, that it has caused educators to be more diligent in collecting data, and that raising standards has been good.

“Did it force us to look at test scores?” asks Boomer principal, Jack. “Yes,” he replies. “Is that good?” he asks. Again he answers his own question, “Yes.” Jack felt

there were some good things and some bad things associated with NCLB, but that we shouldn't throw out the entire system.

"I think we need to be accountable just like every other profession is accountable," he states emphatically. While Jack is generally positive about NCLB, he does not believe we picked the right assessment by choosing ITBS in Iowa. And while he agrees with the GenX administrators that it is not feasible to get 100% of the students to the 40th percentile, he does not believe this is a reason to change the direction of NCLB.

We are certainly doing a better job looking at assessment information than we did 15 years ago. The reality is every school in Iowa is not going to be able to get 100% of our kids at the 40th percentile, but that's our choice as a state to do that, which I kind of admire.

Richard too has positive things to say about NCLB, although he too questions the use of measuring proficiency by Iowa's standardized test.

I think NCLB has many good parts. Holding people accountable I think is probably, to me, the better part of this. Having standards that people are held accountable to I think makes a lot of sense. The piece of testing has me puzzled because in Iowa, I don't believe we are testing as we should using the standardized test scores as our measure.

GenX administrators don't really feel there is a need for NCLB. Having moved into the profession when the drive for accountability was already in place, they don't have the historical perspective to know that it was ever any different. As James states:

I've been a principal for six years. NCLB is the only reality I've known as a building administrator. I don't know it any other way so I can't see what it was like before.

Overall GenX administrators feel that while NCLB has made us accountable, it is not feasible to get students to 100% proficiency. They believe that NCLB has caused

the allocation of resources to get out of balance and that the direction of the legislation needs to change. Accountability, they believe, would occur without the sanctions and threats imposed by NCLB.

“I think NCLB is good in theory but poor in practice,” states Christine. She believes that the accountability piece needs to change.

I think you cannot look at children that way. You need to look at what is most important--that children are growing, that they are making a year's growth, that they are making academic growth. But to take away services, to put people on watch lists and to take away extra benefits to those schools and to offer parents opportunities to take their child to a different school is only hurting that school.

Her opinion is not much different than James:

I think there have been some positives in the sense that it certainly requires people to do a good job of looking at all children's scores and not casting anybody aside. But overall, it is devastating and in my mind, it is in serious need of alteration.

Accountability, they believe, can happen without NCLB. “I think it's done a nice job trying to hold us accountable,” shares Andy. “I think our school improvement plans can probably do just as good a job if we took those seriously by tying it to that accountability piece,” he adds. James also believes schools can be accountable without NCLB.

I would like to think that without that big stick of the threat of getting on the watch list or something, that you would still as a staff be examining those basic skills scores and you would be looking at item analysis.

While accountability has been a driving focus of Baby Boomer administrators, GenXers do not believe the drive for accountability has improved education. In fact, they believe that accountability has stifled creativity and the ability to bring more electives into the curriculum. In this, students have been deprived of the opportunity to explore

their interests. This was clear in Christine's reflection on the changes she has seen in education:

More accountability, more testing, more data driven. I wouldn't say that those changes improved education! It made people more accountable, but... in some ways it reduced, I think, the quality of education because now there's so much high-stakes test taking that it really does not leave a lot of room for creativity, as well as just expanding and really bringing those electives...because you're so focused on getting everything covered in such a short amount of time.

The concern that accountability has lessened opportunity was also reflected in James' response as he described what was happening at his son's attendance center in response to the school being identified as a School In Need of Assistance (SINA) in mathematics:

They are a school in need of assistance for math because they had enough kids who qualified. See at Lincoln we don't have enough kids to qualify as a subgroup. You have to have 40 kids to be a subgroup so the only thing is we don't have 40 in any of those categories. The closest we come is we have 30 kids in free and reduced that take the ITBS, so we are like 10 kids away from being a subgroup. Well guess what, if we had 40 we'd be on that list too because 76% of those kids were not proficient. We were about half of those kids, we just didn't have 40 in any of the categories so we looked fine cause our total makes it. Well Lincoln did. They're a bigger school so Lincoln got on that list because I think it was low SES: it was free and reduced, they had enough kids to be a subgroup and they didn't meet the trajectory a couple of years in a row so they are a school in need of assistance. So as a result they had to go through this massive school-wide math plan and all of this and also students could transfer out of there if they wanted to go to Shilling. So as a Lincoln parent you have this decision to make. Whose going to take advantage of that free pass to Shilling? It's going to be parents who are more actively engaged, concerned about it and stuff like that so all it's going to do is take more of Justin's little friends and role models.

James went on to describe his dismay about the focus the school was required to have on math, disadvantaging the students due to the consequence of having to focus time and resources in that area. He contrasts what Shilling teachers were required to do with what his teachers at Lincoln were able to do. "We have a lot of really cool stuff

because nobody's on us to make this insane math plan," he states. "We get to do things that are more meaningful to us and we get to use our energy and creativity for good and over there they had to go through this and that."

While he does admit that the Shilling staff had wonderful professional development around math, "As a Lincoln parent I'm not thrilled with it because guess what, my kid doesn't need remedial math at all." His concern that accountability has lessened opportunity was reflected in his next statement as he spoke about what his son's teachers were forced to do.

So his teachers now, instead of having time to design more engaging lessons and instead of having time to plan something special and creative, well they're just learning about all of those kids in his class and how are they going to get those lower achieving ones up there in math and that is not all that applicable to my kid is what I'm saying. I'm just worried that is this really going to make the school better or is this going to limit what that school comes up with? They will probably improve in math instruction. I get it, they probably will, but what's the cost going to be?

While James is an advocate of using data to inform instruction, it's the accountability piece that he doesn't embrace. He believes that multiple forms of assessment should be used to help differentiate instruction but that data should not be used as an accountability mechanism to judge schools. "I just think the problem is the judgmental thing!" he states in frustration. "It's making judgments about whether a school is failing or not based on that data that I don't think can be done."

Performance Pay

It is evident that the current administration in Washington D.C. is highly interested in policy around teacher performance. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has clearly established his core beliefs around school reform. These efforts

include enhancing standards and assessments, establishing robust state data systems, turning around low-performing schools, and enhancing teacher effectiveness. The signature initiative of the Obama administration, Race to the Top funds, provides \$4.4 billion for states to experiment with innovative education initiatives. Central to this plan is the notion that increasing teacher quality is a critical need. In this, the Race to the Top funds requires teacher pay to be tied to student performance on standardized tests.

The push toward tying teacher performance to student data has great momentum. A recent report by The New Teacher Project (TNTP) entitled *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) identifies problems with teacher evaluation. TNTP studied 12 districts in four states and found that the systems used meaningless rating systems to evaluate performance, rating 99 percent of all teachers as “satisfactory”. The report urges districts to create a new comprehensive teacher evaluation system, a system “that fairly, accurately, and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement” (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 27).

With the impending retirement of baby Boomer educators, Duncan will have the opportunity to redesign the teaching force. Does the next generation espouse his views on performance pay? I asked the Boomer and GenX principals how they felt about teacher pay, and found that while the Boomers were open to considering different ways to reward teachers, they had mixed responses about merit pay. The GenXers in this study however, were adamantly opposed to it.

“I don’t have a problem with merit pay,” shared Boomer principal Richard. “I believe there are teachers that if you ask them in confidence if they believe in merit pay, they would say yes because they say I deserve more money than that person over there who isn’t getting the results I am, who isn’t trying as much as I am.” While he doesn’t have a problem with it, he shared his concern that “the drawback would be how people are judged and so fairness is an issue.”

Jack believes merit pay is very difficult because he doesn’t know how to define it. “But you look at the research and you know that the impact of a good teacher is tremendous,” he acknowledges. He just doesn’t believe that the way to make sure the best teacher is in front of the students is accomplished through merit pay.

I think our job is to help those middle-of-the road folks become better. Merit pay I think would be, unless you could figure out a way to do it, merit pay would be a real challenge. Professional envy. We have a hard enough time breaking the walls between classes right now. I would hate to see ‘I’m not going to share that because I can’t get merit pay.’

Vicki believes merit pay might be a bad thing for relationships. “Remember that old model shut your door and do your own thing?” she asked. “Now we’re trying to get everybody to be a part of that professional learning community and I think merit pay would work against that.”

Betty believes merit pay is impossible to implement. “To tie to what?” she asks. “If you tie it to student achievement, then you’re back to an imperfect standardized test for kids,” she adds. “The best teacher is a teacher who can take a student from where they are and grow them and broaden their learning.” She does not feel we have the tools to accomplish this.

think it is beneficial!” he states adamantly. “There should be a better way to get the results than that.”

Andy too is “definitely not a proponent.” He uses a neighboring school as an example to help justify his reasoning. “I’d be willing to bet some of the finest teachers in the district are at the building and I think it’s very unfair to them if we used student assessment scores or something like that to determine any kind of bonus or anything like that.”

If the evaluation system were to change, principals would need to spend more time observing teachers in their classrooms. This would require many administrators to depart radically from their current routines. While all of the principals I interviewed spoke of the high value they place on getting into the classrooms, their current practices would not be adequate for this change. This was evident when I accompanied the principals on their classroom visits during their shadows as the average amount of time spent in the classroom was less than three to five minutes with the majority of that time spent chatting informally with students as opposed to observing teacher behavior.

Summary

The two generations of principals differed in their beliefs about education. In short, the function of education to a Boomer is to strengthen America and democracy by producing productive citizens while GenXers believe education should create a safer America by producing respectful citizens.

During their leadership, Boomers have done little to change the structure of the system. Education is still delivered in traditional classroom structures in groupings of 20 to 30 students and for the principals in this study, the school calendar is still based on an

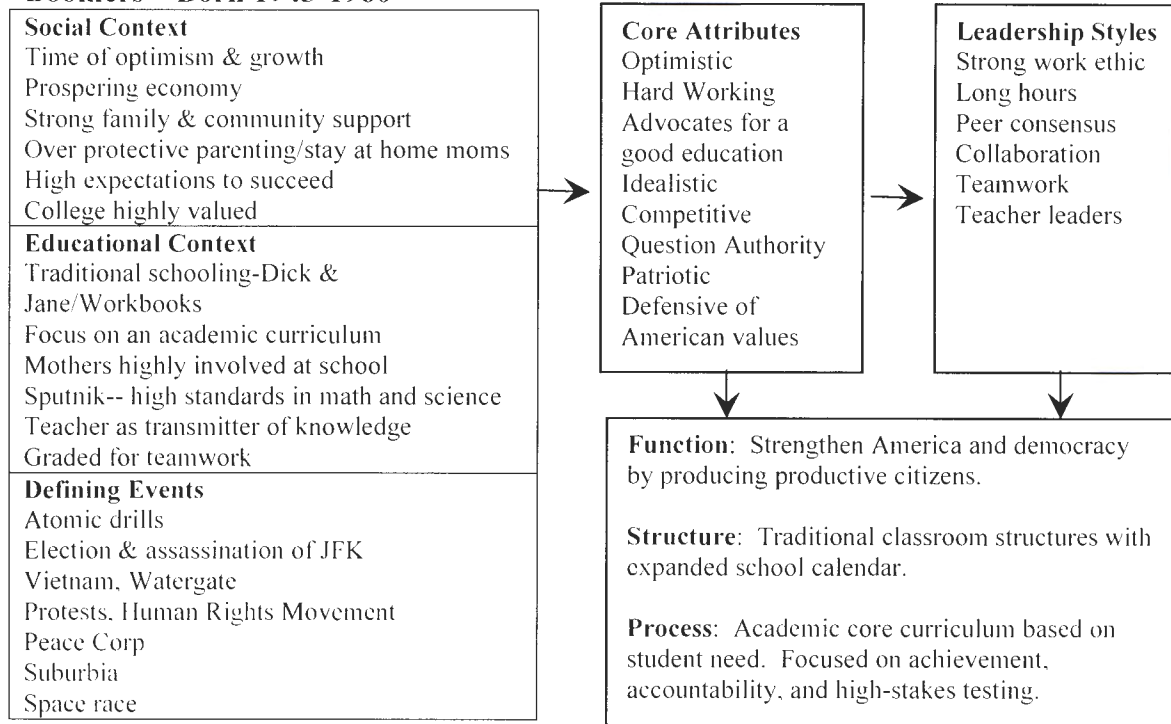
agrarian model. The Boomers did not feel as though there were enough time for students or teachers to gain the knowledge they needed, thus they advocated for an expanded calendar of some sort.

The GenXers have given very little thought to the structures of education. They do not challenge the current structures or groupings of students, and like the Boomers believe that some sort of flexible ability grouping is needed for instructional purposes. Like the Boomers, they believe schools should remain organized by chronological age.

The differing perspectives about the function of education impacts each generation's belief about the processes used to educate students. The Boomers have been focused on providing a core academic curriculum based on student need. Their intense focus on achievement has resulted in accountability measures based on high-stakes testing.

Intent on safeguarding the interests of the young, GenXers believe the focus on academics and accountability has been damaging to education and that resources have been allocated inappropriately toward basic academics. Believing that current educational practices focus too much on student need and student deficiencies, they believe that students should have access to an expanded curriculum with electives and opportunities to explore individual interests. They advocate for the type of education they received, which emphasized hands-on, project-based learning and believe strongly that schools should be a safe and happy haven for children. See Figure 3

Boomers—Born 1943-1960



Generation X—Born 1961-1981

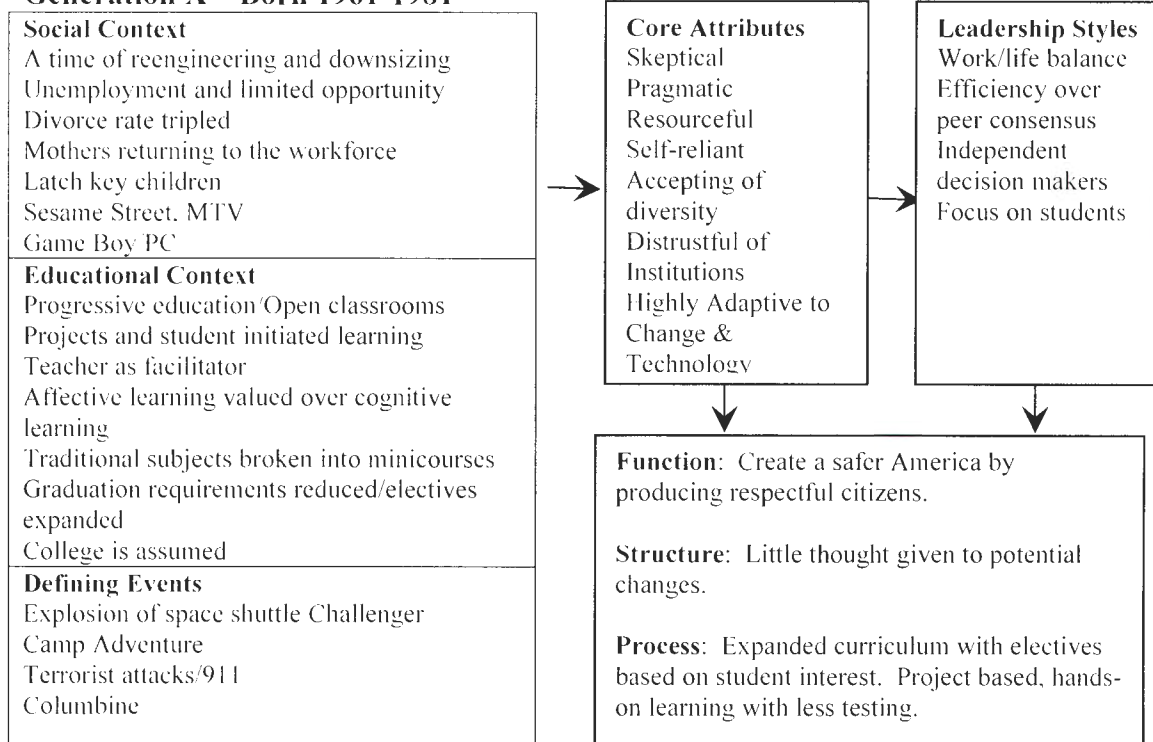


Figure 3. Differences in Educational Beliefs

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As established earlier, studies on generational analysis have illuminated the way in which the influences of historical and societal circumstances shape the belief system of generations as they move through their lifecycles. Each generation is shaped by the influences they share during their formative years, impacting their world view. This world view and the mutual identification and strong bond that develops between the members of a generation results in a strong solidarity, driving the power of the group. (Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Eisenstadt, 1956; Mannheim, 1952; Riesman, 1961; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000).

As each generation of educational leaders enter midlife, the influences of the common experiences and historical circumstances that took place during their formative and young adult years will shape their generational identity. This generational identity will impact the ways they respond to the forces driving education during their era of leadership.

“Generational identity through the twentieth century was fundamental in shaping national consciousness” (Edmund & Turner, 2002, p. 121). This is clearly evident in the national consciousness toward education in the United States. Historical research provides evidence that “each new generation, when it attains power, tends to repudiate the work of the generation it has displaced and to reenact the ideals of its own formative days” (Schlesinger, 1986, p. 30). In tracking school reform cycles from 1925 through 2009, it is evident that shifts in national consciousness and cycles of educational reform have occurred each time a new generation of leaders move into midlife.

Generational Impact on School Reform Cycles

Education between 1929 and 1946 was characterized as the progressive era. Leaders during this time were members of the “Lost Generation,” who were born between 1883 and 1900. Their leadership focused on providing a student centered education where open classrooms, team teaching and individual instruction typified the practice. In providing for individualized instruction, the curriculum was differentiated through the use of testing and leveling by ability, thus I.Q. tests were born. A comprehensive curriculum was offered with a variety of vocational programs.

By the 1940s the national mood toward education began to change. “Although proponents of the ideas of Dewey and other progressive educators still existed, especially in colleges of education, the tide of national opinion had clearly taken a conservative turn with regard to school and childrearing practices” (Rury, 2005, p. 193). The progressive educational agenda began to fade in popularity. “At the very time when educators shared a strong consensus about progressive ideas and practices, progressive education became an object of public ridicule” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 343).

The change in the direction of reform occurred as the next generation of leaders, the G.I. Generation, began to assume the dominant power. Born between 1901 and 1924, the reform agendas of this generation took the nation by surprise.

The leaders of American education in the late 1940s and early 1950s were so assured of their purpose that they were caught completely unawares when the grumbling dissident parents and school board members grew into a loud roar. There was simply no precedent in the history of American education for the tidal wave of protest that broke over the public schools during this period (Ravitch, 2000, p. 343).

Under the leadership of the G.I Generation, “schools were going ‘back-to-basics’ as it was felt that there was a need for a subject-centered education and an intellectual discipline” (Cheung, 2007, p. 184). During this time there was a renewed emphasis on core academic subjects and a shift from “efficiency” to “equity” was seen as the result of *Brown vs Board of Education* in 1954. The National Defense Act of 1958 shifted the curriculum to subject centered disciplines as opposed to a wide array of vocational offerings.

“The 1960s began with no hint of the troubles ahead for the schools and society. Educators enjoyed a keen sense of success” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 367). However, the change in national consciousness began to emerge as the next generation of leaders, the Silent Generation, moved into the dominant position of leadership. The change again caught the nation by surprise.

“In the 1960s, American society was shaken by seismic social, cultural, and political changes. This was all the more shocking because it followed the relatively placid era of the 1950s, when social problems had seemed solvable and ideological conflicts appeared to have abated” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 366).

The agenda of the Silent Generation surfaced. “By the mid 1960s, educational priorities had shifted back again toward the progressive side” (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 15). Under their leadership between 1964 and 1984, education again focused on the individual child and there was a return to progressive strategies and open education. Affective learning was valued more than cognitive learning while course electives expanded and graduation requirements were reduced.

This reform agenda would no longer be the focus once the next generation of leaders emerged. The critics “argued that these liberal reforms in pedagogy and curriculum and emphasis on educational opportunity had eroded authority and standards” (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 17). This resulted in a reform agenda established by the Baby Boomer generation that was different than that of their predecessors, catching the nation off-guard.

With knowledge increasing at an unprecedented rate, test scores sometimes dipping, and international competition knocking at the door, education reformers in the 1990s agreed that something had to be done. The answer was to impose standards and high-stakes tests to direct curriculum, demand certain levels of performance, and insist on penalties if the standards were not met (Marx, 2002, p. 4).

This was not the expected behavior from a generation who had once demanded ‘unconditional amnesty,’ pass-fail courses and a ‘don’t fold, spindle, or mutilate’ anti-computer ethos. However, the Boomers transformed into leaders who imposed zero tolerance, more homework and a wide array of tests on their own children (Strauss, 2005).

“Once-flourishing progressive classroom approaches such as portfolios, project-based teaching, and performance-based testing that blossomed between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, have since shriveled under the unrelenting pressure for higher test scores” (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 180).

The Baby Boomers response was to focus on achievement and accountability, resulting in an academic curriculum guided by standards and high-stakes testing. Though the attempt to produce national standards has failed twice, the Boomers continue to push for the establishment of a national curriculum.

It is clearly evident that changes in national consciousness and the cycles of educational reform coincide with the changing of generations. See Table 2. One explanation for these shifts can be attributed to the changing attitudes and perspectives of educational leaders as they pass through the seasons of their lives. As the older generation of leaders pass into a new phase of life giving way to their successors, an abrupt shift in the social mood of the nation is triggered. This changed is called a *Turning* (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

A turning is defined as a social mood that changes each time the generational archetypes enter a new constellation. Coined by historians William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997) who have examined the socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions throughout American history, a *Turning* is an era with a characteristic social mood, a new twist on how people feel about themselves and their nation. The historians have demonstrated that each time a new generation moves into midlife, a “turning” occurs. The turning results from the aging of the generational constellation and society enters a turning once every twenty years or so, when all living generations begin to enter their next phases of life (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

Table 2

Generational Traits

Lost Generation Progressive Era 1926-1946	-Student centered education such as open classrooms, team teaching, and individual instruction -Differentiated curriculum -Testing and leveling by ability/I.Q. tests -Comprehensive curriculum offering a variety of vocational programs
GI Generation Back to Basics 1946-1964	-Renewed emphasis on traditional core academic subjects -Shift from “efficiency” to “equity” -Subject centered disciplines
Silent Generation Progressive Education 1964-1984	-Open education -Affective learning valued more than cognitive learning -Graduation requirements reduced -Course electives expanded -Officials backed away from acting <i>in loco parentis</i> -Dress codes eliminated
Baby Boomer Generation Academic Education 1984-2009	-Standards and high stakes testing (<i>Nation at Risk</i> and <i>Goals 2000</i>) -Core knowledge curriculum (E.D. Hirsch book <i>Cultural Literacy</i>) -Uniform core curriculum (No Child Left Behind)

As the Baby Boomer generation approaches elderhood and Generation X approaches midlife, I don't think there can be any dispute that the national mood of the country is turning. Inevitably, Gen X administrators will be leading change, which will be guided by their assumptions around the system of education, which is different than that of the Baby Boomer administrators.

In a social system such as education, one must embrace a systems view that looks not at the individual parts, but at the interacting components of the system.

Acquiring a “systems view of education” means that we learn to think about education as a system, we can understand and describe it as a system, we can put the systems view into practice and apply it in educational inquiry, and we can

design education so that it will manifest systemic behavior. Once we individually and collectively develop a systems view then-and only then- can we become “systemic” in our approach to educational change, only then can we apply the systems view to the reconceptualization and redefinition of education as a system, and only then can we engage in the design of systems that will nurture learning and enable the full development of human potential (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004, p. 47).

The purpose of this study was to look at differences in the ways in which Baby Boomer and GenX principals view the system of education. In researching the formative years in which each generation of principals in this study formed their world view and examining their beliefs about education, it is evident they have differing perspectives, which impact their beliefs and practices as elementary principals.

This study then surfaced assumptions held by Baby Boomers and GenXers around their beliefs about leadership and the system of education, specifically their beliefs about the function, process and structure of education. While the current educational structures and policies that guide our educational system were established by the Baby Boomer generation, we could see significant changes as over one third of Iowa’s current administrators are eligible for retirement over the next five years. It is anticipated that by 2014, members of GenX will be the dominant culture of school leaders.

With leadership comes change. “Leaders lead change—because there’s nothing else to lead. If you’re not leading change—moving beyond current conditions and taking your people where they wouldn’t go on their own—you’re administering or managing the status quo” (Spady, 2001, p. 99). As the Baby Boomer generation begins to relinquish its power to that of its successor, Generation X will inevitably change the system established by the Boomers.

Surfacing the assumptions of our next dominant generation of leaders is important as uncovering the implicit assumptions at work in the system is integral to impacting any kind of sustained reform efforts. In comparing the formative years of the current generation with the emerging generation of school leaders as well as their beliefs about the system of education, it is evident that there are distinguishing differences in their world view that impacts their assumptions about education. These differences are summarized in the next section.

World Views

The context in which each of these generations formed their world views is quite different. The Baby Boomers came of age during a time of optimism and growth. Family life was strong, the majority of mothers did not work outside of the home, and children were overprotected and overindulged (Strauss & Howe, 1997). This generation experienced a sense of safety and family nurturing unknown to the GenX generation.

Boomers were reminded often from their depression era parents of the destruction and loss of war, and were taught to “waste not, want not.” Nuclear war and the fear of the spread of communism loomed as they were coming of age, and the need for a stronger America was clearly communicated. Attending new schools that emphasized a traditional education, they were sent the message that a college education was necessary to strengthen democracy. It was assumed that their generation would rebuild America. They sought to live up to those expectations through activist behavior, joining the Peace Corp, protesting the status quo and pushing for changes in civil and women’s rights. They learned that hard work and teamwork could impact change.

The schooling they received was traditional. They were part of an educational system that learned on workbooks and lectures as opposed to projects and hands-on learning. There was renewed emphasis on core academic subjects and the cry for higher standards for academic achievement emerged, particularly in mathematics and science following the launch of Sputnik. The National Defense Act of 1958 placed emphasis on subject centered disciplines.

While they believed the education system was effective for most students, they did not feel it was adequate for all. The system of tracking students in a college or non-college track had a negative effect on some, and they believed that the needs of struggling learners were not well met.

GenXers did not experience this same type of over-indulgent parenting.

“From the late 1960’s into the early 1980’s, the nation passed through a period where many aspects of life became less protective of, even apprehensive, about small children” (Strauss, 2005, p. 3).

Coming of age during a time of reengineering and downsizing that left their parents pink-slipped, GenX children were left to fend for themselves as the divorce rate tripled and mothers flooded back into the workforce. This has left their generation skeptical and distrustful of Corporate America (Bennis & Thomas, 2002).

As latch-key children, their time at home alone led them to make independent decisions and become self-reliant. This feeling of abandonment shaped their psyches, leaving them to yearn for real attention from their parents (Zemke et al., 2000).

GenXers were greatly impacted by terrorism and 9/11. Unlike the Boomers who formed their world view during a time of growth and optimism, GenXers formed their

view of the world during a time where opportunity was limited and fear was widespread. Marked by skepticism, the message they were sent was that the world is not a safe or trusting place so the keys to success are to exercise caution, distrust big organization, and become self-reliant.

The schooling the GenXers received was different than that of the Boomers. The traditional education system experienced by the Boomers was replaced to bring back progressive education, and open education emerged. The open school emphasized the same practices of progressive education, and the GenXers spoke warmly of the projects, activities, and student initiated learning they experienced. School was a place that provided them with a sense of safety and community. Unlike the Boomers who did not believe the system served all learners well, the GenXers were emphatic in describing the system as very effective.

This generation does not understand the bitter divisiveness present in the Boomer generation over war, religion and politics. They believe they are more pragmatic than their predecessors and more accepting of diversity. They do not possess such extreme views as do the Boomers.

The formative years of both generations has impacted their beliefs and values as elementary principals. Those differences are seen in their behaviors and perspectives on leadership as well as their beliefs about education.

Leadership Styles

The impact of the formative years of each generation is seen in their behavior and perspectives toward leadership. While both generations believe in the importance of

a strong instructional leader, the Boomers believe this is done by providing support to the teachers. GenXers provide leadership by advocating for students.

It is not surprising that the Boomers focus more on the teachers. As part of a generation raised with high expectations to change the world, they rallied together in teams to fight for equal rights. Teamwork became the means to an end, so their focus is on the means. In providing instructional leadership to the teachers (the means), the power of collective individuals will impact the students (the ends). In this, Boomers value peer consensus and a democratic decision-making process. This sense of teamwork is understandable given the fact that they were graded on their ability to share and work with others during their schooling days.

It is also not surprising that the GenXers are strong advocates for the individual child. Having grown up during a time of “child abandonment,” they are intent on safeguarding the interests of the young by providing the protection and nurturing they never had. This impacts their perspectives on how to balance work with life, resulting in a commitment to spending time with their family over time at work.

This differs significantly from the work habits of the Boomers, who were taught the value of hard work by parents from the depression era. As part of a cohort of 80 million, Boomers found it necessary to put in long hours to compete for advancement in jobs. In doing so, they could provide their families with luxuries not afforded by their parents.

Another difference in the leadership styles of these generations lies in their perspectives toward teamwork. Boomers are strong advocates of teamwork and peer

consensus. They implemented strategies to decentralize decision making in the schools, introducing the concepts of shared decision making and site-based management.

The collaborative practices of Generation X are different in that they are less apt to spend time with consensus reaching processes than are the Boomers. This is not difficult to understand given that they were raised to be self-reliant and make independent decisions. Given their commitment to balancing work and family life, they are more concerned with efficiency so they work as teams to implement decisions, not necessarily to make decisions.

GenX chancellor, Michelle Rhee summarized the voice of GenerationX well when she served on a panel for the Bloomberg Washington Summit. “If the end goal is collaboration and cooperation and feeling good among adults, then oftentimes what you end up doing is not a whole lot of anything” (Turque, retrieved November 9, 2009 from <http://voices.washingtonpost.com>).

Differing Educational Beliefs

So how do their educational experiences and differing world views impact their beliefs and behaviors as elementary principals? The major difference is that Boomers believe in education for a stronger America and GenXers believe in education for a safer America.

How do you create a stronger America? By producing productive citizens in a democratic society and successful participants in a global community. This has been imperative to the Boomer generation, who came of age during a time where rebuilding a stronger democracy meant survival during the spread of communism and the Vietnam War. Boomers grew up with the message that the key to the nation’s survival was to fix a

failing democracy and educate its citizens. This has impacted their belief about the purpose of education.

As educational leaders then, the Boomers have been driven by a survivalist mentality. A survivalist mentality is the product of people who have lost confidence in the future (Lasch study as cited in Shapiro, 1986). The vehicle for human survival is the development of individual capacities through the acquisition of appropriate knowledge or skills at school, and strong connections have been found in conservative educational discourse around the demand to “return to basics” (Shapiro, 1986).

To the Baby Boomers, survival meant returning to a core academic curriculum where achievement and accountability guided educational policy and legislation. This was the key to education for a stronger America and has undergirded the structures and processes put in place by the Boomers during their era of leadership.

Recall that the Boomers attended a school system that was traditional in nature. The principals believed the system was effective for some, but not effective for struggling learners. As educational leaders, they refocused education from the progressive strategies emphasizing open education and project based learning toward a core academic curriculum. They have been intent on providing an education that meets the needs of all students, and have enacted legislation (Individual with Disabilities Act) to protect struggling learners.

Additionally Boomers have established processes to increase student achievement and hold teachers accountable. Take for example the legislation that imposes standards and high-stakes tests to direct curriculum (NCLB) and their persistence on establishing

national standards. The Boomer belief in accountability is so strong that the current administration is moving to link teacher evaluation to student performance.

To accommodate the changes toward an academic curriculum, one change incited by the Boomers was the move toward year round calendars. While none of the principals in this study have year round calendars at their school, the Boomer principals spoke strongly of the need for more time for both teacher and student learning.

Generation X is also driven by a survivalist mentality. However, their mentality does not support a "return to basics" curriculum aimed at strengthening American democracy. Contrary to the Boomers, GenX beliefs are centered on the need to create a safer America by safeguarding the interests of the child and producing happy and respectful citizens. In essence, by replicating the same schooling environment they experienced; one that provided a sense of safety and security.

The GenX principals believe the purpose of education is to produce respectful citizens. In this they believe education needs to instill a sense of community where students develop the ability to get along with one another. They are less focused on achievement and accountability than the Boomers. Not only do they believe that high-stakes testing and accountability are damaging to education, they believe that resources have been inequitably allocated around academics. They believe that current practices focus too much on a child's deficiencies and inhibits teacher creativity and flexibility. Consequently they advocate for an expanded curriculum with electives and opportunities for students to explore their individual interests.

Implications for Reform

Since the 1990s, educational reform policy has centered on accountability for student performance. Despite the many years of restructuring, rethinking and reforming education, efforts have yielded minimal if any substantial change to the functions of schooling (Ackoff, 1999; Fullan, 2003; Kohn, 1999; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The nations' schools as currently designed are not likely to meet the demands of a global economy in a digital world.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has clearly set his high expectations for increased student achievement, and the infusion of nearly \$100 billion in stimulus funding indicates the urgency of the Obama administration to dramatically improve education. This funding is historical in that it is the largest one-time investment this country has made toward education.

Understanding the context which influences the beliefs of the incoming leaders coupled with the image of their desired system is only a minor step in the process of redesigning education. The findings of this study provide a context to understand what our next generation of leaders believe about education and why they think as they do. This is important as many social system thinkers believe the power of the dominant culture is the primary constraint in successfully transforming organizations (Pickering, 2006).

The beliefs in leadership of the GenXers is similar to that of the administrative beliefs we saw in the 1930s. During that time, the purpose of education shifted from a focus on academics toward a focus on the individual child as reformers advocated replacement of academic studies by projects, real life problems, activities, and socially

useful experiences. They perceived the academic curriculum as a symbol of a corrupt and dying social order (Ravitch, 2000).

The educational journals, the textbooks, the courses that were required of administrators for advanced degrees, the summer training institutes; all agreed that whatever was taught should be determined by the needs and interests of children, not by academic subjects, and that schools have a special responsibility for changing society” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 238).

The GenX principals in this study clearly articulated their strong advocacy for expanded curricular opportunities to meet student interest and spoke fondly of the project based, progressive education they received during their formative years. Their beliefs indicate their intent to safeguard the interests of the young, and the ways in which they balance work and life provide insight into their commitment to children.

The belief system of GenerationX may be the perfect belief system needed to impact needed educational reform. For example, in Theodore Sizer’s book *Horace’s School: Redesigning the American High School*, Sizer states:

The broad and deep support necessary for consequential school reform is at present far from being attained. Even after all the reform talk of the 1980s and the fresh zeal of the early 1990s, the numbers of those converted to the need for serious educational reform is still small. One reason may be the very case that the 1980s leaders adopted for their crusade, a case that basically was an argument for American rather than one for individual Americans. The leaders worried aloud about the quality of the labor force, the competitiveness of this country in a global economy, the quality of our civic culture. However important these issues are, they do little to allay the concerns encountered in the daily life of schools, concerns such as those of a typical parent: Will my children be safe at school? Does anyone know my children well and care for them? Will there be a future for my children, and is the school helping them to achieve it? These personal concerns are proper, untrivial, and not to be swept aside, especially in a democracy, even as they sound selfish: what must be done in school for my child (Sizer, 1992, p. 14).

The conversations emerging in Iowa today indicate that change is imminent. This is evident in the push for a set of core standards as outlined in the Iowa Core Curriculum.

It is also evident in the state's ground-breaking reform plan where there is a drive to implement innovative approaches to creating new learning opportunities and environments such as a competency-based system, new concepts of "the classroom" and learning tasks, new arrangements for teaching, and community engagement in learning.

Additionally Iowa is in the process of applying for a federal Race to the Top grant, a competitive process that only a few states are expected to win. It is believed that The Race to the Top program would help Iowa's students acquire the essential concepts and skills embodied in the Iowa Core. The Race to the Top application is grounded in the belief that to achieve this goal, new learning environments, tools and materials, organizational structures, and resources are needed. The requirement that educators need to do our jobs differently is clearly outlined in Iowa's draft plan and requirements for district participation (www.iowa.gov/educate).

Some of the ideas in Iowa's reform plan and the Race to The Top application hold promise for implementation and sustainability as they align with the beliefs of the GenX principals in this study. Others may pose challenges. These are discussed in the following section.

National Standards

In the spring of 2008, legislation was signed into law by Governor Chet Culver requiring full implementation of the Iowa Core in high schools by 2012 and in elementary and middle schools by 2014. The Iowa Core is designed to take learning to a deeper level by focusing on a well-researched set of essential concepts and skills in literacy, math, science, social studies, and 21st century learning skills (civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability skills).

Iowa was an early signatory to the Common Core Standards initiative, in which 48 states in total have agreed to participate. In fact, Iowa has played a leadership role in the Common Core initiative, meeting as recently as December 17, 2009, with authors of the Common Core and discussing Iowa's interests and concerns. The state will continue to play a leadership role as the Common Core is drafted and will undertake a process of adopting and integrating the Common Core with the Iowa Core as it becomes available to states.

These standards will likely be embraced by members of Generation X as long as they do not stifle teacher creativity and flexibility or focus too much on meeting student needs at the expense of student interest. As the state re-convenes the work groups that developed the Iowa Core to ensure alignment and integration between the Common Core and the Iowa Core, an analysis of the generational make-up of the group should be done to ensure adequate representation of young Generation X administrators.

A Competency-Based System

It is clear that our current policies, structures, and practices in education need to change to support a 21st century system of education. The current system is book-based, designed around individual teachers directing instruction in walled classrooms of 20-30 students in a traditional bricks and mortar free-standing structure. The Core Curriculum is a student-based approach to learning as opposed to course-based, which provides a foundation for moving toward a competency-based system of education. This is a component of the draft plan for Iowa's Race to the Top application

Iowa looks to move our education system into the current century, where Iowa's students have access to engaging, robust learning opportunities in personalized learning

environments that provide for anytime, everywhere learning and opportunities for team-based, inquiry-oriented, project-based tasks, and where advancement is performance-based rather than time-based (www.iowa.gov/educate, retrieved January 5, 2010). Since GenXers are strong believers that students should be exposed to an expanded curriculum that meets not only their needs but interests, competency based education will be very appealing to them. Their non-traditional orientation to time coupled with their experience in utilizing technology to work remotely will prompt them to quickly embrace and support a competency-based system.

Iowa's Race to the Top plans also focus on continuing to move toward competency-based systems for teacher and administrator preparation as well. A cadre of beginning GenX principals in their early 30s should be formed to begin creating a competency based system. These types of conversations should occur in our current administrator preparation programs as they could play a vital role in moving the state forward in this direction.

New Concepts of "the Classroom" and Learning Tasks

The GenXers are adamant that schooling should provide a learning environment that is safe and fun, provides a sense of community, and teaches students how to work with one another. Beyond that, little thought had been given by the principals in this study as to how the structures of education could look differently. In fact, despite all of the cycles of educational reform, minimal changes have been made structurally other than experimentation with the concept of open schools and year round calendars. This clearly is an area that needs to be addressed, but not in isolation of conversations around the purpose and function of education. Again, a think tank of beginning administrators to

discuss ways in which we can redesign schools is important so that educational reform efforts are borne out of their agendas.

New Arrangements for Teaching

The GenXers claim to be highly collaborative, but the degree to which they collaborate is questioned by Boomers who believe otherwise. The Boomers prioritize peer consensus and teamwork over efficiency (Zemke et al., 2000) as they believe consensus is important to the collaborative process. This is different for GenXers.

Members of GenerationX place a high value on efficient use of time. Therefore, they are not as concerned about peer consensus as the Boomers. Recall the statement made at a CEO gathering sponsored by the Wall Street Journal by the chancellor of the District of Columbia Public schools system, Michelle Rhee. Rhee stated her belief that “collaboration and consensus building are quite frankly overrated in my mind.”

In this, new arrangements for teaching must take into account the GenX need for efficient use of time, their non-traditional orientation to time, and their need for work/life balance. Traditional modes of meeting at the end of the day for collaboration and professional learning will most likely need to be examined.

Community Engagement in Learning

The Boomers implemented the concept of soliciting community input to reform education through the introduction of the concept of shared decision making. In his book *Strategic Planning for America's Schools*, Bill Cook outlined a process that engaged members of the community in school planning conversations (Cook, 1988). During this time the concept of town meetings emerged, engaging educators and non educators in discussions on how to deliver education.

While GenXers are strong advocates for involving community in the learning process, they support community involvement in the implementation phase, not necessarily the planning stage. The pushback to involve community in critical decisions of educational matters is already being seen in the behaviors of the GenerationX chancellor, Michelle Rhee, who has been criticized for her belief that “you don’t turn around an organization or a school district by committee.” Policy decisions around the process for community engagement should take this into account.

Charter Schools

Iowa is working to eliminate the current cap on the number of charter schools in the state, eliminate the sunset clause for charter schools, and create new pilot Innovation Zones in which districts with approved plans will be granted flexibility where needed and appropriate to try out innovative approaches to creating new learning environments. This is a necessity due to the requirements of the Race to the Top Program.

GenerationX administrators are not advocates of charter schools. This could be generational, or it could be unique to principals in Iowa since Iowa is considered a hostile state toward charter schools. Nonetheless, it will be important to create the need for changes in this legislation to help this generation accept the concept of charter schools.

Inherent in the push for charter schools is the understanding that today’s schools are not able to educate our future generations.

There is a growing awareness that our current design of education is out of sync with the new realities of the information/knowledge era. Those who are willing to face these new realities understand that rather than improving education, we should transcend it. Rather than revising it, we should revision it. Rather than reforming, we should transform it by design (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004. p. 53).

A systemic approach based on a socio-cultural model should be utilized when designing these schools and inclusion of young GenX principals in conversations around innovation and reform will be valuable when identifying the function, structure and process for charter schools. Additionally, much research is becoming available about the generation of students being educated today, the Millennials. As generational location in life strongly shapes how we see life, a deep understanding of this generation will be vital to designing future school experiences.

Conclusion

Sizer stated that “given the powerful hold that the rituals of going to school have on Americans, only a broad-based reform effort will work” (Sizer, 1992, p. 15). Are the broad based efforts to reform schools today inclusive of the young generation of GenXers who will be left to implement the decisions being made today?

Careful analysis of the world view and assumptions held by our future generation of leaders is needed, and we must enlist them now in conversations about how to redesign the educational system. These conversations need to be based on a careful process for system change that simultaneously addresses changes in the function, structure and process of education, with a purposeful intent to address the structure of the system.

In a study conducted by Bennis and Thomas, a comparison was done to compare the hopes and aspirations of leaders from these generations at the same age, roughly between the ages of 25-30. They found that members from Generation X had bigger and more ambitious goals than the Boomers did at the same age. GenXers, they discovered, aspired to “change the world” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002.).

While it is not possible to predict the future, the next decade will represent a unique period in education. There is great hope that the leadership of Generation X, despite the negative labels that have been attached to their generation, will address the changes needed to impact true educational reform. After all, “this generation the U.S. government had labeled as mediocre became the greatest entrepreneurial and job-creating generation in U.S. history” (Strauss, 2005, p. 4).

There is great potential ahead to redesign our educational system. If we truly want to impact sustainable change, we need to begin now to take a systems approach that embraces the beliefs and values of our young Generation X principals who will be left to sustain the changes that will occur once the generational constellation shifts. As reform efforts take place however, it is equally essential that educators have a clear understanding of the Millennial generation and design schools that are agile and adaptive to change.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. Defining Events

- A) What are some significant moments in your life that define you? Why did you choose those particular moments?
- B) When did you know you wanted to become a principal? Why did you choose to become one?
- C) How would you describe yourself as a leader? What is your leadership style? Has your perspective on leadership changed during your professional life? If so, how?
- D) How would you define a successful elementary principal?
- E) How would you describe the education system when you were in school? Was it effective? Why or why not?
- F) What differences exist between your generation and the generation of children in elementary school today? What differences exist between your generation and your parent's generation?
- G) Do you feel as though your professional and personal lives are in balance? Why or why not. What legacy do you want to leave?

II. Beliefs about School Reform

- A) Should electives in high school be eliminated, kept the same or expanded? Explain your reasoning.

- B) What do you think about NCLB? Are there elements that should be continued? Discontinued?
- C) Should students be sorted? If so, how?
- D) How do standards and benchmarks impact teaching and learning?
- E) How do you feel about grading students? How do you feel about standardized testing?
- F) What are your thoughts on the Iowa Core Curriculum? How do you think the Iowa Core Curriculum will impact teaching and learning?
- G) How do you feel about the current curriculum at your school? Does it need to change? If so, how?
- H) Does the current governance structure in your district work? What recommendations would you make for change?
- I) What are your thoughts about the teacher's union?
- J) How do you feel about merit pay?

III. Future Direction of Education

- A) What are some of the major changes you've seen in the K-12 education system during your lifetime? Did those changes improve education? Why or why not?
- B) What should be the purpose of our K-12 education system? Is our current system serving that purpose? Why or why not?
- C) What works well in our current K-12 education system that should not change?
- D) What changes do you think need to occur?

- E) If you were to start a school of your own with the freedom to structure it any way that you chose, what would that school look like?
- F) In planning professional development for principals, what should the AEA focus on in order to support your learning?