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Students and Teachers in Caring Classroom and School Communities

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Developmental Studies Center

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Students and Teachers in Caring Classroom and School Communities

A little over ten years ago, we began working intensively with educators at a small number of elementary schools to implement a comprehensive program to enhance students' prosocial development. In the course of this project, the concept of the school as a "caring community" gradually emerged as central to our understanding of what we were attempting to accomplish, and it has continued to serve as the fundamental guiding principle in our current work with a much larger, more diverse number of schools around the country. Along with the other contributors to this symposium, we believe that the construct of school as community provides a powerful framework for looking at educational practice, and for helping schools to more effectively meet the needs of teachers and students.

Talking about schools as communities is becoming quite common in the literature on effective schools (e.g., Brandt, 1992; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Lightfoot, 1984; Schaps & Solomon, 1990; Sizer, 1984). However, there is as yet no agreed-upon definition of what a school community is, nor has there been much research on the effects of school communities on teachers and students. Certainly there are common elements in descriptions of community. Implicitly or explicitly, communities are defined as places where members care about and support each other, actively participate in and have influence on the group's activities and decisions, feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group, and have common norms, goals, and values (cf. Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Goodenow, 1993; Higgins, Power, & Kohlberg, 1984; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Solomon, et al., 1992; Wehlage, et al., 1990).

But there are also potentially important differences in the conceptualization and operationalization of community among those doing research on school communities. For example, community has been variously defined from the perspective of teachers (e.g., Bryk & Driscoll, 1988), students (e.g., Solomon, et al., 1992), or both (e.g., Higgins, et al., 1984), and has been measured at both the individual (e.g., a student's sense of community; Goodenow, 1993) and group levels (e.g., Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

The purpose of the present paper is to describe our ongoing program of research on schools as caring communities, beginning with our first attempts to systematically measure the "sense of community" in *classrooms* and assess its effects on students, and continuing through our most recent investigations of the *whole school* as a caring community. In doing this, we hope to convey how our conception of community has influenced and, in turn, been influenced by the research questions we have asked and tried to answer, as well as by our thinking about school change and our manner of working with schools. Finally, we will describe our current thinking about community, and raise what we see as some critical questions and issues for future research on school communities.

Creating a Caring Community in the Classroom

As mentioned, our initial involvement with school change was an intervention designed to enhance students' social and ethical development. Detailed information about this intervention program, its research design and evaluation findings is available elsewhere (Battistich et al., 1989, 1991; Solomon et al., 1988, 1990, 1992). For the present purposes it is sufficient to note that the intervention attempted to enhance prosocial development by providing students with numerous opportunities to: (a) collaborate with others in the pursuit of common goals; (b) provide meaningful help to others and receive help when it was needed; (c) discuss and reflect upon the experiences of others in order to gain an understanding and appreciation of others'

needs, feelings, and perspectives; (d) discuss and reflect upon their own behavior and the behavior of others as it relates to fundamental prosocial values of fairness, concern and respect for others, and social responsibility; (e) develop and practice important social competencies; and (f) exercise autonomy, participate in decision making about classroom norms, rules, and activities, and otherwise take on responsibility for appropriate aspects of classroom life. The program was provided primarily in classrooms by teachers, but it also included significant school-wide and parent involvement elements.

We worked with teachers at three elementary schools to implement the program over a seven-year period. We evaluated the program's effectiveness by following a longitudinal cohort of students in these schools and three initially very similar schools from their entry into the schools in kindergarten through their departure after sixth grade. As we refined and adapted program activities during the initial years, we came to see our major goal as being the creation of a caring community in the classroom—a community which meets students' fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and in which they come to understand through direct experience the importance of values of fairness, caring, and responsibility to life in a democratic society (Dewey, 1900). Students in such classrooms should feel strong affective ties to one another and to the teacher, and their sense of membership in and identification with the community should motivate them to uphold community norms and internalize community values. Classrooms that are caring communities thus would be expected to have positive effects on students' social, ethical, and intellectual development.

Our initial research on community (see Solomon et al, 1990) therefore focused on two questions: (a) Did the program create a sense of the classroom as a community among students? and (b) How was sense of community related to students' attitudes, values, motivation, and behavior?

Measuring students' sense of the classroom as a community. We developed a measure of students' sense of the classroom as a community and administered it to students in the cohort when they were in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. This initial measure included items representing two elements of community: (a) students' perceptions that they and their classmates cared about and were supportive of one another (7 items: e.g., "students in my class work together to solve problems," "the students in this class really care about one another," "my class is like a family"); and (b) that they had an active and important role in classroom norm setting and decision making (10 items: e.g., "in my class the teacher and students plan together what we will do," "in my class the teacher and students decide together what the rules will be," "the teacher in my class asks the students to help decide what the class should do"). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of this measure averaged .74 across the three years.

As a check on the validity of the measure, we aggregated students' scores to the classroom level ($n = 28$) and examined its correspondence with conceptually related measures of classroom characteristics derived from classroom observations. The aggregated student scores were found to be strongly correlated with observational measures of student supportive and friendly behavior ($r = .60, p < .001$), student spontaneous prosocial behavior ($r = .61, p < .001$), the frequency of cooperative learning activities ($r = .55, p < .01$), and opportunities for student autonomy and influence ($r = .51, p < .01$).

Program effects on sense of community. We then examined whether the intervention program was effective at enhancing students' sense of the classroom as a community. Program students scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than comparison students on the measure of sense of community in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, with the difference in mean scores ranging between one-quarter and one-half of a standard deviation (Solomon et al., 1990).

Effects of classroom community on students. As expected, sense of community was found to be significantly related to a large number of positive outcomes for students, either on its own or in combination with the intervention program (Solomon et al., 1990). These included both personal and social qualities (e.g., general social competence, conflict resolution skill, commitment to democratic values, empathy, and self-esteem) and school-related variables (e.g., liking for school, achievement motivation, intrinsic motivation for learning, and reading comprehension).

Most of the joint effects of the intervention program and sense of community were additive. One such effect, on students' conflict resolution skill, is shown in Figure 1. Both the intervention program and sense of community were positively related to conflict resolution skill, with students in program classrooms with a strong sense of community having the highest scores.

Figure 1 Here

More intriguing were findings from this initial research that indicated a differential effect of sense of classroom community on program and comparison students. Such interactions between program status and sense of community were observed for measures of prosocial and moral reasoning. For these measures, sense of community was positively correlated with scores among program students, but negatively correlated with scores among comparison students. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the findings for students' moral reasoning scores.

Figure 2 Here

We were puzzled by these opposite effects on prosocial and moral reasoning until we considered what we knew about differences in the normative structures of program and comparison classrooms. Systematic observations of program and comparison classrooms indicated that the comparison classrooms were quite similar to what often has been described as "typical" of American schools (e.g., Goodlad, 1984)—virtually all authority is vested in the teacher, extrinsic incentives (points, prizes) are used to control student behavior, and student relations are implicitly or explicitly competitive. In contrast, program teachers minimized the use of extrinsic incentives, emphasized cooperation rather than competition in the classroom, gave students more autonomy, and actively involved their students in classroom governance (i.e., program students were much more involved in developing class rules and norms, in solving problems, and in making decisions about classroom activities than comparison students). The size of the mean difference between program and comparison classrooms on these measures ranged from .6 to over 1 standard deviation. There also was significantly greater attention to enhancing understanding of others in program classrooms, and more discourse about the importance of prosocial values to community life, with mean differences between program and comparison classrooms of approximately 1 standard deviation. (See Solomon et al., 1988 and Watson et al., 1989 for more information on the differences between program and comparison classrooms.)

If participation in a caring community promotes adherence to the norms and values of the community, then the differences in the normative structure of program and comparison classrooms might account for the differential effect of sense of community on students' moral

reasoning. Scoring of students' prosocial and moral reasoning was based on Eisenberg's developmental stages (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983), which correspond roughly to Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969). The highest scores (Level 5) represent reasoning based on internalized values and norms, the desire to maintain individual and societal contractual obligations, or belief in the dignity, rights, and equality of all individuals. Conversely, reasoning on the basis of conformance to authority, social approval or disapproval, or reward and punishment would receive the lowest scores (Level 1).

In order to examine this hypothesis, we looked at the relationships between sense of community and its two components (i.e., classroom supportiveness, and student autonomy and influence) and students' scores for each stage of moral reasoning. We found that Level 1 reasoning (i.e., reward and punishment) was positively related to community among comparison students and negatively related to community among program students ($r_s = .19, -.22, p_s < .05, .01$, respectively). Conversely, Level 5 reasoning (i.e., principled reasoning) was negatively related to community among comparison students and positively related to community among program students ($r_s = -.24, .16, p_s < .01, .05$, respectively).¹ Moreover, of the two components of sense of community, classroom supportiveness was more strongly correlated with reasoning scores for comparison students, whereas autonomy and influence was more strongly correlated with reasoning scores for program students.² Thus, it would appear that a strong sense of community may encourage the development of *either* an autonomous morality or a heteronomous morality, depending upon the authority structure of the classroom.

Broadening the Conception: Schools as Caring Communities

Overall, we were quite encouraged by the findings from this first study, but felt they were limited in some important respects. For one, we had conceptualized community as a characteristic of individual classrooms. One certainly might argue that, at least in elementary schools, most of what is important about school for students involves what happens in the classroom. Yet, any enduring effects of community on students' development would seem to require continuity of experience. In other words, students should benefit most from participating in a caring community when the experience of community extends throughout their school career. To achieve this continuity of experience, the entire school would have to constitute a caring community, not simply a few classrooms.

This shift in our thinking about the "unit" of community paralleled a change in our thinking about the unit of change in school intervention efforts. In the first study, we worked with teachers at a single grade level each year as we followed the cohort of students as they progressed through school. We initially felt that by concentrating our resources and working intensively with a small group of teachers at one time, we would maximize the impact of the program on students. In hindsight, this was a mistake because it meant that every year program students in the research cohort were in elementary school, they had teachers who were just beginning to learn the intervention program. This approach also resulted in other unforeseen

¹Those familiar with the developmental research on moral and prosocial reasoning might be surprised that there were *any* elementary students who gave Level 5 reasons. There were in fact relatively few Level 5 reasons given by students, and a score for Level 5 was based primarily on expressions of guilt over not living up to one's own values and/or statements of moral imperative (e.g., "You should always help someone in need."). Consistent with Eisenberg's work, the predominant reasoning of the students was at Level 2 (i.e., simple "needs of others" orientation; see Eisenberg et al, 1983).

²It is worth noting that while program students scored higher than comparison students on both components of the classroom community measure, the mean difference was much greater for autonomy and influence than for classroom supportiveness.

problems, such as causing frustration for teachers who had to wait several years to begin the program and creating an "us-them" mentality among school staff. It also was a very inefficient approach to school change, requiring seven years for the program to be in place throughout an entire school.

Another limitation of focusing on the classroom as a community was that it ignored the extent to which schools are experienced as communities by *teachers*. Certainly, the elements of community as we have defined it—caring and supportive interpersonal relationships and active influence in planning and decision making, resulting in common goals and a sense of belonging—should have positive effects for teachers as well as students. (This was found by Bryk and Driscoll [1988] to be the case in their study of community in secondary schools.) Moreover, in the final analysis, if a school can truly be characterized as a caring community, it should be experienced as such by its staff as well as its students. On the other hand, there is not a necessary correlation between the experiences of teachers and students. A school could conceivably be experienced as a community by teachers but not by students, and vice versa.

Finally, the findings from our initial research on community were limited to a small number of schools in a single suburban school district, with a largely white, middle class student population. We wondered about the extent to which schools serving more diverse and disadvantaged student populations could be characterized as caring communities and, if so, whether community would be associated with a similarly wide range of positive effects. Theoretically, at least, the more diverse the population, the more difficult it might be to establish a sense of community. Yet, doing so may be critical to maintaining social cohesion as our society becomes increasingly diverse. Similarly, the benefits of school community may be particularly great for those students who, traditionally, have not been well served by our schools—the socioeconomically disadvantaged and socially disenfranchised.

Our current research, then, involves a more extensive examination of the effects of community at 24 elementary schools in six school districts across the United States—three on the west coast, one in the south, one in the southeast, and one in the northeast.³ The schools in this sample (four from each district) are quite diverse. Eleven of the schools are in large cities, four are in smaller cities, and nine are in suburban communities. Some of the schools are quite small, with fewer than 300 students, and others are quite large, with student bodies approaching 1,000. The student populations at these schools also vary greatly, ranging from 2% to 95% students receiving free or reduced lunch, 26% to 100% members of minority groups, 0 to 32% limited or non-English speaking, and with average achievement from the 24th to the 67th percentile on standardized tests.

Measures of the school as a caring community. We are assessing *students'* sense of the school as a caring community using: (a) the 10-item measure of student autonomy and influence from the initial study; (b) an expanded, 14-item measure of classroom supportiveness (internal consistency = .82); and (c) a new, 14-item measure of the supportiveness of the school environment at large (e.g., "students in this school work together to solve problems," "people care about each other in this school," "I feel that I can talk to the teachers in this school about things that are bothering me;" internal consistency = .85). The overall measure of students' sense of the school as a caring community includes these three components (internal consistency = .91).

We also are assessing teachers' perceptions of the school as a community for *students* (i.e., of supportive student relations, and of student autonomy and influence), and teachers' sense of the

³This project also involves an intervention in 12 of the schools to enhance community, but the findings reported here are from analyses of data collected prior to the beginning of the intervention program.

school as a community for *teachers*. The measure of teachers' own sense of school community includes three components: (a) faculty collegiality (7 items: e.g., "there is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members," "teachers are supportive of one another," "this school seems like a big family, everyone is so close and cordial"); (b) teacher involvement in school planning and decision making (4 items: e.g., "staff are involved in making decisions that affect them," "teachers take a major role in shaping the school's norms, values, and practices"); and (c) shared educational goals and values (2 items: e.g., "most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be," "in this school, there is a feeling that everyone is working toward common goals"). The internal consistency of this measure of teacher community is .89.

Convergent validity. The correlation between the measures of students' sense of community and teachers' perceptions of student community (both aggregated to the school level) was .70 ($p < .001$). The measure of the school as a community for *teachers* also was positively, but less strongly correlated with the measure of students' sense of community ($r = .52, p < .01$). The measures of school community thus demonstrated a good level of convergent validity.

Interjudge agreement. Although there was good agreement among the measures at the school level, the aggregate measures ignore variation within a school. If teachers or students within a school do not agree in their perceptions of the school as a caring community, then it makes little or no sense to interpret community as a characteristic of schools. Put another way, if community is a characteristic of schools, then a relatively large proportion of the variance in community scores should be between schools. This was in fact found to be the case for both of the measures of school community used here. The intraclass correlation (i.e., the average correlation among the scores of all pairs of individuals within the same school) was .24 for the measure of students' sense of community, and was .27 for the measure of teachers' sense of community. Thus, about 25% of the total variance in the measures of school community in this sample was between-school variance.

Structural model of school community. Given evidence of internal consistency, convergent validity, and agreement among students and teachers on the measures of school community, we next examined the relationship between students' and teachers' sense of school community more fully. Figure 3 summarizes the findings from a confirmatory factor analysis of these data. Two correlated latent factors, one representing student community and the other representing teacher community, provided a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2 (19) = 23.61, p > .20$; Comparative Fit Index [CFI: Bentler, 1990] = .956). Both a model with two uncorrelated factors ($\chi^2 (20) = 29.66, p < .08$; CFI = .907), and a model with a single latent factor ($\chi^2 (20) = 48.88, p < .001$; CFI = .721) had significantly worse fits to the data. Thus, while student community and teacher community are positively correlated ($r = .53, p < .01$), they do not appear to represent a single, underlying dimension of school community, at least in these data.

Figure 3 Here

Relationships of Community to School, Teacher, and Student Characteristics

Our assessment battery is quite extensive, encompassing contextual and sociodemographic characteristics; classroom practices; classroom and school climate; teacher attitudes, beliefs, and behavior; and student attitudes, motives, and behavior. These data are multilevel, and we have examined the effects of school community at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., school,

classroom/teacher, student), using a variety of procedures (e.g., multivariate and univariate analysis of variance, multiple regression, covariance structure analysis). Most of the findings presented here are correlations of aggregate school scores. Although this certainly is not an optimal approach to analysis, it seemed to be the simplest and most concise way of summarizing the overall pattern of relationships. The findings from analyses of data at the teacher/classroom and student levels, some of which are presented here, are very consistent with the findings from analyses of school-level scores. However, because of the well-known problem of "aggregation bias," the school-level correlations of community with teacher and student characteristics are certainly inflated and should not be interpreted as the actual effect sizes.

Sense of community and other school characteristics. Correlations between student and teacher community scores and other school characteristics are presented in Table 1. Two findings are particularly noteworthy. First, contrary to what might be expected, students' sense of community is *not* significantly related to school size, and teachers' sense of community is *positively* correlated with school size in this sample.

The second finding is that sense of community among both students and teachers is negatively correlated with school poverty level. The deleterious effects of poverty are well known, and this finding indicates that the school experience generally is less pleasant and rewarding for both students and teachers in poor communities than it is in more affluent communities. Given the strong relationship between community and poverty in these data, it is important to control for poverty level when examining the relationship of sense of community to other characteristics of students and teachers.

Table 1 Here

Sense of community and classroom characteristics. Some aspects of classroom practice, such as provision for student autonomy and influence, are included in our definition of community. Other aspects of classroom practice certainly help to bring about a feeling of community. Table 2 presents relationships between students' and teachers' sense of community and measures of other classroom characteristics from teacher and student questionnaires. Both first-order and partial correlations (controlling for poverty level) are shown. (For more information on the measures and findings summarized in the remainder of this paper, see Solomon and Battistich, 1993.)

Both student and teacher community were positively associated with the frequency of class meetings, and negatively related to the use of extrinsic incentives. Student community also was strongly associated with the use of cooperative learning groups, and teacher community with the use of classroom activities to enhance interpersonal understanding. These findings are consistent with our operational definition of community—that is, they indicate an environment characterized by mutual support and concern, and collaborative work and decision making.

Table 2 Here

Sense of community, teacher attitudes, and school climate. As indicated in Table 3, both student community and teacher community were significantly related to teacher attitudes and

perceptions of general school climate. The relationships generally were stronger for teacher community than student community, particularly when student poverty level is controlled.

Table 3 Here

Teacher community was strongly associated with a positive learning environment (i.e., high expectations for student learning, belief in constructivist learning, and the perception that teachers in the school generally provide a stimulating learning environment for students). Teacher community also was strongly associated with teachers' sense that they were effective, and with their enjoyment of and satisfaction with teaching. Finally, it was also very highly correlated with teacher perceptions of the principal's competence, of positive relations between teachers and students, and of the supportiveness of parents.

Student community had a very similar pattern of relationships, although the correlations generally were lower in magnitude, with the positive associations with teacher perceptions of positive student-teacher relations and parent supportiveness being most robust. Also, as would be expected given the importance of autonomy and influence in our measure of community, both student and teacher community were negatively associated with an emphasis on the teacher as sole authority in the classroom.

Sense of community and student attitudes, motives, and behavior. Students' sense of the school as a caring community was strongly associated with a large number of measures of student attitudes, motivational orientations, and behaviors. These relationships generally were reduced in magnitude, but many remained statistically significant when student poverty level was controlled. Teachers' sense of community, on the other hand, generally was not significantly associated with student characteristics. These findings are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Here

Student community was consistently, and often quite strongly, associated with a positive orientation toward school and learning, including attraction to school (i.e., enjoyment of class, liking for school), task orientation toward learning, educational aspirations, and trust in and respect for teachers. In fact, mutual trust seems to be characteristic of school community, as indicated by the positive correlation in Table 3 between sense of community and teachers' trust in students.

Sense of community among students also was quite highly correlated with student achievement and inductive reasoning skill, but these relationships disappeared entirely when student poverty level was controlled.

Finally, student community was positively associated with students' prosocial attitudes, motives, and behavior (i.e., concern for others, acceptance of outgroups, intrinsic motivation for prosocial behavior, commitment to democratic values, altruistic behavior), social skills (i.e., conflict resolution skill, perceived social competence), and sense of efficacy, and was negatively associated with students' drug use and involvement in delinquent behaviors. Interestingly,

however, student community was not as strongly correlated with students' sense of personal autonomy as we had expected.

Given the well-known deleterious effects of poverty, and the strong negative correlation between student poverty and sense of community in these data, we are particularly encouraged that many of the relationships between community and desirable student attitudes, motives, and behaviors remained statistically significant even when we controlled for poverty level. In a related set of analyses (see Solomon & Battistich, 1993), we classified the 24 schools in this sample as low, average, or high in student community, and as low, moderate, or high in student poverty, and examined the joint and interactive effects of community and poverty on student attitudes, motives, and behaviors. Although poverty in general was found to be negatively related to student outcomes, the positive relationships between sense of community and the student measures generally held within each level of poverty. Moreover, there were a number of significant Community x Poverty interactions in which sense of community showed its strongest positive relationships with student measures in the highest poverty schools. Three examples of such findings—for students' enjoyment of class, task orientation toward learning, and educational expectations—are shown in Figures 4 through 6. In each case, the negative effects of poverty that are evident in the low community schools are largely or wholly ameliorated in the high community schools.

Figures 4, 5, & 6 Here

Discussion

The major findings from our research so far can be summarized quite succinctly. First, schools differ greatly in the extent to which they can be characterized as caring communities, and there is considerable agreement among teachers and students in their perceptions of this characteristic of schools. Second, school community is significantly related to a large number of desirable outcomes for both students and teachers. Although this essentially causal interpretation may seem unjustified, given that the findings we have presented here are largely correlational, we believe that the overall pattern of evidence from this and related studies (e.g., Bryk & Driscoll, 1988) is most consistent with a school effects explanation.

The correlates of school community in elementary schools reported here are generally consistent with the findings from other studies of community in intermediate (e.g., Arhar & Kromrey, 1993; Goodenow, 1993) and high schools (e.g., Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Higgins, 1991). One interesting difference is the relationship between community and school size. Bryk and Driscoll (1988) reported a negative relationship between school size and school community, measured primarily on the basis of teacher reports, among a large sample of high schools. This contrasts with our finding of a significant positive correlation between teacher community and school size. This may reflect a difference in the range of school sizes in the two samples—our schools had from under 300 to almost 1,000 students, whereas the high schools in Bryk and Driscoll's sample ranged from under 300 to over 1,800 students.

However, it seems likely that factors other than size may help explain these discrepant findings. For example, size may not be related to student community in elementary schools because students spend most of their time with the same teacher and group of 25-35 other students. Size also might be positively related to teacher community in our schools because larger elementary schools have more than one teacher at each grade level, and thus provide

greater opportunities for co-planning, co-teaching, and other collaborative work practices. Among high schools, on the other hand, large size tends to be associated with departmentalization and bureaucratization (Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984; Wise, 1979). The relationships between community, school size, and other aspects of the social organization of schools should be examined more systematically in future research.

The role of values in school communities also warrants additional consideration. Although most definitions of community include the notion of shared beliefs and values among members, not all explicitly consider the *content* of community values. Yet, if the hypothesis that a strong sense of community promotes members' internalization of community values is correct, then the content of those values is of critical importance. While far from conclusive, our early finding that sense of community was associated with an autonomous morality among students at program schools, but with a heteronomous morality among students at comparison schools, is at least consistent with this hypothesis. Research on the Just Community schools (Higgins, 1991) similarly found significant increases in program students' levels of moral reasoning, while comparison students' moral reasoning remained unchanged at the pre-conventional or conventional levels during the study period. Certainly, history is replete with examples of communities that promoted hatred rather than kindness, and exclusiveness rather than inclusiveness. It is not by accident that we define our goals for schools as creating a "caring" community or a "just" community, for we want the "outcomes" of participating in the school community to be students who care about others, are socially responsible, and value justice and integrity as much as academic achievement.

Recognizing that community has the potential for negative as well as positive outcomes leads to one of the most important questions for the study of communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As our society becomes ever more diverse, we face increasing risks of polarization and social conflict. How do we develop communities that value and promote understanding of and respect for others, that are inclusive and open, with "permeable" rather than rigid boundaries? The development of *school* communities that promote such values may be crucial, for the school is perhaps the only remaining social institution that reaches members of all the diverse groups represented in our society. Moreover, it is the school that has primary responsibility for developing in students the abilities and inclinations necessary for citizens in a participatory democracy. There is still a great deal to be learned about how to accomplish this, but what we have learned so far is promising. Diversity among students typically has not been found to be strongly related to school community (e.g., Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Goodenow, 1993), and at least some school communities have been found to enhance students' concern for others, acceptance of "outgroups," and commitment to democratic and moral values (e.g., Battistich et al., 1991; Solomon et al., 1993; Higgins, 1991).

Overall, we believe that the small body of research that has been conducted to date on schools as communities clearly indicates that the concept of community provides a powerful way of looking at educational practice. Even more important, the concept of school community seems to have a great deal of practical utility (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988), in that it provides a clear direction for improvement efforts to help schools more effectively meet the needs of both teachers and students.

We are especially encouraged by findings suggesting that a caring school community may be particularly beneficial for our most disadvantaged students. More research certainly is needed on this issue, particularly longitudinal research that would allow for more confident causal inferences by examining the effects of *changes* in school community on student and teacher outcomes. We recently began a programmatic intervention designed to enhance school community in half of the 24 schools discussed here, and will be conducting research in these schools and their 12 "comparison" schools through at least the 1994-95 school year. The data from this investigation will allow for a much more rigorous assessment of the effects of school

community than we have been able to conduct so far. We may well find that while the features of caring school communities are beneficial for all students, they may be essential for those groups of students that, traditionally, have been least likely to succeed in school (cf. Tharp, 1989).

Although we strongly believe that the concept of school as community has great potential for improving educational practice, one final caveat should be stated. As scientist-practitioners, we share with both William James (1899) and John Dewey (1929), as well as many of our contemporaries (e.g., Cooley & Lohnes, 1976; Cronbach, 1975; Kerdeman & Phillips, 1993), a skepticism that findings from educational research can be simply and directly transformed into "prescriptions" for practice. If we have learned anything from our work with and in schools, it is that effective practice is inevitably highly contextualized. This is not meant to imply that the findings from research on school community should be dismissed as irrelevant under any particular circumstances, but rather to forcefully argue that efforts to enhance community must be carefully considered in light of current, local conditions. Research findings certainly provide valuable guidance, but they are not a panacea for improving schools. As Lee Cronbach (1975) argued almost two decades ago, in a world where most effects are interactive, rigorous generalizations capable of precise predictions in new conditions are unlikely to be achieved. Rather, the task of social science is to develop integrative explanatory concepts that provide people with a useful framework for considering action under particular circumstances. From this perspective, the concept of school community seems to be particularly powerful.

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Table 1
Relationships Between Students' and Teachers' Sense of Community
and Other School Characteristics

| | Student Community | Teacher Community |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|
| Average Age of Teachers | .01 | -.30 |
| Average Number of Years Teaching | .10 | -.30 |
| Average Number of Years in Present School | .04 | -.17 |
| Number of Teachers in School | .04 | .35 ⁺ |
| Percent Minority Teachers | .04 | -.11 |
| Percent Female Teachers | .25 | .14 |
| Average Education (highest academic degree) | -.05 | -.15 |
| Number of Enrolled Students | .17 | .48 ^{**} |
| Percentage of Poor Students | -.61 ^{**} | -.40 [*] |
| Percentage of Chapter 1 Students | -.37 ⁺ | .00 |
| Percentage of Limited/Non-English Speaking Students | .17 | .12 |
| Percentage Minority Students | -.16 | -.19 |

⁺ $p < .10$ ^{*} $p < .05$ ^{**} $p < .01$

Table 2
Relationships Between Students' and Teachers' Sense of Community
and Classroom Practices

| | Student Community | | Teacher Community | |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------|
| Frequency of Students Working in Groups | .56** | (.46*) ^a | .21 | (.07) |
| Frequency of Class Meetings | .42* | (.33) | .35 ⁺ | (.27) |
| Frequency of Whole Class Instruction | -.21 | (-.17) | .01 | (.07) |
| Frequency of Academic Competitions | -.30 | (-.01) | -.25 | (-.06) |
| Frequency of Social Understanding Activities | .19 | (.14) | .43* | (.41*) |
| Frequency of Helping Activities | .01 | (.05) | .20 | (.24) |
| Use of Reward and Punishment | -.48** | (-.21) | -.48** | (-.33) |
| Emphasis on Thinking | .34 ⁺ | (.24) | .25 | (.16) |

^aPartial correlations, controlling for percentage of poor students.

⁺ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3
**Relationships Between Students' and Teachers' Sense of Community,
 Teacher Attitudes, and School Climate**

| | Student Community | | Teacher Community | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| <u>Teacher Attitudes</u> | | | | |
| High Expectations for Student Learning | .51** | (.38 ⁺) ^a | .70*** | (.64**) |
| Belief in Constructivist Learning | .49* | (.32) | .45* | (.33) |
| Trust in Students | .57** | (.40*) | .46* | (.34) |
| Emphasis on Teacher Authority | -.53** | (-.41*) | -.43* | (-.32) |
| Sense of Efficacy as a Teacher | .51** | (.33) | .59** | (.50**) |
| Desire to Improve as a Teacher | .37 ⁺ | (.34) | .71*** | (.71***) |
| Enjoyment of Teaching | .51** | (.33) | .79*** | (.75***) |
| Overall Job Satisfaction | .43* | (.27) | .82*** | (.78***) |
| <u>School Climate</u> | | | | |
| Principal Competence and Supportiveness | .37 ⁺ | (.14) | .86*** | (.83***) |
| Parent Supportiveness | .70*** | (.46*) | .63*** | (.55**) |
| Stimulating Learning Environment | .60** | (.38 ⁺) | .84*** | (.81***) |
| Positive Teacher-Student Relations | .66*** | (.45*) | .82*** | (.80***) |

^aPartial correlations, controlling for percentage of poor students.

⁺ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4
Relationships Between Students' and Teachers' Sense of Community
and Student Attitudes, Motives, and Behavior

| | Student Community | | Teacher Community | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <u>Academic Attitudes, Motivation, and Behavior</u> | | | | |
| Frequency of Reading Outside of School | .49** | (.32) ^a | .01 | (-.20) |
| Enjoyment of Reading | .05 | (.31) | -.33 | (-.24) |
| Enjoyment of Class | .75*** | (.58**) | .40* | (.19) |
| Liking for School | .82*** | (.70***) | .36 ⁺ | (.13) |
| Task Orientation | .72*** | (.69***) | .10 | (-.04) |
| Ego Orientation | -.12 | (-.28) | .20 | (.15) |
| Work Avoidance | -.11 | (-.35 ⁺) | .21 | (.12) |
| Preference for Challenge ^b | .38* | (.06) | .17 | (-.08) |
| Intrinsic Academic Motivation | -.14 | (.32) | -.34 | (-.15) |
| Academic Self-Esteem | .50** | (.02) | .07 | (-.47*) |
| Trust in and Respect for Teachers ^c | .61** | (.58**) | .33 | (.25) |
| Enjoyment of Helping Others Learn | .65*** | (.40*) | .37 ⁺ | (.14) |
| Educational Aspirations ^d | .66*** | (.39 ⁺) | .38 ⁺ | (.12) |
| Educational Expectations ^d | .56** | (.22) | .22 | (-.12) |
| <u>Academic Performance</u> | | | | |
| Achievement Test Scores: Reading | .55** | (.07) | .23 | (-.23) |
| Achievement Test Scores: Mathematics | .59** | (.17) | .33 | (-.05) |
| Inductive Reasoning Skill ^d | .45* | (-.08) | .18 | (-.25) |
| <u>Social/Personal Attitudes, Motives, and Behavior</u> | | | | |
| Concern for Others | .73*** | (.51**) | .35 ⁺ | (.03) |
| Sense of Autonomy | .38 ⁺ | (-.27) | .15 | (-.37 ⁺) |

Table 4 (cont.)

| | Student Community | | Teacher Community | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------|
| Sense of Efficacy | .59** | (.38 ⁺) | .12 | (-.13) |
| Conflict Resolution Skill | .77*** | (.78***) | .25 | (.15) |
| Acceptance of Outgroups ^b | .39 ⁺ | (.38 ⁺) | .17 | (.21) |
| Intrinsic Prosocial Motivation | .60** | (.46*) | .01 | (-.21) |
| Democratic Values | .57** | (.19) | .26 | (-.11) |
| Altruistic Behavior | .42* | (.53**) | .09 | (.10) |
| General Self-Esteem | .33 | (.05) | -.04 | (-.30) |
| Loneliness at School ^c | -.22 | (.35) | -.33 | (-.08) |
| Social Competence | .63** | (.46*) | .14 | (-.09) |
| <u>Drug Use and Delinquency</u> | | | | |
| Use of Tobacco ^d | -.56** | (-.46*) | .11 | (.30) |
| Use of Alcohol ^d | .22 | (-.25) | .39 ⁺ | (.19) |
| Use of Marijuana ^d | -.54** | (-.25) | -.07 | (.29) |
| Delinquent Behavior ^d | -.45* | (-.33) | .10 | (.27) |
| Victimization at School ^d | -.03 | (-.28) | -.07 | (-.22) |

^aPartial correlations, controlling for percentage of poor students.

^bStudents at Grade 3 or 4 only.

^cStudents at Grade 4 or 5 only.

^dStudents at Grade 5 or 6 only.

⁺ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 1. Effects of Students' Sense of Community on Conflict Resolution Skills for Program and Comparison Students.

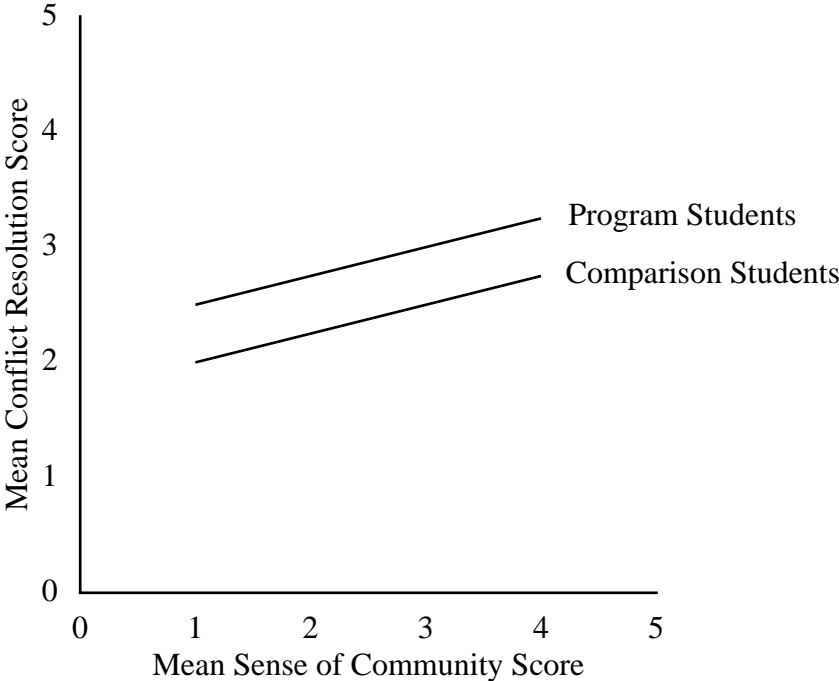


Figure 2. Interactive Effects of Program Status and Sense of Community on Moral Reasoning.

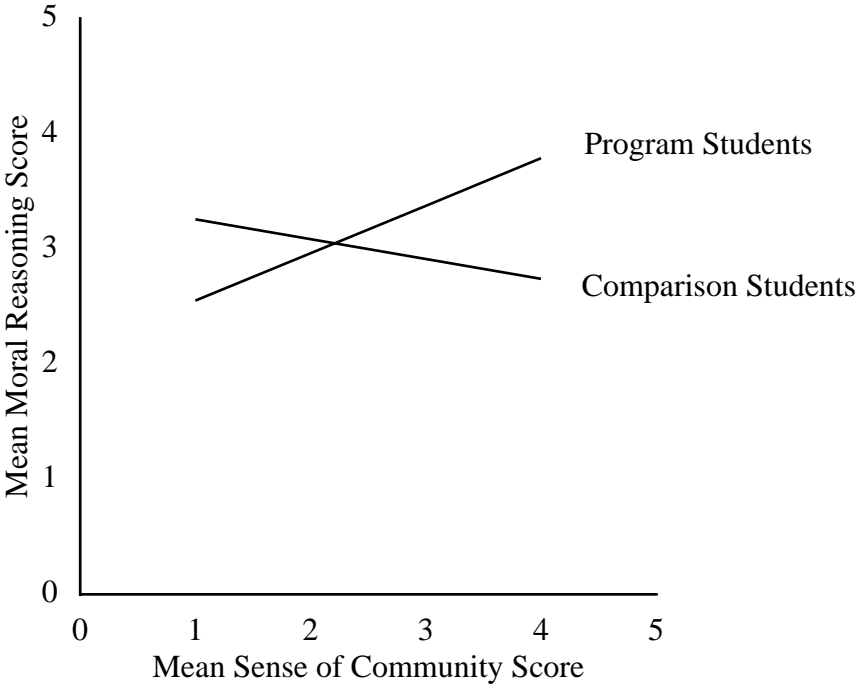
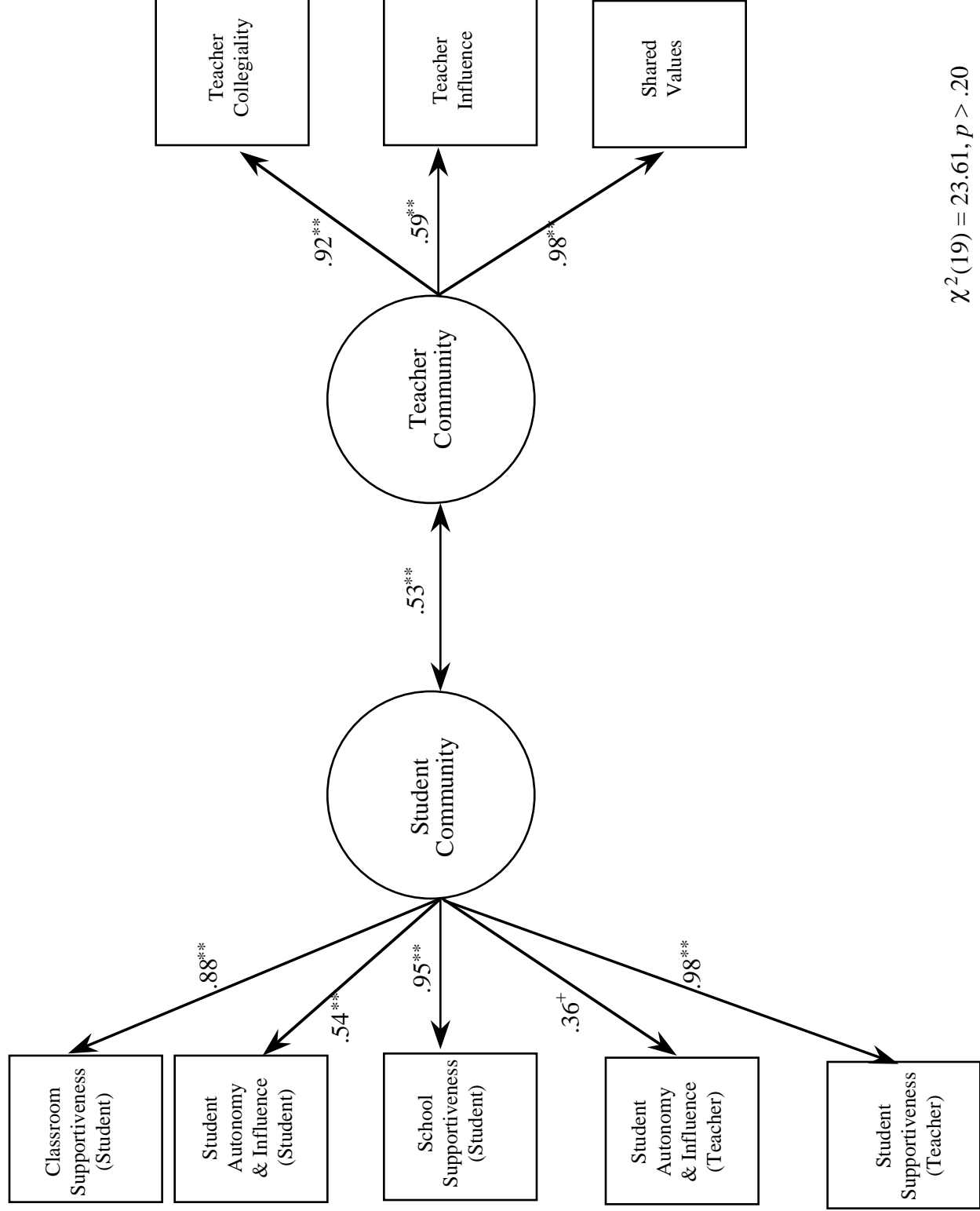


Figure 3. Structural Model of A Caring School Community



$\chi^2(19) = 23.61, p > .20$

Comparative Fit Index = .956

Figure 4. Effects of Sense of Community on Enjoyment of Class by Poverty Level of Students.

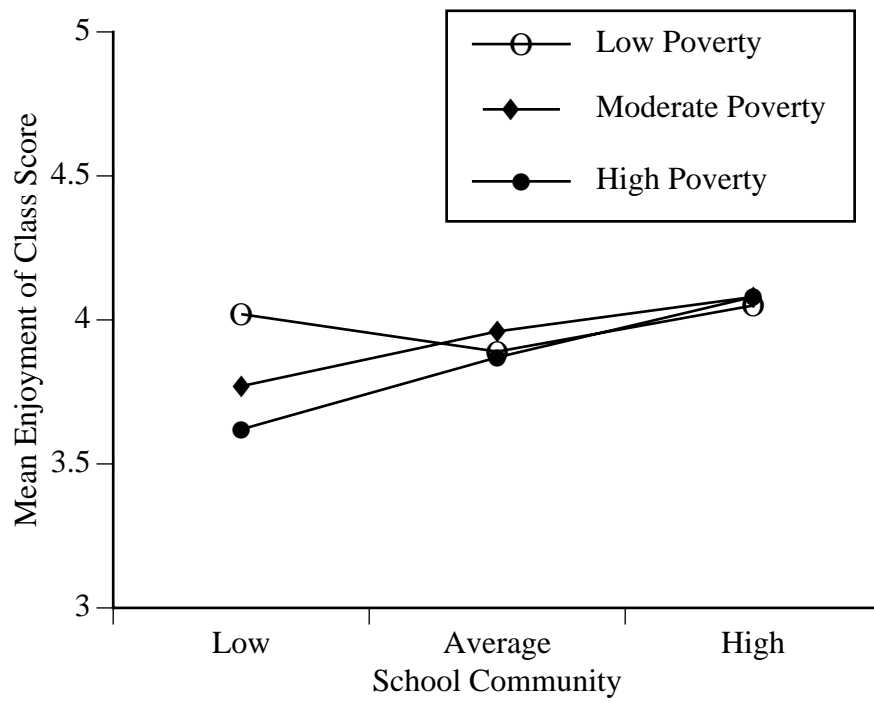


Figure 5. Effects of Sense of Community on Task Orientation Toward Learning by Poverty Level of Students.

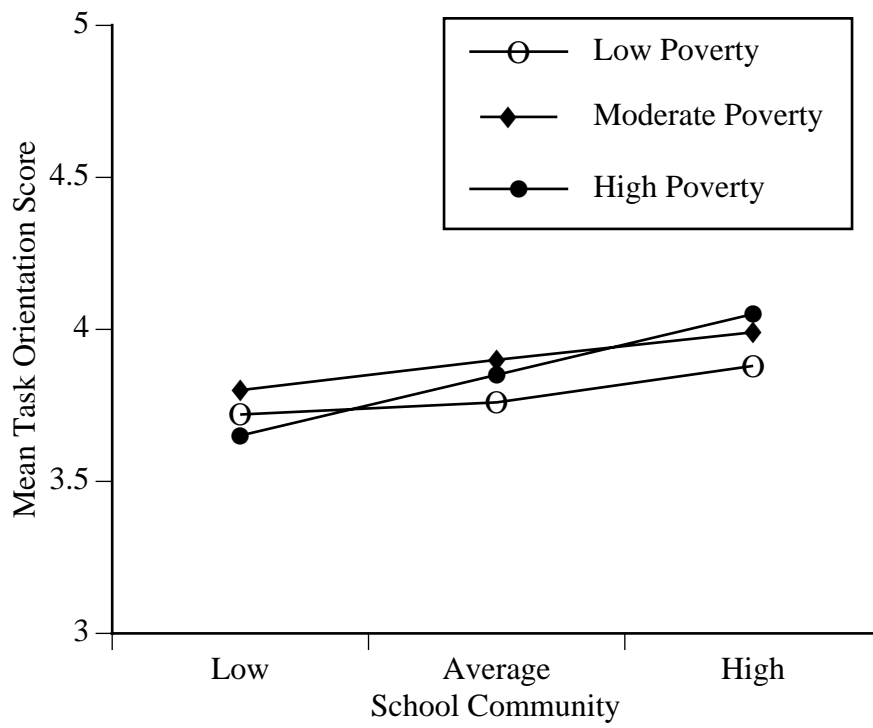


Figure 6. Effects of Sense of Community on Educational Expectations for Students by Poverty Level of Students.

