TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH DESIGN CONVERSATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL CHANGE

A Thesis in

Instructional Systems
and
Comparative and International Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore DESIGN CONVERSATION AS IT IS LIVED OUT IN the communication processes amongst stakeholders involved in SCHOOL CHANGE. School reform efforts in various countries look for increased participation in design and decision-making at the local level. Design conversation, embedded in the theoretical framework of systems thinking and systems design has not, to date, been researched as a theoretical construct. Experiences and perceptions form the core of the data; therefore, a phenomenological research approach was chosen. Data were gathered at three internationally dispersed sites in the Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States of America. The results indicate that teachers do value the process, describe changing mindsets, designing visions, concrete strategies, equitable participation, trust, and risk taking. The study hopes to lead THOSE INTERESTED IN SCHOOL CHANGE to increased use and evaluation of design conversation in educational systems design.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teachers’ experiences with design conversation for educational systems design are the core of the research question for this study. Communicative approaches such as design conversation might gain in importance as more sustainable and system-wide approaches to school change are searched for. That school change is necessary is commonly agreed upon. Mandated reforms with little or no user involvement were characteristic of many change efforts, but to date those efforts have not brought forth results that are substantial and far reaching enough to truly turn the education system into one that serves the learners’ needs. To better address learners’ needs at the local level, stakeholder involvement in change efforts is promoted (Peck & Carr, 1997; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994). This involvement requires communication amongst all affected by those changes. Design conversation as the communicative medium for grassroots design of new systems is suggested by some in the forefront of educational systems design and school change. What is design conversation, how is it practiced and what are the experiences made when engaging in such conversation?

In discussing the problem, I first highlight some central themes in the current school change debate, concluding that change is an ongoing process, not a one-time reform. I summarize the character of the communication processes during school change efforts and introduce the concept of design conversation. I then pose the research questions and describe the path that leads to this researcher’s interest in the problem. To conclude, I present the study’s significance.
“Give up on the idea that the pace of change will slow down” (Fullan, 2003, p. 24). This comment by Fullan calls for urgent attention to change processes. With the transition from the industrial society to an information society, the learning environment in schools also needs to change from a one-size-fits-all transmission model to something else, more in line with the information age (Reigeluth, 1994). What this “something else” is, and how to steer the process to transform the learning environment accordingly, is heavily debated, and one gets the impression that the remarks made by George Leonard in 1984 still hold true today:

“Does this mean that we are in for a period of (as the report [National Commission of Excellence in Education (1983), A Nation at Risk] put it) “sweeping reform” and “far-reaching restructuring of schools”? Will the schools emerge transformed? Sadly, the answer is no. The reports are well intentioned, and they are valuable in directing our attention towards the importance of education, in urging higher standards in the schools and better pay for those who teach; but their promise of real, deep-down change is a hoax” (Leonard, 1984).

Voices for change in schools can be heard coming from many directions, and the debate about education continues amongst those concerned about the quality, efficacy, and effectiveness of the current education system. These calls are not confined to one country, but are a worldwide phenomenon (Villegas-Reimers & Reimers, 1996). Changes are attempted. Little consensus, though, seems to exist about the direction this change should take, who should participate in the change effort, and how the change should be implemented.

The immediate beneficiaries or victims of any innovation or change in school settings are first and foremost students, teachers, and principals, who live in the system on a daily basis, and parents, who experience the effects through their children. But too
often, policy makers hand reforms and innovations to teachers for implementation and rarely involve teachers and other stakeholders in the design of these reforms. Cuban (2003) describes the classroom teacher as “…the ultimate insider when it comes to putting reform into practice and the primary gatekeeper to student learning. Yet teacher voices have been largely unheard in policymaking circles” (p. 60), not only in the United States, but internationally:

“In these calls for reform and in the options which are brought fourth to change schools, there is surprisingly little attention to the role of the teachers. Some of the proposals for change advocate ‘teacher-proof” innovations, which can sustain the impetus for change despite of the teachers. In some other cases, teachers are absent from the discourse about change. In yet other cases, the role of teachers is not central to the proposal of change” (Villegas-Reimers & Reimers, 1996, p. 469).

Villegas Reimers and Reimers ask for “reforms with the teachers, and not in spite of them” (p. 471), but the organization of the current school system is still largely hierarchical, and the communication flows from policy makers, through superintendents and principals, to the teachers (Cuban, 2003; Hansen, 1995). As a result, teachers often react to suggested or imposed innovations either with grudging compliance, subtle neglect, or outright hostility. While some policies and guidelines are necessary, the complexity of educational changes calls for creative thinking and action. “Mandates are not sufficient and the more you try to specify them the more narrow the goals and means become. Teachers are not technicians” (Fullan, 1993, p. 22)

While teachers do generate innovations in their classrooms and, at times, attempt to document them, these innovations do not weigh substantially in the policy making process. A parallel observation can be made at the level of schools, as I learned through my own work and conversations with teachers at such schools. Innovative schools are
created and exist, but only as small islands isolated from each other in an otherwise
monolithic, hierarchical system.

“We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look
different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers
engaging in these practices in large scale institutions designed to deliver
education to most children” (Elmore, 1995, p. 11).

It seems that mandated reforms that do not include stakeholders, in particular
teachers, in the design process are too often doomed to failure, and, in order to avoid
more waste of misappropriated energy, the change process in the context of education
should be rethought.

*Ongoing change*

School change should not be a one-time event consisting of some reform slogans
and policy mandates in response to abysmal test scores resulting from a school
evaluation. Change is an ongoing phenomenon that can be observed in all aspects of life
and should be an ongoing process taking place in all facets of education. Fullan (2001b)
tells those involved in school change to “learn to live with change” (p. 268). Changes in
education should not just be a reaction to changes in society, to different demands in the
workplace, or to discontent expressed by stakeholders. Rather, those involved in
education should be able to reflect on current strengths and shortcomings, create visions,
and design and implement new learning environments on an ongoing basis, creating the
future instead of reacting to developments. Such a scenario calls for an ongoing process
of envisioning the future, self- reflection and evaluation, conversation, decision making
and action by all involved (Wagner, 1993)
Communication during the change process

A preliminary overview of change models and diffusion of innovation models shows that the dominant terminology used refers to change agents on one side and stakeholders or users/beneficiaries of the innovation or change on the other side. Ellsworth (2000), in his survey of educational change models, begins by describing the change communication flowing from a change agent to the intended adopter. He continues by stating that the communication has to flow in both directions and that the stakeholders need to be involved (ibid., p. 29). Still, the majority of change models he reviews do not show the change agent and the intended adopter as co-designers. The change agent is the one who develops the innovation, taking stakeholder insights and indigenous knowledge (Rogers, 2000) into account, but still is the originating force behind the changes. The communication between change agent and adopter is intended to explain the changes or innovations to the user, gather feedback, remove obstacles, and assure adoption of the changes or innovations.

This kind of diffusion process has its place, but is inadequate for addressing the manifold problems the current education system displays. It is too limited, focuses frequently on only one issue, and does not create a broad base of support that could be established through user involvement.

Senge (2000) dramatizes an occasion where a superintendent presented the vision for the school’s future to an audience of parents and teachers. The vision was diligently crafted. Stakeholder input was sought, maybe through surveys or similar tools. During a two-day retreat a carefully chosen team developed the vision. After the presentation the audience applauded. A year later, the superintendent voiced his frustration because hardly anybody got involved in acting on the vision. Senge contrasts this scenario with a similar presentation by a superintendent, but preceded by a year of creative and
generative conversations amongst all those sitting in the audience. In this case the people he addressed felt ownership and remained involved.

“The shared vision process design has three separate but related purposes. First, the process addresses pent-up tensions over current problems and concerns. People, both individually and collectively, experience enormous relief when the system finally gives voice to their problems and concerns. Second, a shared vision process must be “generative”: People must be able to talk about their deepest hopes and desires for their children and community. Only then will people feel not just relief, but a genuine sense of hope. Only then can they recognize the source of each other’s aspirations, enough to generate momentum and mutual trust.

The process will also not be complete until it leads to a third purpose: action. People must have the inherent satisfaction of re-creating the school together, with one another’s support – including the support of those whom they have mistrusted in the past” (ibid., pp 290-291).

Senge suggests developing a shared vision for schools through a process that involves all stakeholders in an ongoing conversation. This conversation resembles the concept of a design conversation (Banathy, 1996; Jenlink, 1995; Jenlink & Carr, 1996).

**Design conversation**

Design conversation is more than discussing an isolated issue or trying to come up with a solution to a specific problem. Banathy (1996) considers design conversation in the context of social systems design:

“Social systems design is a process that carries a stream of shared meaning through a free flow of discourse among the stakeholders who seek to create a new system. In order to understand the critical nature of this communication function, scholars explore various modes of social discourse and search for the most appropriate to systems design” (Banathy, 1996, p. 39).
Generative dialogue, which serves to create “a common frame of thinking, shared meaning, and a collective world view” (ibid., p. 39) is blended with strategic dialogue, which focuses on solutions to specific problems.

Jenlink and Carr (1996) define design conversation as serving to create a new educational system:

“When we consider the use of design conversation in educational change, the purpose becomes that of creating a new educational learning system” (ibid., p. 34).

Conversation is a spoken exchange of thoughts, opinions, and feelings (dictionary.com). By definition, a conversation cannot happen in the context of mandated change. When change is mandated, the communication is vertical, from a superior to those who carry out the mandate. It is in one direction, while true conversations, and most certainly all design conversations, require reciprocity. Conversation is horizontal, on a level playing field, where all participants communicate with each other. In schools, changes are frequently mandated, and conversation is relegated to the discussion of daily problems, but this conversation does not have the character of a design conversation; participants do not design a new system. In contrast, design conversation would serve to create a framework for a shared vision along with specific strategies to address issues within a school system or specific school. It calls for creating a space where old concepts can be challenged and new ones conceived (Jenlink, 1995).

To create this space is not an easy matter. When discussing stakeholder involvement, Carr (1995) observes that it is often difficult to retain already recruited stakeholders involved in a school change endeavor.

“I found that retention rates differed somewhat predictably. … I found that one of the biggest reasons that parents did not remain on the teams they had originally committed to was because of a lack of sense of purpose” (ibid., p. 83).
Could this alienation be due to the character of communication amongst participants? Do some feel excluded, feel that their voices are not heard and their contributions not valued? What is said, how it is said, and to whom it is said, influences the course of a school change effort considerably. Teachers have to stay committed because it is their job, but they still might feel alienated and as a result participate with a minimum of effort. Parents and other stakeholders who feel less obligated might simply drift away.

A sense of purpose can be created when all are involved in the design of the vision and changes from the very beginning and when the necessary dialogues and conversations are inclusive and encourage and value the contributions of all individuals. “Carefully selecting the conversational medium is important to creating a secure climate for disclosure, suspension, and abandonment of old ways” (Jenlink 1995, p. 55). To have this space and ongoing design conversation is not yet a widespread phenomenon:

“In the school setting, design conversation is perhaps the rarest to find because school practitioners and change agents typically engage in conversations focused on solutions to problems within the existing system. …Stakeholders brought together for the purpose of school change must first create a sense of purpose and an identity with that purpose. People do not come equipped to automatically engage in design, but must built their individual and collective capacities for a new form of creative discourse” (Jenlink and Carr 1996 p. 34).

The practice is still in its infancy and has only been experimented with, but the potential for authentic stakeholder involvement can be detected in the concept of design conversation. Therefore it is important to gain an understanding of the process.
The question

In order to better understand the nature of the conversational medium and be able to create a space for design conversation, it would be conducive to learn about the different ways that participants experience design conversations. Clearly, because schools are not operating in a vacuum, but have the imprint of the surrounding society and culture, the experience can vary, depending on the setting. This societal and cultural context needs to be taken into account and will be considered central to this research.

The study is exploratory in nature and seeks to collect experiences with the practice of design conversation in several schools in diverse societal and cultural settings. Phenomenological methods are chosen for this exploratory research. The questions asked are intended to “pull” the reader into the issues in such a way that the reader cannot but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way the human scientist does” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 44). The following questions should be understood as open-ended questions that serve to initiate an exploration.

The key research question is:

*How do participants in design conversation describe their experience?*

Sub-questions are:

1. *How do teachers experience and perceive the involvement of various stakeholders in the design conversation process?*

2. *How do observations of design conversation compare to participant perception?*

3. *Which variations in design conversation processes and perceptions could reflect variations in the societal and cultural setting of the school?*

4. *How does the process of design conversation in the cases explored diverge from or support the theoretical construct of design conversation?*
The questions do not ask for causal relationships (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105), but rather insights into the experience of design conversation. While question three, which deals with the relationship between school setting and societal and cultural setting, seems to invite the search for causal relationships, it will not be possible, nor advisable, to draw such conclusions. Because the proposed research will take place in schools in different societal and cultural settings, it is likely that related phenomena will be uncovered.

**Researcher identity**

During my years working as a teacher, school change was always in the back of my mind. For several years I was able to realize my goal of working in a learner-centered environment, in this case a Montessori school. But this was not always possible, and I also spent a number of years in traditional, “assembly line, factory-type” schools. In both settings, teachers showed concern for the children and tried to do their best to help them develop, but there was not much communication between the people working in these different types of schools and little coming together to explore common frameworks and visions for education.

My experience in the factory-type schools resembled that described by Gatto (1992) as the *seven-lesson curriculum*\(^1\) of confusion, class position, indifference, 

\(^1\) The seven lessons schoolteacher teaches: 1.) *Confusion*: everything taught is out of context and superficial. 2.) *Class position*: “everyone has a proper place in the pyramid and there is no way out of your class except by number magic”. 3.) *Indifference*: The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing. 4.) *Emotional dependency*: prizes, honors, disgraces…”I teach kids to surrender their will to the predestinated chain of command. Rights may be granted or withheld by any authority without appeal, because rights do not exist inside a school – not even the right of free speech, as the Supreme Court has ruled”. 5.) *Intellectual dependency*: “Good people wait for an expert to tell them what to do”. 6.) *Provisional self-esteem*: “The lesson of report cards, grades, and tests is that children should not trust themselves or their parents but should instead rely on the valuation of certified officials. People need to be told what they are worth”. 7.) *One can’t hide*: The meaning of constant surveillance and denial of privacy is that no one can be trusted, that privacy is not legitimate” (pp. 4-11)
emotional dependency, intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, and mistrust (ibid., pp. 4-11). He comes to the conclusion that “Nobody survives the seven-lesson curriculum completely unscathed, not even the instructors. The method is deeply and profoundly anti-educational. No tinkering will fix it” (ibid., p. 19).

I observed the effects of the seven-lesson curriculum in action and taught it myself. Knowing about and having experienced and worked in schools that did their best to not teach those lessons, I inevitably began to question my own teaching methods and classroom organization. All along, I noticed that my opinion about educational practices was not necessarily always welcomed and that there was hardly any open conversation that questioned the dominant modes of teaching. Teachers seemed to have given up, and more than once I heard remarks about “counting the days to retirement” or “leaving teaching and trying other things.”

I also saw my own children at times being slow to leave in the morning to attend one of the “factory-type” schools and, on the other hand, not wanting to leave their school in the afternoon during the years they attended either a Montessori school or a project-based charter school. I observed boredom in the former type of school and excitement for learning in the latter. Therefore, there is no doubt in my mind that the “assembly line” type of school needs to become a thing of the past.

I experienced some developing of a vision of an ideal system of education, some batting around of ideas about ‘what could be’ outside the school environment. These exchanges were usually with friends, in college classes, or also with school-age youth I knew. They did not take place within the schools. In the schools, too many urgent problems and tasks kept people from thinking beyond the immediate future.

I was motivated to look at the issue of grassroots change, change that is initiated and designed by the stakeholders. The awareness that school reforms tended to be mandated and that too many reform attempts are short-lived fads, or “disconnected,
episodic, fragmented, superficially adorned projects” (Fullan, 2001, p. 21) led me to search for alternative approaches to change. During my current studies, I used various class projects to explore school change at the level of an individual school and also within a national education system. The successful cases of reform I read about always had a strong element of communication amongst all stakeholders involved.

I read about communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), communities of learning (Ackerman, Pipek, & Wulf, 2003), and on-line support of such communities (Nichani & Hung, 2002) and found many useful approaches to support ongoing learning and quality improvement through communication amongst stakeholders. What seemed to be missing, though, from these approaches was a strong generative and inclusive dialogue enabling people to envision and design new systems. Some had dreamt up schools of the future, but these models were still at the stage of fiction.

I have been a ‘stakeholder in the education system’ in various roles, as a teacher, a learner, and as a parent. In all of these roles, I had very limited choices and input in the design processes that shaped the learning environment. Outside the school system, I have participated to some degree in processes of participatory democracy and engaged in team decision-making and the design and development of assorted programs and projects. It became obvious to me that the skills and values needed for such participation have to be learned. Simply instituting participation in educational systems design and expecting great results right away is illusory, in my opinion.

2 These experiences were largely gathered during involvement in activities within the Bahá’í community, a faith-based community (www.bahai.org). Here, when planning and designing any kind of study program, service project, or other community endeavor, a consultative process is used which resembles in principle the process of design conversation when applied to the design of a new entity.
These attitudes and insights will no doubt influence my research. I will likely search for flaws in the application of design conversation when research participants describe negative experiences before questioning the validity of the approach as a whole. The difference between the theory of design conversation and the practice of it, especially at this early stage of its use, will be foremost in my mind.

I will not expect people who have very little training in being co-designers of a system to be all of a sudden able to slip into that role without a problem. Rather than seeing perfect design conversations in action, I expect to hear descriptions of how people grapple with learning to engage in design conversation, understand the underlying values and develop the necessary skills and attitudes.

**The significance of the study**

School reform efforts in various countries call for increased decision making at the local level, usually expressed in calls for decentralization and stakeholder involvement. Bottom-up initiatives are supposed to be strengthened, and responsibilities and accountabilities shouldered at the local level (Villegas-Reimers & Reimers, 1996). These developments necessitate communication amongst stakeholders. Processes and safe spaces have to be in place for those involved to create visions, make decisions, and design and implement the desired changes.

Design conversation may well be a suitable vehicle for allowing grassroots efforts in school change to unfold and support substantial and sustained innovation in schools. Very little, though, is known about the communication and decision making processes that go hand in hand with stakeholder involvement or how participants experience them.

The results of the study will add to our knowledge and insights about using design conversation in the broad service of school change and educational systems design. The
study will look at the communicative processes in a systems design endeavor. The description of experiences with design conversation will help those who decide to use it create the appropriate environment for a fruitful design conversation to unfold and, it is expected, will add some pieces to the puzzle of theory and practice as used for systems design.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the current problems school change efforts are experiencing and presented design conversation as a communicative approach to achieving lasting, system-wide and changes.

I argued that a fragmented approach to school reform, top down mandates, and lack of stakeholder engagement continue to lead to insufficient changes in schools and general frustration with schools as we know them. Teachers, who are key to any school change effort, are still not involved in the design of such changes and limited to the role of implementing the policies of others, usually working outside the immediate school environment. Sustainable educational change leading to the comprehensive design of an education system that truly serves the learners is needed. Thus, before attempting change, users of the system need to develop a shared vision.

I presented design conversation as a medium to create a shared vision because communication amongst stakeholders and their effective participation in the design process is an indispensable element in this process. Learning more about effective communication that has the characteristics of design conversation amongst stakeholders during the visioning and design phase is proposed.
Based on the thus established need for design conversation, I formulated the research questions and described the researcher’s experiences that led to interest in those questions.

The significance of the study was established because design conversation can serve as the communicative process when trends toward decentralization of schools, stakeholder involvement, and inclusion of local expertise continue and possibly widen.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Systems thinking is defined as the theoretical foundation from which the concept of design conversation draws. When embarking on jointly designing an educational system, whether it be a program within a school, a school, a district, a state, or a nationwide educational system, or on change of an ecological nature, where the school system is looked at in the larger context of society and societal values (Squire & Reigeluth, 2000), systems thinking is a prerequisite for understanding the interconnectedness of all parts of the system.

After clarifying systems thinking, various modes of communication and their facility to reflect systems thinking are highlighted. Design conversation is explained in depth and change models are analyzed as to their potential for using design conversation.

Research on design conversation or settings and circumstances where design conversation could take place is reviewed, and the need for further research is established.
Theoretical Basis for Design Conversation

**Systems Thinking**


“The shift in world view to a systems perspective recognized that systems don’t operate in isolation; they are interdependent and connected, and cause and effect aren’t linear. That is, because everything is connected to everything else, no single action can be isolated as the single cause of something else” (Hutchins, 1996, p. 13-14).

Systems thinking and interconnectedness was for many years a dominant mode of thinking in various cultures, such as the Maori in Australia and Native Americans (McIntyre, 2003; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004). Reductionism, that is analyzing parts rather than taking a holistic approach, overshadowed systems thinking in the scientific discourse of industrialized nations before von Bertalanffy introduced general systems theory (Hammond, 2002). Von Bertalanffy (1975) points out that the systems view is not new. Aristotle stated that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (p. 149) and that relationships between parts are a vital element:

“The properties and modes of action of higher levels are not explicable by the summation of the properties and modes of action of their components taken in isolation. If, however, we know the ensemble of the components and the relations existing between them, then the higher levels are derivable from the components” (Problems of Life, 1952, cited in: von Bertalanffy, 1975, p. 152-153).

As a result, it is important to look not only at the parts, but also at the relationships amongst the parts, how they interact, and how changes in one part affect the others.
A systems approach developed in various disciplines, such as behavioral sciences, mathematics, physics, social sciences, etc. (Hammond, 2002). In education, a major impetus was given to systems thinking by Banathy (1991), Reigeluth (1993), Jenlink (1995), Carr (1998) and others. Banathy (1991) explains the fragmented approach to the study of education:

“In education, we study the sociology of the classroom, the psychology of instruction, the economics of education, the anthropology of school culture, and the politics of governance. This way of trying to understand education brings to mind the parable about a group of blind men who try to describe an elephant by touching its various parts. Compartmentalized inquiry, combined with the use of widely differing orientations, methods, and languages of separate disciplines, results in unintegrated and incomplete knowledge and characterizations” (pp. 9 – 10).

The fragmented and piecemeal approach to education and reforms that stay within the system instead of stepping out of it are, in the view of Banathy and others, the major cause for failed educational change. The call is instead for a systems design approach that steps out of the boundaries of the current system and involves designing a new system, creating images of a future education system. Once the vision is established, the current circumstances can be taken into account and strategies devised to work towards that ideal image (ibid.).

Peck and Carr (1997) see systems thinking as a requisite to making educational change efforts viable and overcoming the current mistrust towards reforms. Through conversations amongst stakeholders, all variable can be easier identified and success and failure more accurately predicted (ibid., p. 317).

Banathy (2000) postulates that humankind has come to a stage in its development where people need to engage in designing the social systems that affect them. He refers to a conscious, self-guided evolution of society and asks that people “develop design
competence by acquiring a design culture” (ibid., p. 5), taking a systems approach. The key point of importance to design conversation in this statement is that design competence becomes a universally developed skill. Banathy asks that \textit{people} develop design competence. “\textit{People}” includes everybody, not just an elite of experts. This design competence then would enable everybody to participate in the design of future societal systems.

\textit{Communication in Support of Systems Thinking}

For systems thinking to be applied to a systems design carried out by all beneficiaries of the system, communication amongst those beneficiaries or stakeholders is logically necessary. These communication processes can take on different characteristics. The most common conventions are described briefly and analyzed as to their usefulness for a holistic, inclusive approach to systems design. Design conversation is described in detail and its role in systems design and, specifically, educational systems design delineated.

Conversation and, in particular, dialogue are explored in organizational management as a vehicle for establishing a process of organizational learning that is continuous and pro-active (Isaacs, 1993; Senge, 2000).

A conversation can take on various shapes. Carr and Jenlink (1996) describe a typology of conversation along a continuum from a closed form of conversation to an increasingly open one. They include dialectic conversation, discussion, dialogue, and design conversation in this typology.
Dialectic conversation

At the closed end of the continuum is the dialectic conversation. The dialectic conversation is characterized by bringing forth a thesis, juxtaposed by an antithesis, which eventually should lead to a synthesis (Websters, 1984). Opposite ideas are played out against each other, ideologies shaped that are presented as unchangeable truth. Rigid beliefs and debates characterize the process. In school change endeavors, this means that the change effort “often meets strong resistance from individuals unwilling to relinquish their absolute beliefs in certain truths about curriculum, learning, administration, etc.” (Carr & Jenlink, 1996, p. 32). The result of such a communication pattern tends to be the establishment of factions and camps. If any innovation or change within a system is achieved as a result of a dialectic conversation, it likely reflects a pre-conceived view of the dominant party.

Discussion

Next along this continuum, Jenlink and Carr position discussion. During a discussion, pre-shaped opinions and perceptions are brought forth and defended with arguments. Individual positions are argued for. The process tends to lead to the formation of different camps or political movements. Both dialectic conversations and discussions are of a transactional nature. The conversation is aimed at effecting changes within the system, specific issues are addressed, pros and cons weighed, and conclusions debated. In the end, there will be winners and losers, and instead of a new entity designed and shaped by all participants, only the design by the dominant group is eventually instituted.
Dialogue conversation

In dialogue, the conversation tends to be more open and focuses on building community and changing and transforming the system. Bohm (1996) points out that dialogue (derives from dia-logos, Greek = ”through words”) serves to create meaning within a group, a common understanding that comes about through a free-flowing conversation. He states:

“Contrast this with the word ‘discussion,’ which has the same root as ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion.’ It really means to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there are many points of view and where everybody is presenting a different one – analyzing and breaking up. That obviously has its value, but it is limited, and it will not get us very far beyond the various points of view (p. 6-7).

Through dialogue, participants’ perspectives are explored and brought together into “collaborative thought and coordinated action” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 24). In fact, organizations are at times envisioned as networks of such dialogues or conversations (ibid.). Bohm (1996) describes the purpose of dialogue in overcoming fragmentation of thought through observing one’s thought processes (proprioception), suspending assumptions, and developing common content shared by participants.

Banathy (1996) distinguishes between generative and strategic dialogue. Generative dialogue serves to create shared meaning; strategic dialogue is used to accomplish specific tasks.

Banathy (2003) gives a short glimpse of the use of dialogue throughout human evolution and describes the ancient, egalitarian farming communities of the Greek City States using generative dialogue to establish common values and worldviews and strategic dialogue to plan their lives and actions and organize their societies around those values. Whenever autocratic and bureaucratic societal organizations gained dominance, egalitarian dialogue conversation was abandoned and suppressed. With the re-emergence
of a more democratic conscience, people had to re-learn dialogue conversation characterized by Banathy as such:

“Dialogue provides opportunity for learning. In the dialogue event, people are able to be honest and straight with each other, they level with each other, they share ideas freely, and they learn from each other. They develop a shared mind, and think and search together in new and creative ways. They awaken to their collective intelligence. They can think and talk together. Shared meaning and understanding flow freely in the group. All of the above indicates that dialogue offers a unique opportunity for learning from each other, nurturing collective intelligence, and developing social competence. (However, they can do none of these if controlling authority is exercised in the group.)” (p. 13).

Those familiar with the dominant characteristics of our schools know from experience that controlling authority is still in widespread use, as much in relationships between faculty and administration as in the classroom between teachers and students. As a result, students, teachers, and administrators are not likely to engage in substantial dialogue conversations and miss out on learning this vital skill.

While dialogue will serve to create shared meaning and overcome conflict, dialogue by itself does not go as far as facilitating the design of a new system.

Design Conversation

Jenlink and Carr (1996) position design conversation at the open end of the continuum. To design is understood as “to conceive and plan something out in the mind, …to devise something for a specific function” (Websters, 1984, p. 343). The conversational element means that communication exists amongst all involved. Designing becomes a group endeavor. While dialogue conversation can serve to establish meaning and collective thought in a general, free flowing manner, it “is not necessarily aimed at pursuing the design of a new entity” (Banathy, 1996, p. 39). Design
conversation, on the other hand, serves to create a new system. Dialogue can be used to
*transform* the system. Design conversation would *transcend* the system by creating a
new one. It combines generative and strategic dialogue for the sake of designing a
system (ibid.). While in dialogue personal opinions are suspended for the sake of
exploring various approaches to an issue, in design conversation mindsets are suspended.
“Design conversation is a disciplined inquiry grounded in systems philosophy, theory,

Banathy (2000) observes a societal cycle of a creative surge and subsequent
maturity once newly emerged societal structures are fully developed. Finally these
structures will become encrusted and out of sync with new developments:

> “Then, a point is reached where confidence in its own viability and the viability of
its evolved knowledge, its institutions, and ways of life becomes so strong that
they become rigid and inflexible. Any notion of change is rejected, and the
society becomes out-of-sync with its environment. Even if there are calls for
change from within, these calls are dismissed. It is at this point that decay sets in”
(ibid., p. 150).

He sees the current societal development as being at such a crossroads between
decay and a new, creative surge, with society emerging out of the scientific, industrial
setting into a yet undefined shape. Educational change theorists point to the ending of an
industrial era and the emergence of an information era (Reigeluth, 1994), a change from
“industrial worker to knowledge worker” (Drucker, 1989 in: Banathy, 2000, p. 195),
which creates a new set of educational needs. Banathy sees evolutionary leaps: “the new
generative order is not an improved version of the previous one. It is *discontinuous with
it*. It transcends it” (ibid., p. 172).

To live with this evolutionary change, people have developed various coping
strategies, from glorifying the past to anticipating developments, trying to take advantage
of them, to actually playing an active role in designing the future (Ackoff, 1981). Banathy (2000) sums it up as such:

> We may try to fix the host of problems that have arisen with the evolutionary markers as they lost balance, harmony, internal consistency, synergy, and symmetry. Or we can embark on the greatest venture humankind ever attempted, collectively developing the conditions necessary to engage in conscious evolution and guide our evolution by design” (p. 199).

To be able to collectively design an evolutionary trajectory of a system, communication, as stated before, is a necessity. Design conversation is conceptualized in such a way that it would enable a collaborative design process in which all stakeholders participate.

Traditions of conversations amongst stakeholders for establishing desirable societal features existed in history whenever participatory democracy was practiced, as, for example, in classical Greece.

> “The citizens of Athene held forty statutory Assemblies a year on the Agora [the central town plaza], and others when the need arose. These meetings provided the citizenry the opportunity to take part in deliberations and make decisions about issues that affected their lives and the life of their community” (ibid., p. 357).

Reminiscent of the Agora, public spheres with diverse characteristics should be created to allow a wide variety of design communities to operate. Banathy calls them “evolutionary design spaces” (ibid., p. 359). The discourse in these design communities is referred to as evolutionary or design conversation with the root meaning of conversation being “to turn to one another.” Members of an evolutionary design community turn to one another without reserve and in truth and openness, accepting and honoring each other” (ibid., p. 389-390).
Underlying the conversation practices are certain values such as equity of all participants, along with valuing diversity of different views. Diversity leads to a more complete picture of an issue, while “mono-cultures create barren spaces in nature as well as in the ecology of society” (ibid., p. 394).

If equity is a goal, the concept of leadership needs to be rethought, because the notion of leadership creates a dualism of leaders and followers and contradicts the approach of people jointly shaping a collective future system. Banathy suggests replacing the concept of leadership with stewardship. “Stewardship is shared accountability, which is fueled by a shared commitment to service” (ibid., p. 395).

Jenlink (2004) elaborates on some of the discourse ethics related to design conversation. Those who set out to design an educational system are necessarily guided by ethical considerations.

“The nature of design conversation, as communicative and emancipatory action relies on discourses that are democratizing and authentically participative. Design conversation provides a public sphere, in which participants’ voices are valued, listened to, and have a primary role in determining the conceptions and actions necessary for designing a new system” (p. 238).

He defines certain ethical principals guiding design conversation. These include

1. Ethic of responsibility … premised on democratic practice and civic responsibility…
2. Ethic of inclusion … remove obstacles that exclude some participants…
3. Ethic of symmetry … empower all participants by mediating imbalances in the discourse…
4. Ethic of language … honoring the differences in language…
5. Ethic of diminishing dualisms … mediate and bridge dualisms, [e.g. ‘theory’ and ‘practice’]…
6. Ethic of care … concern for how individuals meet and treat one another…
7. Ethic of respect … for oneself, for others, and for the process that guides the design…
8. Ethic for socially just discourse … create access to equal opportunity for all individuals…
9. Ethic of aesthetics … obtain a richness and dignity in interactions, relations, and participants …
10. Ethic of critical consciousness … critical reflection and historical awareness [to unveil reality] …
11. Ethic of deep listening … seek meaning in what another says … (ibid., pp. 244-246)

In summary, design conversation unfolds in a setting characterized by participative democracy. Its purpose is to create new entities or systems that transcend current systems. To achieve this transcending quality, people need to set aside their current mindset, be detached from preconceived ideas, lay out their thoughts openly for all to contemplate, and jointly create a vision of a future system, which is more than “the sum of its parts.” Sometimes the metaphor of a container, which people create by offering their thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and opinions, is used. All participating in the design conversation shape the container.

“As the design conversation comes in contact with the consciousness of the community container, the collective mindfulness of the stakeholders is focused on creating, sustained in the design process by the thoughtful actions of all participants” (Jenlink & Carr, 1996, p. 35).

From this brief description of design conversation, it becomes obvious that design conversation is not merely a change tool to be used occasionally and then shelved away again, but rather a communicative approach underlying all functions of a social system. The mere act of using design conversation means creating spaces where it can happen, and the creation of these spaces in itself would already change systems, should these same systems not be prepared to support processes of participative democracy.
Design conversation and change models

As established above, design conversation is used to create a new system. Various approaches to effecting changes in individual or group practices, social systems, educational systems, organizations, and businesses have been developed and used. To what degree, if any, design conversation might have played or could play a role in those contexts is explored next. A few major change and diffusion of innovation models are selected and the communication pattern occurring during the change processes is analyzed and compared to the concept of design conversation.

Systems Design

As elaborated above, a major thinker in and promoter of systems design is Bela Banathy. He sees systems design “as an intellectual technology to be used in the design of educational systems” (Banathy, 1993, p. 9). Underlying systems design is the recognition that everything is interrelated. Instead of isolating problems and looking for problems and cause and effect relationships in small units, a method called reductionism (Hutchins, 1996, p. 11), recognizes inter-relatedness. Several educational change proponents (Banathy, 1991, 1996; Cuban, 2003; Jenlink, 1995; Peck & Carr, 1997; Reigeluth, 1994) blame the demise of so many school reforms on a piecemeal approach. One problem is addressed, one intervention designed, be it standards, technology, back to basics, educating the whole child, phonics, etc. (Allen, 1993), but the system is left as is.

Banthy and others point out that the entire education system is inadequate for the current era and is stuck in the industrial age. Schools still cater to the needs of a societal organization that is fast disappearing. The industrial society was organized around
material production. The dominant paradigm was “Newtonian classical science, deterministic, reductionist, single causality, organized simplicity” (Banathy, 1993, p. 18). The social consciousness centered on one’s nation and race. In contrast, we now live in an information society with focus on cognitive capabilities, systems science, networking, communicating, and a transnational, global outlook (ibid.). Therefore, it is not enough to merely infuse innovations into the education system; rather, a new system needs to be designed, and all affected by the design ought to be involved in the design process (ibid., p. 20).

The definition of design here is that

“Design is a creative, decision oriented, disciplined inquiry that aims to accomplish the following:
1. Diagnose and describe the design problem situation.
2. Clarify the reason for engaging in design.
3. Establishing the boundaries of the design inquiry.
4. Formulate core ideas, values, and an image of the future system that will guide the design.
5. Define expectations, aspirations, purposes, and requirements of the system to be designed.
6. Create and evaluate alternative representations of the future system.
7. Establish criteria by which to evaluate alternatives.
8. Using the criteria, select the most promising alternative.
9. Describe the future system, and
10. Plan for the development of the system, based on its description” (ibid., p. 39).

Looking over these processes and keeping in mind that the design process calls for universal participation by all stakeholders, it becomes obvious that the communication needs to flow at the horizontal level amongst all participating. As established in the description of design conversation, all stakeholders are involved in formulating core ideas, values, and an image of the future system that will guide the design. The term design conversation was coined by Banathy (1996) and others (Jenlink
and Carr, 1996) involved in educational systems change and design, and therefore it is not surprising that design conversation figures prominently in systems design.

**Diffusion of Innovations**

Diffusion of innovations focuses on the spreading of innovations. The questions here are what characteristic of an innovation and which diffusion strategies bring about adoption by the intended user population.

One major researcher on diffusion issues is Everett Rogers. In his major work, titled *Diffusion of Innovations* (2003), he describes the process of recognizing a need, developing an intervention, commercializing, diffusing, and adapting it. The potential user sees a need, or is made aware of a need, gains knowledge of an applicable innovation (knowledge stage), weighs the usefulness of the innovation (persuasion stage), and decides on the adoption (decision stage). If the intended adopters decide to adopt the innovation, it is implemented and tested (implementation and confirmation) (ibid., p. 170). The potential users become actively involved in the decision making process about the innovation at the persuasion stage. Rogers describes this stage as such:

“At the persuasion stage the individual becomes more psychologically involved with the innovation. He or she actively seeks information about the new idea, decides what messages he or she regards as credible, and decides how he or she interprets the information that is received. Thus, selective perception is important at the persuasion stage, for it is at the persuasion stage that a general perception of the innovation is developed” (ibid., p. 175).

Thus the potential user becomes involved with the innovation once it is designed. While re-invention might occur, and the user might alter the original innovation to adapt it better to a certain environment (ibid., p. 180), the initial design of the innovation is usually not preceded by a conversation or dialogue that involves stakeholders, users, and
designers. Rogers of course emphasizes the need for acceptability research and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the research and development of innovations, but does not go as far as involving the intended adopters in a design conversation. Rogers sees the spread of the knowledge about an innovation as happening in a similar fashion, as news is communicated or products are marketed.

The diffusion of innovations model offers many valuable insights into how the process from observing a need to developing and adopting an intervention can occur, but does not offer a place for design conversation to occur. The focus is on specific changes in behavior, not on envisioning and designing a new system with the involvement of stakeholders. The system within which the diffusion of an innovation is taking place remains largely as is, which implies acceptance of the system in general as good and valid. The innovation would simply improve some aspects within the system. This goal excludes true design conversation because no new system is designed.

**Havelock’s and Zlotolow’s focus on the change agent**

The title of Havlock’s and Zlotolow’s (1995) book is *The Change Agent’s Guide*, which immediately draws attention to the one person or small group of persons who instigate change. The authors speak of the change agent and the clients or the client system. The change agent is “someone who tries deliberately to bring about change or innovation in a social organization” (ibid., p. 21). This organization would then be the client or client system. The change agent could be a member of the system or an outsider, could be in a position of power such as a superintendent, or not. The change process or steps is described as such:
Stage 0: CARE – The first task of the change agent is to develop some sense of what the concern is, a sense of where the system seems to be hurting. …
Stage 1: RELATE – The next task, which may begin almost simultaneously with sensing the concern, is the establishment of contact and building relationships within the system. …
Stage 2: EXAMINE – With at least rudimentary relationships in place, the change agent and his/her clients will be able to consider in more detail what the nature of the problem is…
Stage 3: ACQUIRE – With an adequate definition at hand, the change agent and the system can begin to reach out for resources that might be relevant in contributing to the change effort…
Stage 4: TRY – With a well-defined problem and an assemblage of relevant resources, the system is in a good position to choose a solution or a set of possible solutions …
Stage 5: EXTEND – a chosen solution or innovation must finally be put into action and must come to be accepted by the system as a whole.
Stage 6: RENEW - …There is the need to have the innovation securely placed and integrated into the on-going life of the using system … building an internal system capacity for change which allows continuation of successful problem-solving which is not dependent … on the original change agent (ibid., pp. 12 – 13).

The authors certainly recognize the inter-relatedness of the various players in the client system and the need for those players to communicate (ibid., pp. 6-7) within the change cycle as expressed in Stage 1: RELATE, but the process still somewhat resembles the diffusion of innovations model, in which one person instigates the changes and then brings others on board.

In my opinion, if one wants to use design conversation, one must actually begin with one aspect of the last step, “build an internal system capacity for change which allows continuation of successful problem solving, not dependent on the change agent.” But even then it is not necessarily systems design that is happening; it might just be problem solving.

Judging from the numerous reports about failed school reforms (Cuban, 2003, Villegas-Reimers & Reimers, 1996), getting the system as a whole engaged in continuous renewal seems to be the most difficult stage, because it means a shift in values towards
“participative democracy through open stakeholder engagement” (Jenlink and Carr 1996, p. 35). Ideally, this shift should happen before setting out to innovate. In *The Change Agent Guide*, it is the change agent who builds the capacity within the system for continuous renewal and adaptation after the innovation or change has been established. As a result, any communication happening within the client system at the beginning of the process would not have the markings of design conversation. There might occur conversations resembling design conversation, but the resemblance would be only a surface one. The client system is still the “client,” giving input but not co-designing.

**Ely’s conditions for change**

Ely researched the conditions that should be present when change is desired. He determined several major environmental conditions:

1. Dissatisfaction with the status quo.
2. Knowledge and skills exist in users.
3. Things needed to make the innovation work are easily accessible.
4. Implementers must have time to learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing.
5. Rewards or incentives exist for participants.
6. Participation in the change process is expected and encouraged.
7. Support for the innovation by key players and other stakeholders is necessary.

The one condition that hints at the possible use of design conversation is the statement “participation in the design process is expected and encouraged” (ibid., p. 70). Ely goes as far as offering, if necessary, rewards to adopters. Thus he sees the possibility of resorting to external motivation if an innovation needs to be adopted but the adopters do not see the benefit. He admits though that it is better to establish a sense of ownership
amongst users. This sense of ownership can be reached through participation by all, or, if that is not possible, through some kind of representation (ibid., p. 71).

By emphasizing that stakeholder involvement is one of the conditions for change, Ely sets the stage for dialogues and possibly design conversation to take place, but he does not go into detail about the nature of the communication amongst stakeholders. The wording that “participation is expected” sounds very heavy handed, almost as if participation is forced upon the stakeholders. In contrast, design conversation should be a creative, inspiring process, and any rewards or incentives should emerge because all involved design a future system that they feel they can live with and benefit from.

**Holman and Devane’s group methods for shaping the future**

Holman and Devane (1999) did not devise a change model per se; rather, they collected and described a variety of group methods\(^3\), based on systems thinking, for changing an organization. The authors bemoan the “piecemeal approaches traditionally used to initiate and manage change. Throughout history, thought leaders of the day developed methods addressing only part of the change process. This is understandable, since they typically spoke only from their area of expertise” (ibid., p. 4). And even if those engaged in a change process see the need for systems-wide change, they do not necessarily act on it and “ignore perhaps the most important element: the people” (ibid., p. 5).

\(^3\) The methods describes are: Search Conference; Future Search; Technology of Participation™; Strategic Forum™; Participative Design Forum; Gemba Kaizen ®; Fast-Cycle Full-Participation, Whole Systems Approach; Preferred Futuring; SimuReal; Organization Workshop; Whole-Scale™ Change; Dialogue; Open Space Technology; Appreciative Inquiry; Conference Model ®; Think like a Genius ®; Real Time Strategic Change SM.
These various methods have in common their focus on stakeholder involvement. The approach is either to involve a cross-section of stakeholders or all stakeholders in a communication process that somewhat resembles the dialogue approach described by Bohm (1996). In fact, the method labeled “Dialogue” is based on Bohm (Holman & Devane, 1999, p. 226). The scope of the change efforts, though, varies. Some are looking at quality improvements, others at selected, limited changes, and some at deep, system-wide change. The degree to which communicative processes akin to design conversations would be used depends in all likelihood on the depth of the change desired and on whether participants are engaged in problem solving or in designing a new system. For example, one method likely to have design conversation happen at some point would be Preferred Futuring:

“Preferred Futuring helps teams, organizations, or communities construct the future they want and mobilize the energy to reach it. Introduced in 1996, Preferred Futuring is the progenitor of the other large-system change or visioning methodologies used today. It was also a prototype of helping people to think in terms of “whole systems” (ibid., p. 161).

While this method does not include the term design in its description, the processes described talk about participation of all stakeholders in “co-creating the future” (ibid., p. 162), which basically means designing the future and finding the ways to make it become reality.

*Systemic change from a policy level (Fullan and Sarason)*

Fullan (2001a, 2001b, 2003) looks at change issues in education with a systems perspective and puts emphasis on the involvement of all stakeholders. He observes a
fragmented and erratic approach to educational change and characterizes the current state of change and innovations in schools with the following remark:

“… Agents at all levels wonder how to get more and more programs institutionalized, while teachers think that it is the same promoters of change who should be institutionalized, not their programs. Students are too distracted by a host of other matters to pay much attention to all the uproar” (Fullan, 2001b, p. 4).

To counteract this fragmentation, Fullan suggests the creation of shared moral commitment and meaning. He points to the importance of overcoming isolation amongst teachers and having a level of consensus so that people within the system can feel safe enough to innovate. Professional learning communities, as established in some schools, could facilitate the creation of shared meaning and knowledge creation (ibid., p. 47). Also, going to scale with innovations, large-scale change is analyzed and the interplay between policy and practice discussed (Fullan, 2003).

While Fullan does not explicitly mention design conversation, the circumstances he deems as favorable for educational change to happen would accommodate design conversation because these circumstances incorporate the creation of shared meaning, collaboration, involvement of all stakeholders, and a systems approach. Fullan still works within the current system and largely bases his change approaches on the here and now. While acknowledging that unpredictable non-linear changes can happen (ibid., p. 22), he does not differentiate as strongly as Banathy between transforming and transcending the system.

Sarason also emphasizes a systems approach and remarks that “ignorance of ‘the system’ perpetuates its worst attributes” (Fried, 2003, p. 4). He argues for stepping out of the current system with this blunt metaphor:

“Common advice from knowledgeable horse trainers includes the adage, ‘If the horse you’re riding dies, get off’. Seems simple enough, yet in the education
business we don’t always follow the advice. Instead, we often choose from an
array of alternatives that includes:

2. Buying a stronger whip.
3. Trying a new bit or bridle.
4. Switching riders.
5. Moving the horse to a new location.
6. Riding the horse for longer periods of time.
7. Saying things like, ‘This is the way we’ve always ridden the horse.
8. Appointing a committee to study the horse.
9. Arranging to visit other sites where they ride dead horses efficiently.
10. Increasing the standards for riding dead horses.
11. Creating a test for measuring our riding ability.
12. Comparing how we’re riding now with how we did ten or twenty years
   ago.
13. Complaining about the state of horses these days.
14. Coming up with new styles of riding.
15. Blaming the horse’s parents. The problem is often in the breeding.

This is a rather sarcastic observation about the state of school change, but it drives
home the point Banathy makes in calling for transcending, not transforming the system.
Sarason asks “If it were illegal to teach math, science, or any other subject matter in a
classroom or school, how and where would we teach it?” (Fried, 2003, p. 271) With this
question he encourages people to put aside mindsets and create something new.

Sarason also supports Banathy’s call for participative democracy by stating that
“those who will be affected by a decision have a right to be included in helping to shape
that decision” (ibid., p. 5) and observes that this democratic principle is largely ignored in
schools.

Sarason’s biting critique of the current system and his manifold suggestions for
changes emerging from the bottom up and top down, along with Fullan’s attention to the
details of educational change, complement Banathy’s idealistic suggestions for systems
design. Banathy’s work establishes avenues for creating idealized educational systems.
Fullan and Sarason’s work helps those engaged in changes to analyze the current state of
affairs in the North American context, work backwards from an ideal image of an educational system, and devise strategies for evolving towards the ideal system. Their insights would help those who might embark on using design conversation to consider current realities when creating spaces for design conversations.

*Design Conversation for Educational Systems Design*

Embarking on design conversation in the field of education means being detached from the current education system, setting it aside, and “dreaming up” a system that does not yet exist (Jenlink & Carr, 1996). To set aside pre-conceived notions and experiences with the tried and true is not easy. Jenlink and Carr’s (ibid.) experiences with design conversation in some Michigan school districts demonstrated that old habits are hard to overcome and that participants slip easily into discussion, defend their opinions, create fractions, and cling to old mindsets. Therefore, “design conversation, like dialogue or other forms of conversations, must be carefully crafted. The design of conversation must be guided by the purpose for which the conversation is to be used” (ibid., p. 35).

Choosing to use design conversation for school change has implications that go beyond the act of conversation itself. Values such as “community, participative democracy through open stakeholder engagement, creating a shared set of core values and beliefs, and constructing a common language …” (ibid., p. 35) are expressed, while ready-made solutions by outside experts are avoided. These values need to permeate the system and be practiced, resulting in consequences that would be felt in the operation of all aspects of schooling.
These values need to permeate the system and be practiced, which has consequences that would be felt in the operation of all aspects of schooling. For example, the phrase in the citation “participative democracy through open stakeholder engagement,” if put into practice, would require drastic changes in most schools. The manner in which teachers, administrators, students, parents, and all others involved in the school system interact and make decisions would have to be far more egalitarian and participatory. The learning environment, the classroom practices would need to be changed to reflect participative democracy. Students would become active shapers of their learning environment and all participants would engage in some form of team decision making if participative democracy ought to be reflected in all aspects of schooling. Consideration would have to be given to the nature of participative democracy within the entire education system and responsibility and accountability issues clarified, if all stakeholders were to be part at some level or another in the design of a new entity.

Banathy (1991) emphasizes the need to develop design capabilities amongst the users of the system to be designed.

“Attaining individual and collective capability to engage in design involves (a) developing design thinking in preparation for design action, and (b) acquiring competence in the use of approaches, methods, and tools appropriate to designing educational systems” (ibid., p. 166).

It seems to be a daunting task to develop design capabilities amongst all users of a future system. The premise, though, is that users of a system who have been involved in the design of it will show far more support for the system and work towards keeping it alive than users who simply adopt a prefabricated system. Thus, the understanding of
systems design for education has to permeate the community, because the community as a whole tends to have a stake in the education system, and users in one capacity or another can be found across the spectrum (ibid., p. 163).

“Essential in this framework is membership in a community of stakeholders seeking to design a new ideal for the educational system – a design community. Membership in the community by the facilitator and stakeholders is balanced through a division of labor that seeks to authentically engage all participants in the systemic change process” (Jenlink, 2001, p. 348).

Ideal systems design is thus essentially a socially constructed process, and design conversation and systems language mediate the process.

**Research Base on Design Conversation for Educational Change**

The concept of design conversation is a recent creation, and a search for studies directly on design conversation did not yield any results. The larger field surrounding design conversation for educational systems design is systems thinking, educational systems design and idealized educational systems design, school change, stakeholder involvement, user design, team decision making, and communication for change. After failing to find any research directly concerned with design conversation, these fields were explored to locate research that might touch on communication conventions similar to design conversation. Several of the domains listed above cut across disciplines and are discussed in social sciences, managerial sciences, etc. Since the proposed research will be in an educational setting, only a few parallels will be drawn to other fields, if deemed useful.
Research from inside the educational setting

Research from within the education field included very few studies that could be remotely useful to making any inferences about the potentialities and pitfalls of using design conversation. Most studies with a focus on stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes afforded an insight into the communicative processes underlying school change efforts, but these communicative processes did not intend to have the character of design conversation.

One study, for example, looks at extended public deliberations called for by a Canadian school board in response to a proposal by parent groups. The parent group, in the name of choice, lobbied for establishing a school that would have been less inclusive than the current public schools (Gaskell, 2001). A full year of deliberations involved many focus groups and meetings and included many diverse stakeholders. The parent group sponsoring the proposal considered those deliberations a farce, because the school board was perceived to have made up its mind from the beginning (ibid.). Putting aside one’s mindset as called for in design conversation never happened and, while the consultative process was rescued with a compromise, the parent group remained feeling alienated (ibid.).

Results from another study on the social organization of schools confirm one important aspect of design conversation, the need for a common vision and shared meaning. Many quantitative and qualitative data, collected in eight Tennessee districts, consistently underline the beneficial effects of a high-consensus school climate on the work of the teacher. If decision-making processes are transparent, and stakeholders, here teachers, are involved and feel safe enough to contribute and also question, teachers challenge themselves to achieve higher goals (Rosenholtz 1991).
The Rosenholtz study emphasized the benefits of consensus. A study by Epp and McNeil (1997), though, demonstrated that having a high consensus at the cost of individuals not voicing their own opinions and observations can be detrimental. The authors describe an elementary school that had introduced shared governance. The meetings ran very smoothly and did not differ greatly from former staff meetings. In fact, the principal observed a lack of innovation and creativity. At one point, a minor incident brought disagreements to light that had been covered up for the sake of consensus. The resulting crisis almost ended the shared governance experiment. “Some teachers complained that the model was too restrictive because the expectation that all would cooperate allowed them no opportunity to confront each other. Others thought the correction of individuals should come from an authority figure” (ibid., p. 260). The staff eventually realized they needed ways to talk openly about conflicting issues and shared governance was continued.

Design conversation involves group decision making, and similar situations could occur. The study highlights the fact that differences are to be expected and actually ought to be used for achieving a more complex understanding of an issue. Consensus or shared meaning does not mean “group think,” where everybody has the same opinion for the sake of unity. In fact, that unity would be superficial or actually fake.

**Research from outside the educational setting**

The proposed research is conducted within the K-12 education system. Nonetheless, because of the dearth of research on processes bearing some resemblance to design conversation, in particular in schools, a few studies from outside the education system are chosen because they serve to highlight critical questions that ought to be asked in research on design conversation.
A few inferences can be drawn from Future Search conferences. Future Search is a short-term intervention to help stakeholders envision and work towards a common ideal future within their system (Holman & Devane, 1999). It shares the establishing of a common vision with design conversation.

In her investigation of two Agenda 21 related Future Search conferences, Oels (2002) found that the envisioning of an ideal future, in this case related to environmental issues and sustainable growth in two communities, engaged and energized participants. There were, though, implementation problems resulting from the gap between participative democracy, as would be a hallmark of both Future Search and design conversation, and representative democracy, as still commonly practiced in municipal or regional politics. Power issues and special interests made the implementation of the vision difficult (ibid., p. 354).

Polanyi (2002), in his research on a Future Search conference to address repetitive strain injuries, also found that power issues are far from absent in a setting that is supposed to be “inclusive, non-coercive and reflective” (p. 357). While it was observed as progress that different stakeholders were brought together, there was an “imbalance in participation. For example, almost three quarters of large-group statements were made by members of the four largest and most vocal stakeholder groups [from a total of nine]” (ibid., p. 360-361). Those who were more skilled at expressing themselves and more effective at communicating verbally participated more actively. In settings where oral communication is the medium, including design conversation, dominance by a few vocal

4 “Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/index.htm)
participants is certainly always a possibility, and its effect ought to be taken into consideration.

Dialogue and conversation are used for conflict resolution in many settings. This use does not involve the design of new systems, but, just as in design conversation, participants explore each other’s mindsets, set aside established mindsets, and possibly find common meaning.

Christakis and Brahms (2003) describe boundary-spanning dialogue (BDA), as practiced in the 21st-century Agoras described by Banathy (2000), for conflict resolution in three settings: between Native Americans tribal leaders and US government staff, between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and between Israelis and Palestinians. Of interest for the purpose of design conversation are the cross-cultural observations in these accounts. For example, “in traditional Native American societies, authority was a collective right … There has always been a strong tradition among American Indians of decision-making by consensus rather than by individuals in authority positions” (Christakis & Brahms, 2003, p.378). In this case, the tribal leaders had requested the boundary-spanning dialogue approach for the meeting with US government staff. The result was a consensus-building session that dealt proactively with difficult issues and resulted in a mutually agreeable vision (ibid., p. 379).

Similarly, following conflict resolution sessions amongst Cypriots from Greek and Turkish communities, a participant commented that this approach led to group decisions and visions (ibid., p. 380). In the Israeli and Palestinian situation, though, participants had already developed an approach to conflict resolution and found BDA too restrictive. They were more used to just getting together and talking in unstructured ways with everybody voicing their ideas, but admitted that they could learn the method and possibly benefit from it (ibid., p. 380-381).
Since systems thinking and design conversation promote a global worldview, there is a strong possibility that it could be used by people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, either together in the same room or within their cultural group. While the stories told here hint only at a few aspects of cultural differences, they could help to sensitize potential users of design conversation.

The Need for Research

When changes are made in education, the first question is usually whether outcomes are improved. “Did the students’ test scores go up?” is a major factor for determining success or failure. International assessments such as the TIMMS (Gonzales, P., Guzman, J.C., Partelow, L., Pahlke, E., Jocelyn, L., Kastberg, D. & Williams, T., 2003) or PISA studies (OECD) that focus on the results of standardized tests tend to be a trigger for reflections on school reform. Again, innovations are tried, students are tested, and the innovations are adopted or dismissed based on the test results. And the cycle continues. Little attention is given to how those participating in the change process feel. The lack of research describing the stakeholders’ perceptions and experiences illustrates the somewhat excessive reliance on test results. Surveys that ask about attitudes are helpful, but largely reflect opinions and do not allow a rich description of the actual experiences those affected have had.

The questions about what is really happening when new educational initiatives are introduced remain unanswered. What do the participants experience? What are their narratives, their stories?

This study attempts to close the gap, at least in a small measure, by focusing on the communication when stakeholders engage in an educational design venture, and also intends to relate their narratives so that others can learn from these experiences.
Conclusion

Communicative means such as dialectic conversation or discussions are too limited for systems design. They allow for the debate of opposing viewpoints but do not have the generative quality needed for design endeavors. An either–or debate reflects dichotomous thinking, not systems thinking. In design conversation, a consensus in which “the sum is more than its parts,” is sought. In addition, all parts of the system need to be considered during the design process, which requires a holistic approach.

Change models vary in their capacity to use a systems approach and in the degree to which they would allow design conversation to take place. Diffusion of innovations, initiated and designed by experts, is increasingly complemented by user-design, which requires a communication amongst co-designers that supersedes discussion and involves generative and strategic dialogues and design conversations based on values that guide how people relate to each other.

Because the current education system in general has a hierarchical structure, users of the system are at the receiving end of innovations and are involved in the design of changes on a very limited basis. Stakeholder involvement that goes beyond giving opinions on surveys or in focus groups is rare and is commonly practiced only in isolated, innovative, and experimental schools. The term “design conversation” is new and little known. While design conversation might be practiced without having the label attached, it is rarely used intentionally. A survey of research showed no research on design conversation as such and very little on the communicative processes amongst stakeholders when changes in an educational setting are attempted.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

A fairly new phenomenon, a school-change effort taking place in an atmosphere of participative democracy, with most stakeholders co-designing the new learning environments using design conversation as their communicative medium, is explored.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the research will take place in the field, that is, in a school setting where processes resembling design conversation are practiced. Events, developments, and attitudes are researched in a real-life context. The lived experiences of the teachers, their perception of the communication processes during the conception and design stage of the change effort is the focus. Because experiences and perceptions form the core of the data, a phenomenological research approach is chosen.

In this chapter I will first give the reasons for conducting a phenomenological study. Next, I will describe the process of selecting research sites, the characteristics of each site, and the recruiting of research participants. Data collection and the two research instruments, conversational interview and close observation of meetings, are presented, followed by a description of the data analysis process. As part of the data analysis process, I will elaborate on how themes within interview transcripts were determined and observation notes and transcripts of meetings analyzed.
Reflections on the writing process conclude the core of the chapter. Details about recording and storing data and confidentiality issues are briefly discussed at the end.

**Reasons for Conducting a Phenomenological Study**

A phenomenological study is considered to be a suitable approach to answer the research questions because it is “a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 153). Teachers will be asked to recount their experiences and perceptions of their involvement in a school change process. The questions will revolve around the “nature of the essence of the experience” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 10).

To be able to understand and improve processes of school change, the experiences of those involved need to come to light (Fullan, 2001b, p. 29). It would be beneficial to see the experiences through the lens of the people who have undergone them, so one can feel their impact as directly as possible with the help of first-hand descriptions from those who had them. Phenomenology serves this purpose:


Husserl used descriptions and reduced the essence of the experience out of those descriptions. He posits that only the phenomena, the “the data available to consciousness – the appearance of objects” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45), ought to be used. These data, however, can be transcended through reflection and the subjective and objective correlated (ibid.). He calls for looking at things as they are and through reflection and
synthesis coming to the essence (ibid., p. 47). Reduction is understood as looking at “experiences of the way things are” (Schmitt, 1968, p. 30 in Moustakas, 1994, p. 91).

Heidegger went a step further and interpreted the phenomena (ibid.). Van Manen and other researchers, referred to as the “Dutch phenomenology of the Utrecht school ... combine features of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology“ (Zichi Cohen & Omery, 1994,, p. 150). I will predominantly refer to Van Manen’s work. He defines phenomenological research as such:

“Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness. In this focus upon meaning, phenomenology differs from some other social or human sciences, which may focus not on meanings but on statistical relationships among variables, on the predominance of social opinions, or on the occurrence or frequency of certain behaviors, etc. And phenomenology differs from other disciplines in that it does not explicate meanings specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individual’s personal life history (biography). Rather, phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 11).

In this particular research a defined segment of this ‘lifeworld’ is selected: teachers who co-design, with a variety of stakeholders, changes in their educational institution

**Selection of a Research Site**

The concept of design conversation had been developed fairly recently, and the lack of research about design conversation in school settings leads to the conclusion that it has likely not been *intentionally* applied to design and planning efforts of innovations in schools. Design conversation calls for systems design of new entities or social systems, and most educational innovations were partial, piecemeal reforms. It is not
expected to find the design of an entire new, large-scale educational system in place. Potential research settings could be a new, innovative school or an existing school in the process of undergoing a major transformation.

Based on written project and school descriptions, the researcher identified two schools and one school district that offer the circumstances for design conversation to take place. The researcher compared the concept of design conversation as defined by Banathy (1996, 2000) to the communication, interaction, design, and decision making process used in the chosen projects and determined that they resemble design conversation sufficiently to justify calling this research “research on design conversation.” The sites that were identified and agreed to participate are:

- A college preparatory school, grades five through twelve, with ca. 600 students, in the state of Thüringen, Germany. The school is hereafter referred to as the Gymnasium.
- A private international school in the southern Czech Republic, with ca. 350 students. The school is a college preparatory school, grades 7-12. It is referred to as the International School.
- A school district in the Midwestern United States with ca. 5,500 students, referred to as the U.S. School District.

At the Gymnasium and the International School the first contact was with the school administrators; in the case of the U.S. School District it was with the facilitator of a systemic change project, who passed the request on to the faculty and sought its agreement, which was then communicated to this researcher. Dates were set with the administrators. The schools in Europe were visited between late May and mid-June of
2005, shortly before summer break; the U.S. District in the fall of 2005, after the summer break.

The Gymnasium

The Gymnasium was found because of its involvement in the International Network of Innovative Schools (INIS) project. The INIS project caught this researcher’s attention while searching online for innovative school change projects with the hallmark of systemic change and the potential for international comparison. Currently, schools in Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Switzerland, Hungary, and Germany are participating in the project, which was originally conceived by the Bertelsman Foundation of the international publishing house Bertelsman Verlag\(^5\).

Twenty-six schools were asked, via correspondence, about their willingness to participate in research. One school agreed. This particular school happens to be located in a small town in a state that used to be part of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) before reunification, which resulted in some interesting transition experiences with relevance for design conversation.

\(^5\) The project aims at fostering an ongoing quality improvement and change process conducted by schools themselves. Quality indicators were developed for this purpose. Stakeholders at participating schools are surveyed as to their perception of how their school fares. The results are used as a basis for self-evaluation, reflection, and design and implementation of changes and new approaches at the level of individual schools, again with the involvement of stakeholders. In order to help participants learn about a variety of approaches to various problems, partnerships or clusters are formed amongst schools dealing with similar issues. These partnerships go across national boundaries to allow participants to look across fences and learn from practices in other countries (Stern, et al., 2003).
The secondary school is now a public school, but was originally founded in the nineteenth century by the Franciscans. It was a state-run school under the socialist government. After re-unification of the two Germanys, it retained its state status as a public school. The school includes grades 5–12 and is a Gymnasium, which would be equivalent to a college preparatory high school and middle school within the U.S. system. The school was recently named a European Environmental School for its experiments with solar energy.

The school has active participation by parents and students in the planning of innovations and changes and in decision-making on major school issues.

The International School

The researcher has been aware of the International School and followed its progress since it was founded. While no close personal connection to the school existed, the researcher previously briefly met former school personnel on various occasions. The use of consultation for design and decision-making at this school, as based on practices in the Bahá’í community, was well known to the researcher. This particular school, one of two possible sites, was chosen in part because of its convenient location relatively close to the first site.

The International School, located in the southern Czech Republic, is a private institution and, as mentioned, influenced in its vision and educational philosophy by the tenets of the Bahá’í Faith. It is co-educational and is open to students from all national, religious, or ethnic backgrounds. It has a residential component, dormitories for those
students who do not live in the region. Instruction is predominantly in English, with some courses taught in Czech. The student body and faculty are very diverse. The international students live in dormitories and the local Czech students come for the day.

The school was founded in 1992, shortly after the political changes in what was then Czechoslovakia, with 35 students in rooms rented from a local elementary school, and it grew from there to its current size.

In its mission statement and description of student involvement, the use of consultation is mentioned as a modus operandi. Consultation here is based on the concept of consultation as explained and defined in the Bahá’í literature (Kolstoe, 2003), and bears a strong similarity to the values and processes of design conversation if used with the purpose of designing a new entity. Consultation at the school is used for a wide variety of purposes from problem solving and activity planning to the design and development of new programs, projects, curricula, or other school life needs. If used for the design of new entities, a resemblance to design conversation becomes apparent.

Similar to design conversation, people are asked to set aside preconceived mindsets, put

6 The information is based on a conversation with one of the founders.

7 Consultation, as explained and defined in the Bahá’í literature, is a process wherein a group of people talks about an issue in order to devise a plan of action, resolve a problem, create projects, or design community life. A problem, question, request, thought, or observation is taken up. The issue is analyzed and understood by collecting background information, relevant facts and expertise. Participants openly and frankly voice their understanding of the facts, generate ideas and offer opinions. Together, they shape and refine the understanding of the issue at hand and create a plan of action or whatever the nature of the issue calls for. The consultative process usually continues until a consensus is found. Only if a consensus seems unattainable, is a majority vote sought. Consultation is based on spiritual values such as commitment, courtesy, consideration for others, dignity, care, concern for others and the issues, and moderation. Instead of clinging to one’s views, ideas and opinions are offered to the group, and through the interplay of different ideas and thoughts a fuller picture of the issue at hand is achieved (Kolstoe, 2003, 2004). Consulting in this manner has been a practice in the Bahá’í community.
their ideas on the table, and let them be shaped by the group, as in the previously mentioned “container” metaphor in design conversation.

The U.S. School District

The researcher’s awareness of the systemic change effort at the U.S. School District came about during the literature review. This district is currently involved in a systemic change process, a collaboration effort between a team from a university, school district personnel, and stakeholders. The goal is to develop a shared vision about education and design systems changes in the district based on the shared vision. For that purpose, stakeholders continue to engage in a dialogue to help them understand each other’s mindsets about the goals of education in their district and devise strategies for concrete changes. Participants in the change process educated themselves on school change issues and drew in part on the same literature (Banathy, 1991, 2003; Reigeluth, 1993; Jenlink, 2001, 2004) that is also a basis for the design conversation concept. They concurred on values for their interactions that would be characteristic of design conversation.

Initiated in 2001 by a core team, it was intended from the beginning that all stakeholders collaborate in the formulation of changes and reach a consensus agreeable to all. Trust, communication, and consensus-building skills are values and strategies practiced. Some of the premises underlying the project are:

1. As many stakeholders as possible should be involved.
2. The stakeholders collectively should have ownership over both the change process and the changes that are decided upon. …. 
3. The process should encourage all participants to think in the ideal, then develop a strategic plan for evolving as close as possible to that idea (Reigeluth C., 2002).

Emphasis was placed on developing a shared vision about education. For that purpose, it was proposed that stakeholders engage in a dialogue that would help them understand each other’s mindsets and collectively arrive at a shared understanding (ibid.). While design conversation is not mentioned by its label in the description of this project, the brief listing of major premises given here leads to the conclusion that communication processes bearing all the characteristics of design conversation must be practiced to achieve the stated goals.

**Research Participants**

Moustakas (1994) refers to the research subjects as co-researchers. They are co-researchers because, together with the researcher, they intend to bring the “hidden out of its hiding” (Zichi Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 141).

For this research, stakeholders in the school change projects were selected purposefully. Participants in such projects would come from many different groups including school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other caregivers of students, school support personnel, or members of the community at large. Phenomenology calls for a deep description of the experience (Van Manen, 1997). To achieve an in-depth description, the participation must necessarily be limited to a few. Because the goal is not to compare experiences of subgroups, but rather to “explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (ibid., p. 11), it is acceptable to focus on one group of stakeholders. Teachers were chosen because they are the ones at the forefront of implementing an innovation, and their views and insights are
also traditionally neglected when policies are created and changes conceived (Villegas-Reimers & Reimers, 1996).

Teachers at each research site were recruited to participate voluntarily in semi-structured, conversational interviews. At the Gymnasium and the International School the participant selection concluded once the researcher was at the location. In the case of the U.S. School District, all teachers agreed before the actual visit and all who volunteered were interviewed. This was necessary because of the low number of teachers to date, who had actively participated to date in the systemic change project. The researcher had to be certain that enough teachers agreed to assure collection of sufficient data. At the other sites the number of teachers was held flexible because the interviewing continued until sufficient perceptions and anecdotes were gathered to reach a point of saturation and allow for describing the essence of the experience (Leedy & Omrod, 2001, Van Manen, 1997). In the end, ten teachers participated in interviews at the Gymnasium, eight at the International School, and four in the U.S. School District. The criteria for being a research participant were experience with the phenomenon researched and consent to be interviewed, with the interview being audio-recorded (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants in the observed meetings included most of the interviewed teachers. Some other stakeholders, such as parents and administrators, also attended the meeting. There were seven participants at the Gymnasium meeting, ten at the International School, and fifteen at that of the U.S. School District. The choice of meetings was limited because of time constraints and distant location of research sites. The researcher had to be content with observing a meeting while on location, whether it was more of a business-type meeting or more of a design meeting. The meetings observed turned out to have both elements present.
Table 1: summary of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gymnasium</th>
<th>International School</th>
<th>U.S. School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>7 (faculty &amp; adm)</td>
<td>10 (faculty &amp; adm)</td>
<td>15 (fac., adm., parents &amp; facilitator)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All together, the researcher had the opportunity to conduct conversational interviews with twenty-two teachers, including two teacher-administrators at the site in Germany.

**Data Collection**

Using the term “data collection” sounds contradictory to the nature of phenomenology. *Data* implies that they are quantifiable or can be objectified in some form and compared to other data for drawing conclusions and finding causal relationships. Narratives of lived experiences, on the other hand, are “never identical to the lived experience itself … [They] are already transformations of those experiences “ (Van Manen, 1997, p. 54). But even if the data are not quantifiable, they are still narratives given to the researcher and serve to bring to light often very personal experiences.

**Types of Data Collected**

At the core of the collected data are the perceptions of the teachers about their experiences with design conversation. Perceptions are defined as “intentions united with sensations” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52), which means that those perceptions are interpreted to some degree by the person who relates them. Collecting perceptions means that the

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8 Principals and vice principals at German schools typically have a dual role. They continue teaching and have some release time from their teaching tasks in order to carry out some administrative tasks.
phenomena are probed to an ever-deeper extent, but that one never really achieves a complete picture of a phenomenon. There would always be new discoveries and more perceptions that would allow the picture to become more refined, though never finished (ibid., p. 53).

Anecdotes are one primary source for gathering data. Looking out for stories that illustrate the experiences is a major task for the researcher (Van Manen, 1997, p. 69). The stories bring the experiences to life and, whether they are gathered through interviews or through close observations, allow the researcher to enter the life world of the research participants.

Therefore data collected consisted of narratives, opinions and thoughts offered by teachers who experienced design conversation-like processes. In addition, meetings were observed, which allowed the researcher to experience conversation as practiced in the particular setting and enabled a close view of the environment in which the teachers collected the experiences they are recounting. Interviews and two of the meetings were all audio-recorded and the interviews were transcribed. One meeting was observed and notes taken.

Any kind of documentation about the research setting, such as project descriptions, minutes of meetings, or descriptions given by school personnel, were not used as part of the actual data on the experiences with design conversation, but were used to describe and give background information about the context. Background material such as vision and mission statements and information on the schools regarding organization, learning environment, history, and surrounding community were collected in conversations with administrators and facilitators. The researcher also had the opportunity to observe a few classes and a sporting event, and to informally mingle with teachers, students, and other personnel, in particular at the German and Czech sites. Because the International School is part boarding school, the researcher stayed in the
dormitories and could get a “behind the scenes” look. While this informal contact is not part of the proposed research, it still allowed for coming closer to the life world of the teachers.

**Research Instruments**

The teachers’ perceptions were ascertained through conversational interviews and close observation of meetings during which design conversation is used as a communicative medium. Conversational interviews and close observation were the two instruments. In the case of the interviews, an audio recording of the conversation was transcribed for the then following data analysis. The observation of the meeting was also accompanied by an audio recording. Video recording would be too intrusive and would possibly keep participants from behaving naturally, which was already likely impeded by the mere presence of an observer.

*Conversational interview*

In phenomenology, interviews do not set out to ask about opinions, but rather to gathering narratives of experiences and anecdotes. The anecdotes should then serve to help the researcher acquire a deep understanding of the phenomenon to be researched (Van Manen, 1997, p. 66). The relatively unstructured nature of the interview allows for gather a breadth of data that probe deeper than, for example, surveys or structured interviews would (Fontana & Frey, 2000). While the interview style is defined as conversational, it is important to keep the interview focused and the stories related to the questions posed. Otherwise, irrelevant material would be collected. A few focused,
guiding questions that are open-ended and invite story telling (Van Manen, 1997), are best suited. The interviewer may change or omit questions, depending on the course of the interview. It is important to create a climate in which the interviewee feels safe and is encouraged to describe personal experiences, which is often achieved with a short social conversation at the beginning (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114).

For the purpose of this research, conversational, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers at each research site. The final number of interviews depended, as mentioned, on the narratives given and the interview process was ended as soon as it became obvious that enough material had been gathered to allow for a rich description of the experience. It was also determined in part by the number of teachers who volunteered. (For exact numbers see Table 1).

The interviews were conducted in one of two different languages, either German or English. Some interviews at the research site in the Czech Republic were with non-native speakers of English. Diverse language and cultural settings add somewhat to the complexity.

“When different cultures and language are involved epistemological problematics in constructing similarity and difference are compounded. If there is no one meaning to a text, then there can be no one translation of it (Temple, 1997, p. 610).

This researcher is very familiar with both language and cultural settings in the US and Germany and, to some degree, in the Czech Republic. The researcher’s professional experience as a foreign language teacher and previous studies in Germany enabled her to translate the interview questions and transcripts herself. The fact that the researcher can carry out the translations and conduct the interviews in both languages prevented compromising the research design. Even then, complexity is certainly added and care

See Appendix 1: Interview protocol in German and English
needs to be taken not only to take language issues into consideration but also different pedagogical and school organizational traditions.

**Close observation of meetings**

The observation of meetings allowed the researcher to make her own first-hand observations of design conversation-like processes in action and to get as close as possible to the lifeworld of the research participants.

“Close Observation is exactly what the phrase suggests. In contrast to the more experimental or behavioral observational research techniques, close observation tries to break through the distance often created by observational methods. Rather than observing subjects through one-way windows, or by means of observational schemata and checklists that function symbolically not unlike one-way mirrors, the human science researcher tries to enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant study material for his or her research project” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 69).

An observation would be an experiential anecdote (ibid., p. 68), in this case an anecdote observed directly by the researcher without the filter of the narrative. The researcher was not a participant observer because she did not join the conversation during the observed session. She was an observer and thus able to narrate her own perceptions and analyze the conversation that took place during the meeting, albeit not in the same role as the teachers and from a different perspective.

The settings were a steering committee meeting at the Gymnasium, a faculty meeting at the International School, and a Leadership Team meeting at the U.S. School District. The number of participants is listed in Table 1. Two of the meetings were also
audio recorded and the recorded material was analyzed. One was observed and written notes taken. 10.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis in phenomenology means reflecting on the narratives collected and trying to understand their meaning. Ryan and Bernard (2000) distinguish between two traditions, the linguistic tradition, in which the text itself is analyzed, and the “sociological tradition, which treats text as a window into human experience” (p. 769). Here the text collected through interviews will be analyzed following the sociological tradition and used as a window to the human experience. The observed meetings will be analyzed using the conventions of qualitative conversation analysis (Ten Have, 1999).

Determining Themes within Interview Transcripts

The text of the interviews itself are free-flowing narratives gathered in conversational interviews. The events and perceptions recounted by the research participants were initially grouped and organized by themes, but this does not imply a categorization of each individual event, neatly separated from other event categories, and labeled. “The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning in the lived experience” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 76). The researcher is renewed in contact with the

10 For more details on the meetings see Chapter 4: Results and the following Data Analysis and Interpretation
research participants and relives their experiences through the narratives, trying to find meaning. To come to grasp and understand a wealth of anecdotes and perceptions and explicate meaning, structuring is necessary.

As a starting point, major themes were defined based on literature review (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). In this case, the description of design conversation, and characteristics and components of design conversation served as a reference point. Additional themes and sub-themes emerged out of the narratives. These themes were identified by first grouping aspects of the various accounts. When grouping, two questions were asked:

1. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
2. Is it possible to abstract and label it? (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121)

Van Manen (1997) suggests finding themes by asking for the meaning or the point of an account and by trying to get a notion of what the narrator tries to convey. Still, any kind of formulation of themes is always a simplification (p. 87).

To isolate thematic statements, Van Manen suggests three possibilities. One is a holistic approach, in which the researcher searches for the phrase that expresses or summarizes the meaning of the passage. Another is selective reading, in which case all statements in a transcript that are essential to the description of the phenomenon are highlighted. Lastly, in detailed reading, each sentence is analyzed as to its significance in relation to the phenomenon being explored (ibid., p. 93).

The selective reading approach should most readily allow for grouping, because statements are highlighted and therefore isolated and can then be grouped with similar statements in other passages from transcripts. This reading approach was used for the thematic analysis of transcripts. When using a holistic reading approach, details will
likely be lost. Selective reading is detailed enough to allow for comparison between statements from a variety of interviews, but does not involve so much attention to minute details that the analysis could lose focus, as might be a possibility in the detailed or line-by-line approach.

Defining, grouping, and relating themes to each other and to the theoretical constructs was an ongoing process during data analysis. Open coding of the initial sample broke down data through analysis, comparison, and categorization. Description, opinions, interpretations, and events were grouped together by theme through constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

During transcription of the recorded interviews, the researcher achieved an overview of the stories told and the first themes emerged. After transcription, a thorough reading helped determine detailed themes and sub themes. The interview text was then separated into chunks, by theme, and a code for each theme, was noted at the beginning of each paragraph. During the coding process, a codebook was built, which facilitated the grouping and relating of themes. In the codebook, each theme was defined and described and the selected chunks of narratives grouped under each theme such that thematic piles and sub-themes emerged (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p.781). A careful use of paragraph breaks while chunking the interview text and assigning codes to each paragraph allowed the codes and chunks of text to be converted into a table, using the tools offered by Microsoft Word (Nideroest, 2002). The codes were chosen in such a way that the Sort feature of Microsoft Word grouped all chunks with the same code together and in a sequence appropriate for the writing process. Thus the thematically organized chunks of text could then be easily referred to during the writing process.
The interview text was analyzed in the language in which the interview was conducted. Because this researcher is bi-lingual and bi-cultural and was able to relate to linguistic subtleties and the use of idioms, this approach proved to be very efficient. Those interview texts that are cited verbatim in the write up were translated.

**Analyzing the Conversation that Occurred during the Meeting**

While the interview data were collected from outside the system and offered an etic viewpoint, observing a meeting allowed the researcher to experience design conversation from inside the system, which allows an emic viewpoint. The conversations recorded during the meeting were then analyzed using a qualitative conversation analysis (CA) approach.

“CA is interested in the procedural infrastructure if situated action, rather than in the categories of ‘action-as-talked-about’. Therefore CA’s interest in an emic reality should be understood in this sense of implicated procedures of talk-in-interaction” (Ten Have, 1999, p. 37).

The analysis of the conversations was systematized by using these steps recommended by Ten Have:

“Check the episode carefully in terms of Turn-taking: the construction of turns, pauses, overlaps, etc.; make notes of any remarkable phenomena, especially on any ‘disturbances’ in the fluent working of the turn-taking system” (ibid., p. 104).

The character of the exchanges was described based on the audio recordings of the two recorded meetings and observation notes of the meeting not recorded. This analysis brings to light details in the interactions amongst the meeting participants. Questions such as “are all people involved in the deliberations, are some dominating and forceful
and others hesitant?" could be answered and parallels drawn to the concept of design conversation.

The observations, though, will not be the backbone of the research planned; they will rather serve to illustrate the experiences of the teachers. A few observations are merely a snapshot. The course of meetings can vary greatly, even if the same people are involved. All kinds of factors can influence how participants relate to each other and the factors likely vary from meeting to meeting. In order to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of design conversation from observations of meetings, a longitudinal study of meetings would have to be carried out, which is not the purpose of this study.

The Writing

During the writing process, the researcher is again engaged with the lifeworld of the research participants. In the interplay between distancing oneself through reflection from the stories that were related and coming again in close contact with the stories, the researcher is challenged to describe the essence of the phenomenon.

"Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques. The ‘procedures’ of this methodology have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning, oriented towards a rigorous interrogation of the phenomenon as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question. The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and fourth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting, re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 131).
Data analysis continued throughout the entire writing process. For that purpose, this researcher kept the possibility open for continued contact with the research participants.

**Recording and Storing Data; Confidentiality Issues**

The interviews and meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed as soon as possible. All personal identifiers were omitted from the transcript.

Personal identifiers were not intentionally associated with the data. Because of the nature of the research, though, participants gave personal identifiers. Participants mentioned names of schools or people when answering open-ended questions. They described their work and their role in the project in such detail that anybody familiar with the setting could recognize the participant. Interviewees were offered the option of omitting names from their stories, which would reduce the possibility of identifying people who are associated with negative events.

**Conclusion**

A phenomenological study would allow insights into the actual experiences of those engaged in educational change and new systems design. Fullan (2001b) requests that we understand what participants in a change process go through if we want to effect lasting and sustainable changes. The change process is little researched to date. Commonly, the outcomes of an innovation, such as student achievement, become the focus if the success of a new program is measured. How stakeholder involvement and the concomitant communication processes are perceived is a highly personal experience.
and can vary greatly amongst participants. Through the collection of anecdotes and experiences and the thematic analysis and triangulation of the narratives, it was expected that the researcher would find certain patterns and threads that weave a coherent picture of the experiences with design conversation.

In this chapter I described the process and methods of the research. I determined that a phenomenological research method would be appropriate because the problem is barely explored and a phenomenology would bring to light the teachers’ initial experiences with design conversation. Because the concept of design conversation is little known as a theoretical construct, but, as the studies cited in the literature review show, design conversation is practiced, the research site selection was guided by reviewing school change and development projects with participatory practices. These criteria and the goal of gathering experiences with design conversation in diverse settings led to the selection of three sites, located in Germany, the Czech Republic, and the USA.

I described the data collection, beginning with the selection and recruitment of research participants. Teachers were chosen as research participants since they are key players in school change endeavors. Teachers at the sites were invited to participate voluntarily in conversational interviews. The interview process continued until a point of saturation was reached. In addition, a meeting at each site was observed to allow the researcher direct insight into the teachers’ experiences.

The data analysis process was summarized, highlighting the constant comparison, coding and thematic sorting, and close observation of the meeting. The use of software, in this case Microsoft Word, for chunking and sorting the interview text was described and some reflections on the writing process were included.
Chapter 4

Results

Organization of the Chapter

The teachers’ experiences with design conversation, in particular the learning processes towards acquiring such a practice, are embedded in the cultural and historical circumstances of their backgrounds. Therefore, the chapter begins with a description and comparison of the larger societal context and the education system in which each site is situated. The organizational transitions and adoption of participatory design and decision-making are described.

With this background information available, the themes that emerged from the interviews are presented. This is the narrative of the teachers’ experiences, which will answer the key research question: How do participants in design conversation describe their experience?

The description of the themes is organized in three major categories:

– Laying the foundation for design conversation
– Experiences with attitudes and values in the context of design conversation
– Experiences with processes in design conversation
Within each of these categories the related themes and sub-themes are described. The narrative that conveys the themes is followed by the description and analysis of the meetings that were observed.

Once the description of the teachers’ experiences is completed, the sub-questions are discussed, based on the descriptions, in chapter 5.

The Research Sites in their Context

The Comparative Aspects

The study is comparative in the sense that the three sites are embedded in the education systems of their respective countries. Some of the experiences and thoughts the teachers offered are context related, while others could have happened anywhere. Thus the results should not be understood as a comparison of design conversation as practiced in different countries, but rather as experiences of teachers influenced to some degree by the social and historical context of the school system they work in.

The region where the Gymnasium is located is a cultural enclave. It is a predominantly Catholic region in an otherwise Lutheran part of the country, and the majority of the population tried to stay out of the political party machinery during the GDR days. The teachers comment on that distinction and relate it to various experiences. The U.S. School District is in a region that is quickly changing from rural to suburban/industrial, and the schools within the district, in particular the elementary
schools, cater to populations with different socio economic backgrounds, but which by and large are not very mixed ethnically (Joseph, 2003).

The International School adds another dimension to the comparative aspect of the study. The school needs to follow the policies, rules and regulations of the Czech Republic, but the teachers come from diverse countries (e.g. England, Ireland, Germany, Australia, Czech Republic), and some grew up in bi-lingual and bi-cultural or immigrant families.

Because design conversation is shaped by the human relationships in an organization, the character of each institution has an impact on the experiences. That organizational character can potentially be quite different from school to school, even if they are located in the same region or school district, as this researcher can attest based on personal experience as a teacher.

Thus each site has its unique character, different from other nearby schools, but still subject to both the education policies in the country or state where it is located and to some historical developments. I will briefly summarize those facets of each education system that are most pertinent to this research, so that the reader can relate the experiences to the larger context when called for.

The Schools within their Education Systems

Both the Gymnasium and the International School are located in regions that used to be “behind the Iron Curtain.” When political changes swept through Eastern Europe
around 1990, the education systems in the affected countries underwent major reforms and restructuring immediately after the political changes occurred.

Before the political change, the ideal of a voluntary acceptance of socialist principles was never quite achieved. For schooling, this meant that the principles had to be enforced through mandates to teachers. The pedagogical style was one of transmitting content as doctrine. External critics called it “command pedagogy” (Mitter, 1996, p. 136). In the GDR, detailed syllabi spelled out the objectives, content and methods for courses and individual lessons. It was a cookbook approach to lesson planning. Teachers had explicit teaching guidelines collected in volumes labeled *Volk und Wissen* (People and Knowledge) (Pritchard, 1999, p. 59).

The schools in the GDR were monolithic, unified ten-year polytechnic schools (*Politechnische Oberschule* - *POS*). The school visited used to be such a POS. After reunification, the education system in the new states went through a transition period when the old regulations had been abolished but new ones had not yet been created. During this transition period, teachers experienced a lot of grassroots conversations, but then the system adjusted largely to practices in the western part of Germany (Mintrop, 1999).

Education in Czechoslovakia during communist rule followed the same Marxist-Leninist doctrines as in the GDR. The system was equally monolithic and dictated content and methods to the teachers. Innovation was discouraged and conformity promoted (Polzoi & Černá, 2001).

In both countries, immediately after the political change, the school structures, governance, financing, and curricula were redrawn. Unified secondary schools were
diversified, and tracking, as it existed before communist rule, was reintroduced. Any kind of Marxist propaganda or ideologically tainted teaching of, in particular, history and social studies, was eliminated from the curricula to make place for more pluralistic views (Mitter, 2003; Polyzoi, E., M. Černá, 2001).

In the debate on education in the Czech Republic, or initially Czechoslovakia, some voices were searching for a correct solution to be handed down to teachers and implemented by them. Others promoted diversity, saying that there does not exist a solution suitable for all and that schools ought to be varied and cater to the needs of children and parents. Parents should have school choice and cooperate with the schools (Kotásek, 1993, p. 483).

During the initial six years after the political change, educational change happened in the Czech Republic largely from the bottom up. Individual and local initiatives carried reforms. Government policies caused changes in some aspects, such as financing and allowing choice and private schools, but wherever micro-level innovations happened, they were locally initiated (Cerych, 2000, p. 44). Towards the end of the 1990s, reform groups diminished. It seems that a window of opportunity to introduce change narrowed (Polyzoī & Černá, 2001, p. 71). With school choice being possible, private schools were established. These were either religious schools, commercial schools that supplemented what public schools offered, or schools with distinct philosophies. The International School visited for this research is an example of such a private school that offers an additional choice to people in the region.

The US did not experience a comparable upset. Rather, ongoing discontent with schools, low student achievements, glaring inequalities, a string of ineffective and
unsustainable school reforms, and an education system perceived to be out of synch with the exigencies of modern society fueled the school change debate (Cuban, 2003; Gatto, 1992; Leonard, 1994; Peck & Carr, 1997; Reigeluth, 1994). The traditional local control of school affairs and community involvement practiced in the US should have allowed teachers to engage in ongoing reforms and changes all along. Instead, as already described in the literature review, changes and innovations were largely prescribed by policy makers and handed down to teachers, who were asked to implement them. In that sense, teachers in the U.S. School District, just like their counterparts at the other sites visited, are just beginning to engage in practices resembling design conversation.

**Organizational Transitions within each School**

Once the Gymnasium and the US School District began their transition, and the International school was founded, forums that would offer spaces for conversations were established. These forums in themselves are not novel. At each site, an assortment of student and parent elected bodies, faculty meetings, all school meetings, steering committees or management teams, and other committees or taskforces existed. In the U.S. School District, town meetings were occasionally held. Usually, parents, students, teachers, administrators, and some school staff are represented in such forums, but few other stakeholders. One key difference amongst the three schools is that the various forums at the Gymnasium and the International School serve multiple purposes. There, stakeholders take care of pressing business and short term planning, design learning environments, or determine long-term development goals for the school. The U.S.
School District, on the other hand, created forums exclusively dedicated to the design of a systemic change project.

All schools had venues for parent and student participation, but the Gymnasium was the only school that had equal representation from parents, teachers and students for finalizing plans and making decisions in a so-called school conference. These three stakeholder groups elect annually three representatives each. These nine people then come together periodically in a school conference to consult on important school matters and make decisions that are binding. The principal cannot vote on that body, but has an advisory role. Before the school conference decides on major issues, students consult about them in their homerooms and pass recommendations on to the elected student representatives. Similarly, parents of the students in each homeroom consult and pass their recommendations on, and teachers proceed in a similar fashion, using faculty meetings to shape their recommendations. The elected representatives take these recommendations to the school conference for further consultation and come to a decision. Through these channels, everybody from within these three stakeholder groups can thus make his or her opinions and suggestions known to the key decision making forum, the school conference.\footnote{For a reader more familiar with the US school system, the complete absence of administrators in this forum must be striking. In part, this might be because administrative tasks such as the hiring of teachers are taken care of at regional level. The school principal typically still teaches and has fewer administrative duties than a U.S. school principal.}

The experiences, thoughts and observations of the teachers as recounted here usually occurred while teachers collaborated with other stakeholders on one of the various forums.
The Teachers’ Experiences

Identification of Themes

Thematic sorting resulted in the identification of major themes, some with attendant sub-themes. The table below shows the relations.

Table 2: Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laying the Foundation for Design Conversation</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to service</td>
<td>Long-term relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure climate/trust</td>
<td>Taking risk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentional trust building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity in interactions</td>
<td>Differences in language</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deep listening</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feeling as equals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspending mindsets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating a shared vision</td>
<td>Teacher involvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student involvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability of a vision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating strategies and concrete changes</td>
<td>Generating ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making ideas concrete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating consensus</td>
<td>Abstract vs. concrete</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Criticism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Faction building</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the organization of the themes, the teachers’ experiences were narrated in the following sequence:
1. Laying the foundation for design conversation – here the transition from mandated changes to locally designed changes is described and the learning process included.

2. Attitudes/Values - this segment relates to several themes, including commitment to service, trust, dignity in interactions, responsibility, differences in language, dualisms, care, respect, deep listening, and seeking meaning.

3. Processes – themes based on experiences with participation, suspending mindsets, disciplined inquiry and information gathering, creating shared vision creating strategies and concrete changes, and coming to conclusions are summarized here. A conversation analysis of one meeting observed at each site follows the thematic organization of the interview results.

Because the study is not a comparison of different schools, but an exploration of teachers’ experiences, the school identity is not always needed to convey the stories. The data are organized by themes, not schools. Whenever the teachers’ experiences are context specific, the location where the event happened or the observation was made is given, but without school name. Where context is not relevant, the schools were not identified to allow for greater anonymity.
Laying the Foundation for Design Conversation

*Getting there – the then and now*

The research participants reflected on previous work environments and on the differences to their current situation when it came to participation in design and decision-making. The teachers at the *Gymnasium* emphasized the differences before and after the change in the political system. Several of these teachers were old enough to have had considerable work experience before the changes. The teachers at the International School tended to compare schools they worked in previously with the circumstances at the International School\(^ {12} \). The teachers in the U.S. School District compared either developments within the same school district from before the systemic change project began or previous work environments at other public schools to their current situation. All recalled experiences of simply being told what to do and reflected on the transition to design and decision making in teams with various stakeholder groups.

The transition at the *Gymnasium* was likely the most abrupt, because it coincided with a restructuring of the education system in the entire state and with deep societal changes. One research participant described the GDR days as a pretend democracy. The term *democratic* in country’s name was just a label that did not correspond to the reality, and if one voiced contrary opinions, the consequences could be swift. For example, students might not be allowed to take the high school graduation exam (*Abitur*) and

\(^{12}\) The majority of the Czech teachers at the International School were too young to have worked in the school system before the political changes.
would consequently be unable to enter a university. But developing one’s own opinion was not forgotten:

“I believe that in the days of the GDR – I can’t say that for everybody, but I believe that it was frequently the case that one had two faces, an official one and an unofficial one. The official one was shown whenever necessary and the unofficial one was for friends and family. We had the possibility to form our own opinion in the days of the GDR. Only the question was always, do I articulate it or not, if I know that there could be certain consequences” (Teacher C).

Teachers had to follow party mandates. If they did not agree with a mandate, they coped by carrying out only the minimum actions needed in order to comply:

“Before the changes, things were simply mandated: that’s the way it is, that’s what’s being done. And when one could not conform to the mandates, one did not participate. I remember, for example, when I was a teacher in 7th grade, I had to motivate the class so the children would go to the Jugendweihe and I just announced that that’s coming up… I was scolded because I did not do a lot of advertising, but I said, I did my duty, I am not agreeing with this practice and I cannot whip up a lot of enthusiasm for it - I didn’t suffer any consequences. I always did only what I could support in good conscience, and I fared well with that” (Teacher I).

For a school to be designing their own ideal vision of themselves as an educational institution and drawing up a vision and mission statement, as the Gymnasium did recently, would have been impossible in the GDR. The party set the goals for the entire society, and that was the program for the next years. The collective was emphasized. One teacher thought that to be a cause of his lack of teamwork skills. He is still struggling to learn them. However, the emphasis on the collective did not mean that collaboration at the stakeholder level was non-existent. Teachers pointed out that there

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13 *Consecration of youth* or the *pledge of youth*, which all fourteen-year-old pupils took (Fishman, Sterling, 1993)
was and still is a connection between school and home. Parents always helped with celebrations and various school activities, but now they are also involved in design and decision-making about key school issues.

“During GDR times, I visited parents and I also visit parents now when there are problems. … We also had an “active parents” initiative upon request of the political leadership. But what we did together in those groups and what we talked about was our decision. We talked about pressing problems, not politics. My advantage was that I was on the same side of the parents. I was not a party member, and therefore the parents considered me as their equal. If I would have been a party member, I would have gotten pressure from the parents, because they were in the opposition. … This is a Catholic region, and there was a conflict between church and state. As party member, you were on the side of the state, and as a Catholic you were on the other side. That was an advantage, because you were in line with the parents. Only if I had one or two party members amongst the parents, I had to be damned careful because that was dangerous. … but in principle we had the same interest, the parents and the teachers, and that didn’t change. …. Actually, not that much has changed. In socialism and in a market economy … I always say, the 45 minutes of class when I was alone with the students … I could do what I had in my head. You can ask my former students. They are now in their 40s…. Back then, we talked about that the border has to go – if that would have become known, one would have been in trouble. Similarly, today I am responsible as a teacher for what I am doing. One shouldn’t be afraid, not of the people nor the government. Now I can say things freely. That was more dangerous back then. If you said something against the state it could have had a nasty ending. Nowadays, nothing really can happen. That is the freedom we have and I do my best to let students and teachers voice their critiques. … We can decide everything as long as it isn’t against the law, only in those days there were unwritten laws one had to abide by and if you didn’t you were in trouble … I always say, let us do everything that is sensible and up to now nobody said ‘you can’t do that’” (Teacher D).

Right after the changes, in the transition years, teachers welcomed the initial opportunity to participate in the shaping of the education systems and sought exchange with others. Because of the lack of official regulations, they could do anything they deemed sensible. Possibilities were somewhat limited by lack of equipment, but the field was open for exploring new approaches:
“In short, you could do whatever you wanted. That essentially forced you to say: ‘we have to talk with the parents’, because one did not consider oneself all wise. … One was looking for a discourse because it would have been presumptuous to consider oneself that wise that one would know everything. …. The thought to include students was not that alien from one’s work as a classroom teacher during the GDR times. Then, as a normal, thinking human being one did not always wait for decrees to be pronounced by the grace of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - Socialist Unity Party of Germany) in order to know what one has to do. … one did not unlearn the normal human togetherness and that was a good foundation to built on” (Teacher A).

Teachers described the free range they had for designing the learning environment in the years following the political change. Things happened that would only be possible in such a time of major changes, comments one teacher. But after two to three years, the new rules were in place, and teachers had to implement a lot of new programs and processes, which sapped their individual initiatives. “… There was a relatively quick sobering effect because of the transition to being a Gymnasium …” The heavy workload entailed transforming the school from a POS to a Gymnasium and the many handed-down changes and programs squelched the initial grassroots initiatives.

Despite the leveling off of the initial spike in locally designed educational practices, the school continued with the practice as much as possible. Staff and students created a school theme around environmental issues and organized projects and cross-curricular activities for that purpose. As a result, the school was named European Environmental School several years in a row.

The design of locally initiated changes received a new impetus through the involvement in the International Network of Innovative Schools (INIS), which began in 2000, and as of 2005, the school is poised to participate in a pilot project called Eigenverantwortliche Schule [autonomous school; literally: self-responsible school], a
project that would give an individual school more autonomy and decision making power than was possible before.

Because the International School did not go through a transition, but rather was conceived with a team approach to design and decision-making, teachers did not have the transition experience within one school setting. Teachers come to the school from different countries and with teaching experience in different education systems. When referring to former work places, whether they were in the Czech Republic or elsewhere, teachers did describe a by and large top-down approach to the design and implementation of changes and staff meetings that largely follows a one-way communication pattern from the principal to the teachers. Teachers recalled circumstances in their former employment, where they had to fight for things they needed, couldn’t discuss any problems in staff meetings, and sought support outside the school environment from family and friends.

In the Czech Republic, the possibility for teachers to get involved in design and decision-making does exist on paper, but the degree to which the practice is implemented varies:

“In Czech schools, they can legally do it. It depends on the headmaster. … I have been to many schools recently, and they had a student body to discuss issues, and they have team management. I know it is happening in Czech schools, even in grade school, but it did not happen in my children’s school. It depends on the headmaster” (Teacher M).

The transition from autocratic ways to participatory design and decision-making encounters a number of problems. For example, under the old system in Czechoslovakia,
students could not freely express themselves. Now they can, but they need to learn to express their views respectfully and practice self-discipline instead of imposed discipline:

“There are two extremes here, and we need to balance it and find a middle. … I think the teachers are not skilled. In a typical Czech grammar school, the atmosphere is very competitive, no teamwork” (Teacher M).

The experience of the Czech teachers has been echoed by teachers from other countries, countries with a democratic tradition, such as Ireland or Australia.

The International School interacts with the Czech education system, but because it is not a public school, it is not an integral part of it. Teachers relate that they came to the school because they liked the concept, whereas the majority of teachers at the Gymnasium were there during the GDR days and went through the changes together.

The systemic change project at the U.S. School District resembles the trajectory of the school in Germany in that respect. It is a public school district, and the stakeholders are changing an existing entity together. Most gained their experiences with designing changes through their involvement in the systemic change project. One teacher had previous experience with school change in various capacities and had the opportunity to be on the side of those who received mandates and also on the side of those who do the mandating:

“Certainly when I first started teaching, reform meant “here is a new project for you. You are assigned to do it - go do it”. And that was the way the world worked… .The other thing I did that may be helpful in terms of understanding - I was involved in site visits for performance based accreditation, and at that time, if schools were not performing in several different areas they would get a team of teachers and administrators sent out from the state. It was very high stakes and it was serious dog and pony show, they fed us well and all that kind of stuff. … I have been part of the ground up/top down kind of things from three different perspectives. Once having stuff handed to me, here I am part of the group trying
to figure out what the reforms are going to be and I was also part of the mandating process” (Teacher Q).

According to the observations of the teachers, things began to change at the school district with a change in the administration five years ago:

“Our superintendent has been here probably 5 years. He started this process. He is really great to include everyone in the decision-making. There are obviously times where he has to make these hard decisions we have to abide by, but he strongly believes in all voices being heard” (Teacher R).

Coinciding with the personnel change in leadership positions and a subsequently more participatory leadership style, the school district became involved in the systemic change process, and a core team engaged in a long process of self-education in joint design and decision-making.

**Learning to practice design conversation**

Based on the above descriptions, the teachers mostly worked in situations where teamwork and collaborative design and decision-making with other stakeholders were previously not very common. They experienced a learning process through trial and error and training programs.

At the Gymnasium, teachers repeatedly mentioned that they receive support by the ThILLM\(^\text{14}\). Both the school as a whole and individual teachers took advantage of the offerings of the professional development institute when it was deemed necessary. There they learned techniques such as mind mapping, moderating consultation, etc.

\(^\text{14}\) Thüringer Institut für Lehrerfortbildung, Lehrplanentwicklung und Medien - Institute for Teacher Professional Development, Curriculum Design and Media of the State of Thüringen
From the research sites visited, the people involved in the conversations at the US School District were the ones most familiar with the theoretical basis of design conversation, as proposed by Banathy and others, because their facilitator has extensive expertise in the area. Participants in the systemic change project read about systemic change in education, used authors such as Peter Senge’s work\textsuperscript{15}, and had support by the facilitator. They met extensively, initially once a week, participated in a retreat, and developed ground rules for their conversation and consultation processes, such as listening with respect and care towards others.

At the International School, those teachers who had experience with Bahá’í community life were used to consultation for design and decision making within the context of volunteer work in the community. They could transfer these skills to their workplace. Teachers at the school who did not have that particular experience learned on the job, and all engaged occasionally in school-based in-service training. Also, the skills needed for design conversation are not unique and new. Participants likely had exposure to such skills and had used them before in various contexts without explicitly labeling them as such.

Teachers described their own learning processes and also made observations about other stakeholder groups, in particular parents and students. A research participant from the Gymnasium explains how he wanted to learn and introduce others to participatory practices out of frustration with the way meetings ran:

“Actually, it grew out of the situation, because of frustration. The meetings I had with parents over a course nineteen years - one stood up front and the parents were sitting there, asking questions and complaining. When I asked for contributions, they held back. So, I said: “No way, I’m not just the whipping boy for everything. I have to try to bring the parents into the conversation”. So I went for professional development to the ThILLM and learned moderation methods, which I passed on to the parents. Now the parents, when they come, they already ask, “How do we form the groups and look forward to the approach?” We do group work, each parent who comes to work gives a contribution with some thought – well, and that’s simply a learning process” (Teacher D).

On-the-job learning, conversation training such as a counselor would receive, mediating conversations, techniques such as reading carousels, rules and norms for conversation, conflict resolution-type training, and different methods of active listening, were all training situations mentioned by teachers and deemed helpful. Reference was made to principles of learning organizations.

Teachers thus took the initiative to learn strategies for moderating conversations, group consultation and decision-making in professional development outside and within the school. They then brought their knowledge and skills to the school environment and modeled and spread the approaches learned.

Parents who were increasingly involved in design and decision-making at the school experienced a learning curve, as a teacher observes:

“Initially, the parents needed some time. Because it was new for them, they waited for a while until they engaged into a work cycle. It used to be that during meetings with parents many things were simply presented or read, and at the end questions could be asked. Now, when the parents work on a certain topic - first they had a bit of a difficulty to get started, they needed the first minutes to get adjusted to the situation. But after this, they worked quite efficiently and had no problems to deal with the topics. This was, for example, the case when they designed the mission and vision, which was discussed in the parents’ forums. They intensely reflected on the content of the issues” (Teacher H).
Teachers observe that parents come with different preparation to take on participatory roles. For example, at the Gymnasium, some parent speakers prepare for the parent meetings independently, while others need some teacher support, for example, with making an agenda, and still others rely greatly on the teacher. The teacher might even need to gather the class parents for meetings and prepare the meetings. Similarly, at the U.S. School District:

“Many of our parents are people in our community who are active in the school; so they’re already participants, say in our parent teacher associations, they already had leadership roles, so it was natural for them to want to pursue a participatory role with our leadership team. They were probably at a higher level of understanding of things that go on a school system, because they have supported fundraisers, helped in the classroom and those kinds of things” (Teacher S).

As for students, teachers at the Gymnasium observed that their students are actually quite well socialized into a participatory design and decision-making system:

“I have to say, the students we have in the schools nowadays grew up with it. They don’t know anything else. They know these forums for co-determination of issues and use them - maybe not always with a view towards their own responsibilities, but they use them” (Teacher F).

Gymnasium teachers mention that they practice conversations and discussions in their classes in various contexts, and that such communication is a performance goal in the state’s [Thüringen] curriculum standards:

“I taught that already in 5th grade. I trained it with them. We talked together about some topic, which is not that easy with my class, because they are quite lively, and there are always some who want to be in the foreground. We trained, for example, that one calls on each other, does not shout out things into the class or interrupt another person who is speaking. Those are all things we worked on hard. … I didn’t practice it in isolation but when we discussed a topic, I said: “Listen well, and think about what s/he said when you refer to it, when you give your contribution, so you connect to what the person before you said””. I don’t like those out-of-context practice exercises, but when we deal with something real, then there are rules, and they have to be paid attention to” (Teacher B).
Overall, the key recipients of training were the teachers. Students learned some conversation or discussion skills as part of their regular curriculum. Parents, if necessary, learned largely through example and modeling when participating in meetings where the facilitators used group work strategies.

**Summary**

Research participants shared experiences about transitioning from following mandates when implementing new practices and policies to shared design and decision-making through change in management practices. For most teachers working in the US School District and at the Gymnasium; this transition happened while they worked at one and the same school. Together with fellow faculty and other stakeholders, they engaged in the change process. At the Gymnasium, the transition also coincided with major societal and political changes and a search for new practices. At the International School, teachers had very diverse previous work experiences and compared those to their current situation.

All teachers spoke about a learning process. They intentionally sought out professional development possibilities, underwent on-the-job learning or transferred skills learned elsewhere to the design conversation processes.

Teachers from quite diverse backgrounds including different countries and different school systems all talked about the common experience of a transition from mandates being passed on to them to participating in design and decision-making. While the circumstances at each site were different, the research participants could connect to
the issue and relate personal experiences or observations. The number of research sites and participants are too limited to speak of an international trend, but it is noteworthy that all teachers had insight and understood issues related to a transition from hierarchical, one-way communication to horizontal conversations. All engaged in some sort of training on related skills and grappled with stakeholder inclusion. A review of the teachers’ statements gives the impression that if the teachers from all sites were brought together in one room, they could easily relate to each other’s experiences.

**Experiences with Attitudes and Values in Design Conversation**

Here personal attitudes and values are explored that were observed by the teachers in the course of designing shared visions or specific strategies and practices. The two themes that could be crystallized out of the teachers’ experiences and thoughts are commitment to service and dignity in interactions. When reflecting on dignity in interactions, research participants voiced thoughts and experiences related to deep listening, openness, differences in language, and leaving personality conflict behind.

**Sources of conflict**

Research participants had experiences with conflict both on a personal level between individuals and at an organizational level between different organizational entities and institutions when engaging in joint design and decision-making. At a personal level, several teachers recalled moments when things got heated. Stories were
told about raising one’s voice with a colleague, strong conversations, and a parent constantly bringing up the same issue, like a “broken record.” One teacher at the International School described all those moments as baggage when comparing his previous employment with the current situation:

“In my previous experience, sometimes people brought with them baggage. Issues that happened months ago, or even years ago, and this baggage prevents them from actually engaging the consultation process. Here, people don’t have baggage, and possibly because they’re not here long enough to develop baggage. ... But I think they buy into the consultation process. And I think it’s because very quickly they find that it has partly to do with the ethos of the school as well. That this is the way things are done here, and they accept that. Otherwise they wouldn’t come here” (Teacher J).

When this teacher happened to facilitate a session during which school personnel reflected on the school’s vision and mission and worked on translating the school’s philosophy into concrete actions, he recalled that he was petrified, because he had brought in baggage from home. If he had tried this in the school he worked in before, it would have been a disaster. The most skilled facilitator would have failed, in his opinion.

“[In contrast], what happened here was, people really got into it, and we have people who were from different religious backgrounds, different cultures, and they were mixing in there, and there were really stern things said, and really, you know, there was a lot of thought put into it…” (Teacher J)

A research participant at the US School District observed that old personality conflicts are embedded in the history of an institution; they are hard to overcome and can slow down change:

“Part of what we are looking at now is how do you begin to get people to have real conversations to get them to say, “OK, that is history and let’s do things a little bit differently and honestly”- and people have a good point when they say, “we’ve heard this twenty seven times.” So that’s my take on it. It’s been the real struggle and it is all the time” (Teacher Q).
Similar observations were made at the Gymnasium. A research participant stated that meetings of the various forums are, on principle, open to all. If somebody wants to bring an issue to a committee he or she is not a member of, he can ask to participate at any time, and if an unexpected issue arises, people or committees can be called together at short notice. If that person instead “engages in backbiting and complaining, something else is the problem, and they are often private things, sensibilities, people not getting along”.

Conflicts that hamper design conversations happen not only between individuals, but also between entities within an organization. Not enough communication, lack of openness and listening, and sometimes very easy-to-resolve obstacles such as scheduling meetings at a time convenient to all parties were mentioned as factors.

Misunderstanding and misinterpreting motives can also place a wedge between different stakeholder groups:

“I get the impression that they [policy makers] interpret it as a personal boycott or bad mood if schools are against something, but they simply have to accept that if one does not work full-time inside a school, one looses the perspective for what is doable. … There should be a forum where things are consulted about before they are made public, where [school personnel] can give input about whether something would work or not. But I guess those higher-ups are in positions where they don’t have to ask anybody anymore. They have an idea, and that idea is the solution for a proven defect, and if teachers raise some concerns against it, they are thought of as lazy” (Teacher E).

The attitudes touched on in these examples include putting the past behind, being open and listening, and conversing at the level of equals. The following stories are experiences with attitudes that were helpful in avoiding conflict and fostering conversation.
Commitment to Service

Commitment to service was commonly understood to mean keeping the focus on the issues and doing what is best for the students:

“What is characteristic for the faculty here is that there is a lot of engagement for the students. Our background might be different, but that is where we meet” (Teacher N).

Willingness, welcoming a challenge, leaving behind agendas, shedding “baggage,” thinking about what is best for the students, and parents’ getting engaged for the sake of the students were all mentioned:

“If I have parents who are engaged, it is fun. If you see that they want to move something ahead, not just for the sake of their own children, but in general, then it is very nice if something gets done this way” (Teacher F).

On the other hand, people just wanting to “polish their image” was perceived as counter-productive:

“They have some new ideas and want to push them through and change things according to their mind. I don’t think that is good … It should be people who are focused on the issues and want to find the best in an idea and not people who just want to get attention” (Teacher E).

Teachers saw being issue-oriented and concerned for the children as a factor in establishing the cohesion necessary for designing and deciding jointly on school issues.

Secure climate and trust

Trust amongst participants in a change process was mentioned frequently. Change is inherently risky and can fail. Thus, at all sites, this trust and a secure climate were viewed as a necessity. Without failure there is no learning. If participants know and trust
each other, failure is taken as a learning opportunity and not as an occasion to blame each other. People then feel free to speak openly and experiment. Teachers commented on the possibility of expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of recriminations.

Long-term relationships

At the Gymnasium, teachers saw this trust as something that builds over time when long-term relationships exist and people know each other. The character of the community in which the Gymnasium is located allows these long-term relationships. Some teachers at the school were friends with the parents or even grandparents of some of their students.

“If a school wants to develop itself - and that is a process that takes years – the colleagues have to know each other, their strengths and weaknesses. … I’m not constantly looking for a new wife to educate my children, that’s not good. They [the students] have to find in you someone they can talk to. … And at some point, conflict happens, and if you have solved that together, then there is a greater trust. Then you know I can do this with that person and that with the other. Then things are being achieved and it’s fun. …. I need groups I know, with which I can go through thick and thin and tackle difficulties” (Teacher E).

As part of their involvement in the INIS project, some Gymnasium teachers had the opportunity to get to know Canadian schools and noticed the frequent personnel rotation, especially amongst administrators. They had the impression that Canadian educators welcomed the rotation, because group formation and cliquishness is avoided. In contrast, the Gymnasium teachers favored group formation, because in a faculty everybody has certain strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and groups build on that and can then choose to engage in projects that suit them.
Establishing a trusting relationship with parents depends in large part on the stories the children bring home from school, teachers observed.

“I had the experience that parents are open to everything if they have the feeling that one means it well with their children, gets along and makes an effort for their sakes. Then they are amenable to innovations. On the other hand, if one makes the students nervous, if they have a lot of difficulties and voice their frustrations at home all the time and don’t find their way, the parents can become quite nasty. How parents react depends on the trust one is able to achieve” (Teacher B).

It was also seen as helpful to combine work and socializing, combine in-service with a grill party, for example, or with other enjoyable activities.

Taking risk

At the International School, these long term relationships are more difficult to establish, because many teachers have taken time off from their employment in their home country to work at the school for a number of years and then return to their home country. Here teachers comment that trust is based on a priori expectations. Teachers and students want to be there, and they made that decision based on what they knew about the school. They come with the expectation of finding a supportive environment.

It does happen that some staff members or students have known each other before deciding to teach or study at the school. They might come because a friend is working or studying there, but usually long-term relationships are rare. A teacher thought that people who come tend to be risk-takers and like change. She describes her expectations and experiences as such:

“I think the trust more easily happens here, because … they [the teachers] are not set in their ways. They are more willing to take a chance, so therefore they’re more willing to trust. And this was my attitude when I came here, because I
wanted to come here, and I think the other teachers would have been the same; they want to come. … Now, having said that, there is confrontation and there is conflict, and definitely that has happened over the years, and I have experienced conflict with colleagues over certain things that have happened, or certain things that should happen. And I think that’s healthy. Because if I am a teacher, with this staff and I feel if I can’t confront people about things, then I’m not effective. I need to have the freedom to be able to confront. … And that’s perfectly OK. No hard feelings” (Teacher J).

The boarding school setting and small size also fosters a quick getting-to-know-each-other process. Teachers do not live on the premises, but do come together in extra curricular activities or find themselves having to help students with personal problems. This family atmosphere has its advantages and disadvantages. It is supportive, but also, in terms of the teacher-student relationships, “It is very difficult to be a strict teacher when you know all the personal problems”.

In the U.S. School District, teachers observed a change in climate when a new superintendent began to work at the school approximately five years ago, which was also the beginning of the systemic change project. In fact, the change in leadership made the project possible. Teachers were, to some degree, burdened with an adversarial relationship at first and had to learn to trust.

“We probably had an adversarial relationship with administration and the teachers at that time; actually not adversarial but just not a lot of trust. And to sit down once a week and discuss change and how we are going to change was scary. I’m not sure I had a lot of faith in anything happening…. And really getting them [the teachers] to feel like they can take risks--I don’t think teachers are used to taking risks because they had been told what to do for so long. They are just getting there to believe. After five years they are just starting to believe this is for real that Mr._ isn’t going to come and tell us everything we have to do” (Teacher P).

Now that trust has been established, a teacher reports that she feels much freer to experiment and try out new approaches to teaching.
“And the trust, building the trust of understanding that it’s O.K., that you can make mistakes is O.K. That you say, I tried this and it didn’t work. He truly believes that. I believe I can go to him. I can say, Mr._, today I was going to do some big project in my classroom for whatever reason. I even invited him in. I feel comfortable that he can come in my classroom and sit and read and be with my class. And he did. I can make mistakes and he says, it’s ok and what are you going to do about that? How can you change?” (Teacher R)

Intentional trust building

Long-term relationships are harder to establish in the U.S. District because of frequent staff turnover and large district size. The team members closely involved with the systemic change project did not know each other well on a personal basis and therefore engaged in some intentional trust building activities. Being an ever-changing group, participating stakeholders need ongoing opportunities for reestablishing trust and bringing people up to speed on the change process. Teachers observed that people relaxed and became more confident after such activities as retreats and through collaboration over time.

“We had the PTA [parent-teacher-association] president--even the body language--she sat away from us. She didn’t feel smart, she felt intimidated, I think. By the end of the year, she was speaking her mind, because spending time on the retreat made a difference. Sharing personal things made a difference. We got to know each other as people, not as superintendent. Everyone being on a level playing field, being different was O.K” (Teacher P).

Thus, in the observation of the U.S. teachers, trust is not something that is created automatically, but needs attention and possibly intentional strategies.
Encouragement

Acknowledgement of work well done and expression of appreciation also foster a secure climate, teachers mentioned. I could, quite unexpectedly, observe such an occasion at the Gymnasium. When I was introduced to the faculty during the mid-morning break on the first day of my visit, the faculty happened to have a surprise celebration ready for the principal to recognize an award he had won. This brief moment gave an unacquainted observer the impression that teachers by and large enjoy a secure climate at the school.

In the opinion of several teachers, the school leadership plays a decisive role in establishing a secure climate. Receiving guidance and suggestions but not mandates, as well as being able to experiment and be trusted and having collaboration amongst equals instead of hierarchies, were seen as supportive.

**Summary**

The factors teachers describe as facilitating feelings of security and trust range from the benefit of long-term relationships to knowing about the school climate ahead of time and coming with certain expectations or engaging in intentional trust-building activities that speed up the process of getting to know each other. Teachers saw openness, the possibility to experiment and not always succeed, and being able to rely on others as vital for engaging in conversations on change and implementing changes.
Dignity in interactions

When contemplating dignity in interactions, teachers brought up issues revolving around differences in language, deep listening, openness, and feeling like equals.

Differences in language

Research participants mentioned experiences with trying to understand each other’s thoughts and opinions. Bridging differences in language usually meant making an effort to grasp the meaning of what was said. At the International School, linguistic diversity added to the complexity. The local parents did not always speak English, a sizable percentage of students spoke English as a foreign language with varying skill levels, and teachers came from very diverse cultural backgrounds, with several speaking English as a second language. During meetings with parents or large-scale gatherings, translation had to be arranged. Usually bi- or multi-lingual staff and also students could help out.

Actual linguistic differences are obvious. Less obvious is that people from different cultures tend to express themselves differently. A teacher from Ireland observed that in his country people say things indirectly, “beat around the bush,” whereas the Czech or German teachers are very upfront, something he had to get used to.

In the U.S. School District and at the Gymnasium, differences in language referred to connotations a word or expression might have for different groups. When designing the vision and mission statement, differences in understanding surfaced:
“The community as a whole - we had to change language because the community did not understand or like the educational jargon. We had the word risk-taking in there somewhere, because if you make changes, you take a risk. And the parents did not like the word risk taking. They were pretty adamant. They did not like it in there. They did not want us taking risks with their children. Even though that is what we do every single day, they did not like those words. They didn’t like how it felt, so we kept that word out. That was a concern that we take risk with their children. I guess that is more a misunderstanding” (Teacher P).

Teachers from the U.S. School District mentioned that they struggled through final versions of the vision and mission statement for about a year. “A lot of it was about words and figuring out what we were really saying and if we believe those kinds of things.” Common understanding of certain key words and concepts vital for the design of the changes in the district came about over time. Extensive conversations supported the achievement of this common understanding. Input was sought from many different stakeholder groups, and drafts of the vision and mission statement were repeatedly circulated. The conversations lead to a common understanding of school change vocabulary and descriptions of the desired learning environment. Newcomers to the process needed to then learn the meaning of key terminology.

Deep listening

A vital skill needed to find common understanding is listening. At the Gymnasium, the one issue that was mentioned in the context of finding common understanding and listening was the meaning of Christian or humanistic beliefs. Teachers drew on practices such as active listening:

“In this respect we have learned a lot. In the early years, there were real arguments amongst teachers during faculty meetings. I think during the past five, six years, we have learned a lot about how to treat each other, for example active
listening, and that has helped a lot. Because of our participation in the INIS project, we simply had to talk with each other. We looked at a report and asked ourselves what does this mean and we had to engage in a conversation with different groups. It helped that we talked with each other and that we had the guidance to comprehend an issue together. And I also have the feeling that most teachers feel happy here and say what they think. Sometimes there are small arguments, especially when designing the mission and vision statement. We had the sentence: “we educate towards humanistic values in line with Christian charitable love”. There were two teachers who said, “we are not Christians, we cannot live with that”. So we said, we have a wording with which we can all agree, for example we educate in the spirit of humanism and Christian charitable love. Then the humanists can find themselves and those who wanted to see Christian charitable love. It is very important not to loose anybody” (Teacher D).

Another teacher reflected on her own development in learning to listen. She thought that even living in a democratic country [referring to the U.S.], the concept does not always translate into action:

“We had so much of being allowed to have our own personal belief--this is my belief and this it who I am--that we can’t let go of anything we believe in. I think a lot of times that I get to the point where I can’t accept you and your ideas. I’m so stuck on mine, and my beliefs, and telling you who I am that I can’t take the time to listen to you. Because this is the way I do it, especially teachers, you know. You can put us all in a room and give us one topic and ask how to teach reading comprehension, and everyone is going like they are the best. You won’t have many people that sit there and go, “well that is an interesting way. I think. I’ll try that”. Instead everybody is fighting to tell you the best way. “I do it well and you can’t tell me any different”. And I have a lot of that, too, I noticed from my transitioning” (Teacher R).

Research participants took active and careful listening as a given and a necessity when engaging in a conversation. Teachers at the Gymnasium mentioned that they teach their students to listen to what others say and that in a conversation people typically first listen to each other, then weigh advantages and disadvantages of the various ideas and suggestions and think them over before coming to a conclusion.
Finding the right space and a time to meet when people are not in a hurry was also deemed important.

While teachers generally expressed feeling listened to by others, several teachers mentioned follow-up, getting results, and seeing some action as a measure of whether or not the listening was real or done only in a token way.

Openness

Listening carefully to each other goes hand in hand with openly stating one’s thoughts, ideas and opinions. Teachers commented that they felt comfortable doing so, and several teachers emphasized the idea that the place to voice ideas, opinions and observations is in the respective forums, for all to hear:

“People are usually very straight and candid, they say exactly what they need to say, which is very good, because any problems that arise can be discussed and dealt with there. And even the students themselves don’t feel reluctant to speak their mind… I think, and I feel that there is this image that once I have said something, it is out there for the public to discuss, which is very different from the school I come from, where consultation is not to be found at all, and where staff meetings can be very tense experiences, and if a person expresses their opinion, it may actually go outside the staff meeting and there may be some kind of conflict or confrontation later on. But here it’s different. What is said in the meeting is said in the meeting. Sometimes people outside of the meeting will make comments, sometimes negative comments, about what happened in the meeting. But my reaction to that is that when you have something to say, you say it in the meeting, don’t take it out here, because it’s not good out here” (Teacher J).

Openness and frankness were generally felt to be positive, albeit with some caution, because things can also be said in a way that is not only frank but insulting. Criticizing the person, not the issue, can turn diversity of opinions into insults, as some teachers’ remarks illustrated. One teacher reflects that he had to learn to take critique and
thinks that it involves a certain degree of maturity to work in a group and accept diversity.

Feeling as equals

Listening to others, being open and accepting diverse views requires participants to feel like equals and not act superior:

“It is important to view the parents as partners. If I put myself, as a teacher, as a principal, on a pedestal, I don’t even have to try to get into a conversation” (Teacher D).

A teacher in the U.S. School District described decision-making processes in their meetings that actually reflect this “feeling like equals”:

“There isn’t any debate. It’s just odd. I think in conversations like that, when there’s debate, there is someone who thinks he is more important, but in ours everybody is the same. If we came up with a decision and we could tell he [the superintendent] was against it, it would not color that decision and cause a change in the decision because this is the superintendent. He would honor that. I guess we have become a group” (Teacher P).

The teacher also remarked that it is necessary for the principal to give up power, which can be difficult, and that every now and then power relationships creep in and supersede the otherwise collaborative approaches.

Summary

The teachers’ experiences show that design conversation is not just a process, or steps to be followed, but rather requires adherence to values and the expression of those
values in the communicative interactions where design and decision-making processes are pursued.

The values mentioned begin with commitment to service, which was understood as focusing on what is best for the students. Another is trust, seen as a prerequisite for establishing a secure climate. A secure climate where people trust each other is seen as necessary when attempting the inherently risky venture of designing major changes in an educational setting.

Dignity in interactions was an overarching theme amongst values. Dignity in interactions included making an effort to understand each other’s ways of expression, using active and deep listening to grasp the meaning of what was said on the listener’s side, and openness, or willingness to clearly express one’s observations, thoughts and ideas, on the part of the speaker. It was remarked that this interplay of openness and deep listening can only take place if people perceive each other as partners, as equals in the process, and put aside hierarchical relationships.

These values are, in essence, proposed by Jenlink (2004, pp. 244-246), and they were brought to life and put into the context of everyday schoolwork by the teachers’ observations and examples. More could be defined and proven to be essential if research would focus on values only. Here the goal is to find those that dominated the teachers’ experiences.
Experiences with Processes in Design Conversation

Processes in design conversation refer to organization and flow of the meetings. Participation, information gathering, creating shared visions, strategies, concrete changes, and eventually coming to consensus, form the core of the processes.

Stakeholder Participation

For stakeholder participation three major sub-themes were identified: inclusion, involvement and equity. Inclusion is understood here as various stakeholder groups having access to the design and decision making processes. Involvement is the character of the collaboration various stakeholder groups display. Equity means that people can participate to the degree needed and wanted.

Inclusion

All research participants agreed that the connection between community and school at large and the inclusion of key stakeholders, especially teachers, students, and parents in the design and decision-making is important and a goal to be achieved. The Gymnasium and the U.S. School District, by virtue of being public schools and having been part of the community for many decades, are an integral part of the larger community. The international school is more of an implant.
At the Gymnasium, the staff increased its focus on design and decision-making with stakeholder inclusion when the school conducted a self-assessment as part of its involvement with the INIS project:

“The school draws students from 30 different villages and towns in the region, which has a systemic significance. One should – here you have the subjunctive – seek more contact with the communities, community organizations and companies. We have made a beginning, but it is something we still have to work on…. “(Teacher A).

“The community itself is happy that they have the Gymnasium, but, honestly, contact isn’t very strong. I don’t have the feeling, as a teacher, that I am being supported by the community. At higher levels, yes. The Landrat (county council) makes sure that our school has the necessary support. That, for example, the public transit continues bus lines needed for the students’ commute. That is supported, I can’t complain. But about the community itself, I’m a bit critical …. we can be proud that an educational institution like this one exists in this town. That is not common for a town with 5000 inhabitants. If you go to another region, there are towns with 9000 inhabitants and there is no Gymnasium. The children have to commute far to attend one. I have the impression that the community does not know what a good and engaged educational institution they have here” (Teacher G).

Typically, community collaboration is seen as contributions the school makes to community celebrations and events or community support of school programs, but not the act of engaging together with staff in design and decision making related to the school’s learning environment.

Gymnasium teachers did not perceive that any particular population group enjoys more inclusion in school issues than another because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion or social status. They pointed out that the region is very homogenous, and the population is closely knit. Only for a brief time after the changes in the political system did alliances during GDR days, such as party affiliation, carry over to the school involvement of parents:
“In the first years, there was the tendency to divide the people up. You have to take into consideration that an entire system collapsed and that those who had the say-so before now had to step back. Those are the communists. And that was difficult for this part of the population. They were completely against the new system. I immediately noticed it in the school conference – that is a former comrade… . But that is part of the past now. That doesn’t exist anymore. I don’t think there is a group here where one could say they absolutely want to push through their agenda. That doesn’t exist. I must also say that this is a bit of an oasis here. Other schools in Erfurt, Jena, Göttingen …, it’s different there” (Teacher D).

Currently, the one issue that could discourage parents from participating in school affairs is a fairly high joblessness rate. Higher unemployment means that people are preoccupied with trying to take care of their own affairs and that some might develop low self-esteem. But teachers did not observe any discrimination because of social status. Minority populations are uncommon in that particular region.

The International School is seeking contact with the surrounding community and, as at the school in Germany, this is still an issue to be fostered. The community at large is not participating in design and decision-making processes at the school. It is also more difficult for many of the parents to participate, because they live far away. Additionally, a language barrier exists to some degree for the Czech parents, even though translation is always arranged when necessary. Teachers who come from other countries to work at the school have the added challenge of getting used to a new culture and language when interacting with the community around them. The degree to which teachers immerse themselves in the local culture and get to know the country varies and depends on personal initiative. One teacher’s description summarizes the relationship:
“This has been a major issue through the year, this idea of how the school relates to the local community, and there’s actually the phrase, which is: “Oh, the school on the hill”⁶, and even that phrase, the “school on the hill”, conjures up a barrier between this school and the community. As if we look down on it. And, I don’t like that phrase, but it is a symptom of maybe how the people in the community perceive us. But I do feel that the school does try to get involved with local projects. And we try to involve the Czech students in many of our activities. For example, in the newsletter that I have here, I kind of wanted to put in something that is particularly Czech… and I got four Czech students to actually write this. Also, in student of the month, it is very, very important that we have Czech students involved, that we have representatives. For example, this year we have three or four of the twelve students. So that’s a good breakdown relation to the amount of Czech students that are here. So we try different ways to involve the community in the school, and a dance workshop will be involved in the local community as well. We have very strong ties with the mayor of the town. He comes in here and he walks in and is a friend to all. So there is this effort to try and break down the barrier, the boundary that would exist between the school and the community. I don’t know how receptive the local communities are to that, but I can just hear from being a teacher here that that actually happens. I need to know the local community a little bit better. But that’s my fault, because I can’t speak Czech. Sometimes, often here I feel that we’re in a bubble, you know… . I think there’s a weakness on our part to try and engage in consultation with the community, and there are other people who would like to engage, as well, but I don’t know whether it is a language barrier or if it is a cultural attitude. I don’t know” (Teacher J).

Another teacher mentioned that occasionally older people in the local community voice some prejudices, in particular against students of Middle Eastern background. But those seemed to be isolated occurrences, and in general the school receives positive feedback from the local community, sometimes in rather informal ways, as a teacher who speaks Czech observed:

“I come every year for the diploma ceremony, and I can hear what the Czech parents say. … I hear what the management doesn’t understand, and this is the feedback for us. When they see the vice principal, they say it in a different way,

¹⁶ The region is very hilly, and school is located on top of one, but is not remote from the town. It is surrounded by neighborhoods and is within walking distance from the town and public transportation. Thus the term “on the hill” signifies more of a mental barrier.
but I hear the little comments and the feedback is positive. Generally, 90% of the parents and also grandparents come here because they have children who graduate or they want to see how it looks. They like it. It’s different. This is what this school contributes into this environment” (Teacher M).

Connections are made with area youth groups through service activities, sports and performing arts, especially a popular dance workshop. The facilities are also rented by local organizations for conferences, and town officials like to show the school to visitors from other countries to emphasize the community’s integration into the European Union.

The connection to the local community is currently best described as being in a ‘getting-to-know-each-other’ phase. As a private school, its relationship to the community is somewhat different than a public school supported financially and in many other ways by the local community it serves. In fact, the boundaries of the community here should be defined differently than for the public schools, which serve a specific town or small region. The school actually serves various communities: the local population, the foreign nationals who live in the region, and an internationally spread Bahá’í community from which most of the boarding students come. The founders did consult extensively with friends and supporters from amongst the Bahá’í community during all stages of the school’s development17. A lot of conversations took place with staff at a similar school in Canada, for example, and those conversations have influenced the design of this school considerably. Thus this community is not geographically confined, like the local community of a public school, but rather is defined by common goals.

17 Conversation with one of the founders
The US School District made a concerted effort to include the larger community that the district serves. Community forums were one venue where this happened during the design phase of the vision and mission statement. Referring to the development of the vision and mission statement, one teacher observed:

“This is all from the stakeholders. That’s the unique thing. We have had parents, business owners, the Lion’s Club, lots of people have gotten together to come up with what we believe in, as to who we are” (Teacher R).

The teachers recounted many struggles in trying to get more community members involved. Information about the systemic change project was mailed out but not necessarily read. Teachers even handed out flyers during school sponsored football games to make sure parents were reached. It was difficult to get people to meetings and to keep parents involved in the work:

“The parents we kept are diehard committed people. They come faithfully. They have really taken on leadership roles. You would think they work for the township because they have become knowledgeable about education. They are comfortable with what they know and they are comfortable with giving input. We constantly add more parents. We might add six parents and we find one who is committed. They find out how much time is involved. The time factor is a problem, to get that much time away from families. Whatever we do in the leadership team we take out to the community. There are other community meetings they go to. We take what we do to the staff. There are staff meetings, PTA, community meetings, council. It’s all commitment of time, so the more comfortable they feel, the more they stay” (Teacher P).

The teachers who were closely involved in the change effort felt that they spearheaded an effort to get the school change project off the ground, and that in the course of doing so, they learned a lot about school change that they want to pass on to parents and the community at large. Some now see that the parents who participated encounter problems similar to the difficulties they themselves faced in reaching out:
“… Now the parents are out there trying to get other parents involved in the leadership team. They are coming back now and say: “Oh my goodness, we can’t get these parents involved.” So they are saying the things we’d been saying. On the same token, we understand now some of the things they were saying all along, that teachers don’t do enough and don’t listen as well as they should, because that hits us – oh, I do too? When you really get out there and start thinking about an ideal setting with our beliefs… “(Teacher P)

Both, the coming and going of teachers and the changing of community members participating directly in the work was a concern. It is difficult for many who are involved in the project voluntarily to make a consistent time commitment over long periods. There is a changing group of stakeholders, and a level of trust and knowledge has to be reestablished with new people on an ongoing basis. Ways to involve students are still being explored. Currently, their input is given through focus groups.

Broad-based stakeholder inclusion in design and decision-making is thus a goal at all three sites, and teachers commented on the need for more development in that direction. The boundaries of the community vary for each site. For the public schools, it is the local region that the schools serve. That local region is most clearly defined in the case of the U.S. School District by the district boundaries. In Germany, parents and students can choose which school the child attends; therefore the region is more loosely defined, and it would be more difficult to determine who the stakeholders are outside the immediate parent population. For the international school, the community is the local region and also an internationally spread faith community. The public schools, one could reason, owe the community a voice because they are funded and supported by the local community. And since the International School is an added resource to the local community, a good relationship with the community and some local involvement would
be in its interest. The teachers’ comments reflect that the schools at all three sites seek diverse ways in which to be in touch with the larger community.

Involvement

Involvement differs from inclusion. Inclusion can be understood as the possibility to collaborate and have access to the process, being allowed to participate. Involvement would then mean the degree and character of collaboration. This is an issue when concrete systems are designed and also when the overall vision is developed. But the design of concrete strategies and practices requires a different quality of involvement, because people have to immediately commit time and effort to then work on the implementation. Creating the vision is something still more abstract, a mental product. People don’t need to get their hands dirty, figuratively speaking, and act. When creating concrete strategies and practices, involvement means not only participating in meetings and coming up with nice ideas, but also doing the ensuing work:

“When we collaborated with the international school project [INIS], for example, many hesitated and had second thoughts, if we will be able to do that strength-wise. And the parent committees had to fill out so many forms… Initially they did not agree very much. They said, oh, so much time, we have to fill out this and that form. People don’t like to do that. … But when things got moving and one could see that one thing or the other was bearing fruits, and one could see where there were still weaknesses, where work was needed, then things [the purpose] became clear, and it was ok. But to do this first step, to dare get involved in a new project, there are first many obstacles because it is quite simply a lot. … People say, oh, just leave me in peace - I just want to do my lessons. It is also a question of strength and if one sees the meaning” (Teacher I).

The question “what do I, or we, have to do?” is raised. This can easily lead to conflicts, because one group might make requests of another group that are unrealistic or
not doable. Stakeholders have to invest considerable time in “filling out forms” or other work. People who take on tasks have to be available. Concrete projects have to be evaluated and possibly redesigned. Strength and resources are an issue:

“If you offer parents collaboration, they come with this wish and many more ideas, and as a teacher, there comes a point when you cannot accomplish it anymore” (Teacher G).

According to the teachers, it is critical to keep involvement at a level that does not overwhelm participants and to have individuals who are interested and see things through, as this example from the Gymnasium highlights:

“A deciding factor is always that somebody is the motor and then the students and parents also have to be exited about it. If it is only imposed, it doesn’t work. With the taskforce [Saving Energy], that worked wonderfully because the solar collectors were mounted on the roof, and that excites students who are interested in technological things. Along with it came the dividing of trash. Simple things, that we put up different types of trash cans. That works more or less - the caretaker has to help it along occasionally. ... Those are all things that were well received by the students and parents, and then the project developed” (Teacher A).

The U.S. School District is currently transitioning from designing its vision and mission statement to forming design teams at individual schools in order to design the concrete strategies and practices. Several teachers were wondering whether dealing with very concrete issues would be as smooth a process as coming up with the vision and mission statement, which, despite being a lot of work and generating some tensions, was generally perceived as a positive process.
Equity in participation

Equity, the possibility to participate in conversations as a partner with an equal voice, regardless of rank in a hierarchy, is vital to the process of design conversation. It is closely linked to inclusion and involvement. If hierarchies are to be leveled out and equitable participation assured, the possibility for involvement is the first step, followed by work strategies that allow continued equitable input in design and decision-making. It means a shift away from decision-making by individuals:

“Everything is done in a committee. All decisions are made together with people. … Everything I write, I write with somebody else or a committee. There is no role for dictatorship” (Teacher P).

Related to equity, teachers voiced observations about the scale of involvement by stakeholders in any given issue, different levels of engagement, diverse qualifications of people and the nature of their contributions, and the work processes that facilitate equity.

All teachers observed that the possibility to voice opinions, give suggestions, and participate in design and decision-making is a given at their schools, and the school leadership was generally perceived as being open to this participation. Teachers saw the benefits of stakeholder participation and, in particular, of bringing parents in the loop:

“Changes and innovations are not necessarily always consulted upon, but I am for doing so, really explaining ones’ plans and what is involved. In principle, the parents have a lot of interest in seeing their children learn something and flourish at the school… and the parents aren’t poisonous. And if one does not do it, and there are difficulties getting things off the ground, it can happen that a very bad atmosphere develops against a project, and that makes life more difficult than it has to be” (Teacher B).
Research participants pointed out that there needs to be some differentiation in terms of what issues need large-scale involvement and what can simply be designed and decided by a few or by one person. In other words, it has to be determined, based on the issue at hand, who has a stake in it, and those people should contribute to the design and decision-making process. Assurance of equity does not mean that the entire school community is always automatically involved:

“Where appropriate, the school leadership can consult on things before making a decision. Well, not everything has to be consulted. I am not a defender who says all decisions have to be discussed at length, and everybody has to add their two-cents worth, and we have a meeting and another meeting and yet another meeting, and somewhere down the road we get results. Some things, I believe, do not have to be discussed, and the school leadership can simply decide. That’s what they are there for” (Teacher C).

The teacher gives examples where stakeholder collaboration is appropriate. In the case of the Gymnasium, the involvement in the INIS project or in the Eigenverantwortliche Schule would need stakeholder participation, because of the major impact of those changes.

There are events or projects that might be designed for and by specific interest groups, and in this case, these interest groups are the ones in charge. At the Gymnasium, for example, the parents initiated round table discussions (Stammtisch) on topics that were of interest to them in their role as parents, and they largely determined the format of these discussions. Issues that affect all
stakeholders are talked about by all, using the existing forums, as in the case of the Gymnasium:

“With important issues that have relevance for the school, an effort is made to include all three partners, parents, students and teachers. If we take the example of the vision and mission statement or the “evaluation as motivational help” initiative… we worked on it in the teachers’ conference, with the parent speakers and student speakers” (Teacher D).

The student speakers would take the issues up in their classes, and the parent speakers with all the parents. This way, everybody can potentially participate in the consultation.

While the potential for participation is given, there is always the possibility that some people dominate, while others are overlooked or do not express themselves readily. A teacher reflects back on her own situation in a previous employment, where she was hesitant to speak openly:

“… maybe because I was young and shy, I really didn’t feel I was proactive in the consultation. I remember coming to the staff room. We had staff meetings every Monday, once a week. And the principle of our school would lay down the law. So, this is it. Sometimes she said, “what do you think about this?” and the teachers would kind of say their ideas. But it is interesting, because at the second school I worked at, there was a lot of disunity at the school amongst the staff. Because I was there only for one year - I was the youngest staff in the school, I just stood back. I didn’t take ownership at that school. I really felt I had to be careful, I had to remain in the shadow. There was some staff who was leaning to one side, and I didn’t want to get into that. I just focused on my work. I mean, I loved the kids so much, and every time I was in the classroom, I enjoyed the most, but at staff meetings, times when we had to talk about something I really…” (Teacher L)

In this description, an intimidating climate and lack of experience kept the teacher from contributing. None of the teachers interviewed observed such an intimidating climate at their current school, but individuals likely choose to
contribute with different intensity for a variety of reasons. One is the facility to be articulate:

“I always experience these moments when a student who is good with words says things, and then another maybe would not say anything. Also the parents – one parent is active and talks a whole lot, and at the end of the meeting you think, one parent talked, but it was just the opinion of one parent, and the forum should have been for all parents”. (Teacher E)

Ingrained attitudes such as seeing the authority in the teacher might still play a role. One teacher described how, during meetings with parents from her homeroom class, when it is time to give suggestions for activities, changes, solving of problems etc., she finds herself giving the bulk of the suggestions, and parents tend to follow and defer to the teacher. The teacher found it easier to assure equity in participation with her students. She can call on those who tend to be quieter and encourage them. The teacher admitted that she gets along better with those who are a bit livelier and voice their opinions, because, as she told her students, “I’m not in your heads, I’m not in the heads of thirty students, that is asking too much…”

With the parents, with grown-ups, that would be awkward, she thought. Another teacher observed that as people become used to the process, and as the comfort level rises, participation increases:

“You would notice different levels of participation. You would see the new people somewhat sit back and listen and watch, and then you would start seeing them chime in, just a little bit, and now we have a group that pretty much responds at any point and jumps right in when they feel that there’s something they want to contribute and need to contribute, and it’s a pretty joyful process. We joke a lot, so we’ve definitely developed camaraderie” (Teacher S).
Misrepresentation is possible when design work or opinion and idea-gathering take place in sub-groups, and representatives of those groups present the results of those conversations to decision-making bodies:

“We always have to question: is it one parent who is formulating the opinion of many or is it that parent’s personal opinion? A very active school leader can completely alter something, or also a very active parent speaker, if they present it accordingly” (Teacher E).

Given the opportunity and means to participate, in the end it is the stakeholders’ choice as to how much they do so. Whether or not equitable participation becomes a common practice also depends on the individual’s initiative. As one teacher observed:

“It is easy to get lethargic in conversations and let people talk. You have to remember to give your input as much as possible” (Teacher P).

Level of participation can also vary from meeting to meeting. A teacher pointed out the many obligations and distractions people have, and observed that one might be at the meeting but still not be very focused:

“It depends on the day. When you have people who are in various ways deeply engaged in the work that is supposed to be done - a committee of people made up of teachers who have probably worked the entire day and … parents who have worked the entire day and principals who have worked the entire day and who intend to go back to work when the meeting is done and administrators from the central office who have worked the entire day and who probably have to go to another meeting or two after this, then engagement is a relative term. … There have been times I have had to go home and pick my children up and bring them to the meeting, and that’s ok. But when you talk about being engaged--was I 100% focused on what was going on at the meeting that day - no, I tried. But that is part of the deal. But I’d say the more deeply the person is involved in working in the day-to-day processes of the school/classroom, the less likely you have full engagement of what is going on, and that’s just the way it is” (Teacher Q).
Equitable participation and openness with one’s thoughts can be hampered by self-censorship, or thinking about consequences for oneself and the school and about whether what one says might cause problems:

“It’s about stakes, and as long as they [referring to students] feel that it isn’t going to cost them anything in a personal sort of way, and it is not going to cost the school anything in any sort of personal way, then they feel pretty free and comfortable talking about what they see and what they don’t see. That has been my experience… . The thing is, though, that you have to watch out for student awareness of what might be the stakes involved for the school. There are two parts to that. One depending on what the status of the kid is within the school that may determine the words that get said, and that is particularly true if they feel like that it is going to cost the school something in some way, they kind of snap into line. … As an example, the high school change process that is required by the State - we are going through an accreditation process [U.S. School District]. The students that they call in to talk about what was going on were the class officers and top students in the senior and junior classes. That is going to really, really skew the kind of information you get, because by definition these are the most active kids, the ones that have been really engaged in extra curricula, the ones who find the system matches them perfectly. So if that’s the case, then the information is going to be skewed. I think that we are better at just asking regular kids what goes on with the leadership team” (Teacher Q).

Another issue brought up was the qualifications and preparation of participants. Since the design and decision making in question here is happening in a school context, teachers ought to be the ones best qualified to give contributions based on their knowledge and experience in the field. With other stakeholders now participating, teachers find themselves needing to educate, for example, the parents as to what is doable, wise, and professionally appropriate:

“Well, I would say the possibility for co-determination is always a given. What I notice personally, and that should be stated honestly, … that sometimes the view behind the scenes is not that real for the parents. To say it more concretely, they bring ideas and suggestions where I simply have to say: “I know that better, that doesn’t work that way.” One has to guide that with patience and skill into the right pathways, and that is again our task … Overall, we try our best to reach a
consensus by means of awareness, explanations and discussions. Things are not simply mandated. Here is a small example: The parents thought that it is a remedy for everything to have the grade distribution published with each exam, how many 1, 2, and 3 (A, B, and C) etc. In my experience, I know that when I write an exam in a class and all have a “3”, except for one who has a “6” (F), then it is not wise to single out that one person. Then it is much wiser to return the exams anonymously. Usually the students figure out amongst each other who got the “6”. We should not rub it in by saying: “look, you failed again”. A student has to be able to deal with it. It was a bit difficult to get this across to the parents. We came to a compromise that in pedagogical exceptions it does not have to be published. In principle, yes, the parents have the right to see the distribution of grades, but we shouldn’t be forced to do it always, otherwise something is missing. This is just a small example where we realize that we are more knowledgeable about something from our daily work - without appearing to be a know-it-all, which is something teachers are often accused of: … Everybody went to school once, and that’s why everybody thinks they are an expert. … That’s why there are so many people who like to dabble in school issues” (Teacher A).

The teacher went on to say that occasionally one meets people who think they have to explain to the teacher how to teach, and that is not always easy to deal with, especially since teachers these days do not have a very high status [referring to Germany].

While teachers observed collaboration and co-determination, they saw that assuring equity needs support and having strategies in place so that people can be heard. At all schools, some variation of working in smaller groups or committees exists, and the results of that work were brought into the larger group.

A variety of group work strategies were used to support the flow of consultation, as this example given by a teacher at the Gymnasium illustrates:

“There are different methods to get the conversation going and to gather ideas. Setting the table [the label for a group work strategy] is nothing else but a method. Parents and students have a task. For example, there is the topic: what can parents contribute to using evaluation as motivation? That is currently a topic. Then a sheet of paper is put on the table. There are maybe four persons, and they have five minutes to think on their own – what can they contribute? And they write it in their field. So they write
one, two, three, four, five thought in their field, everybody on their own, and then we already have twenty ideas. Then one says, I have this idea, the next person says, I have that too – that can be dropped then. In the end, you might have 15 ideas total, and you write the five most important ones in the middle, and you have a concentrated result. A colleague did that with four groups, they had 4x5 results and summarized those…” (Teacher D)

That becomes the basis for working on an issue. Teachers at the Gymnasium described variations of this kind of group work and observed that this is currently a fairly common approach for summarizing and condensing the opinions and ideas of many people.

A teacher who facilitated a session at the International School describes a very similar strategy:

“Yes, what we did was, I teased out some of the issues that might have to do with this philosophy statement at the beginning, and then a lot of group work went on. Broke them into groups, three groups, and with sheets of paper, and they had to put down what issues for each one. O.K. And then how to apply each one? And then a feedback from that, and then a general discussion. Now, I don’t think it should finish there. I think what has to happen now is that all of the staff and all of the stakeholders in the school should look at this, and should put fourth the consultation, to tease out more and more and more. Because the more you’re involved in it, obviously, the greater will be the successes of this mission statement” (Teacher J).

Again, very similar approaches were common at the U.S. School District. Here is the example given by a teacher when facilitating a session with different stakeholders:

“Each station I gave them….I gave them about 5 minutes. I said, read them and then go through and write down your example. … I had different stakeholders in each group on each of those five different sets of beliefs, what we are learning, the learning environment and all of that, the different ones. They were each in different areas, and I made sure I strategically placed them so that they were mixed up in groups. I’d tell them, I’ll take you out of your comfort zones for a little bit. They were
very involved. There were husbands and wives that I separated them, even, and made sure they were off in different groups. It went very well. I said, it’s time, we are going to shift now to the next station, and they were not ready to stop. They wanted to keep writing, they wanted to keep talking” (Teacher R).

In essence, this organization of group work resembles classroom management tools, strategies teachers would use when they want collaboration by all and give participants in a large group the opportunity to contribute. These are used at all thee sites to design a common vision or concrete practices and projects. The teachers reported that the participants got used to it and usually enjoyed the process. One teacher, though, observed that when parents participate in meetings after a long day of work, they, and the teachers who facilitate the meeting, might not always be very motivated, and was of the opinion that activities therefore need to be focused:

“One arrives from work, had a full day and now has to have a meeting with parents. So your goal is to be well informed and have a good quality exchange, but everything that looks like games can be nerving, and I have the feeling that applies to parents too - maybe that’s because I’m not presenting it convincingly – they come, and they have done enough for the day – should I then give tasks that need more effort and time?” (Teacher B)

Streamlining meetings and making effective use of the time is a concern and needs attention if equitable participation is to be assured. The U.S. School District, for example, looked at convenient meeting times, at combining the work sessions of various sub-committees to facilitate communication between them, and in general at making effective use of time.

The examples illustrate that equity involves strategies to allow everybody to give input and participate and to avoid dominance by a few, and also strategies to keep the
conversation focused and to the point with concrete results at the end that allow the work to go forward, because time and energy is a factor in assuring equitable participation.

**Summary**

Design conversation is characterized by participatory democracy. Therefore, broad-based stakeholder inclusion is a prerequisite. The key groups repeatedly mentioned by research participants are teachers, parents, and students. At all schools, teachers and administrators are spearheading the bulk of the work. Parents and students participate with varying intensity. Teachers mention the efforts they make to include and motivate parents. Inclusion of the community at large is a goal at all three sites and is still very much in the beginning stages. Equitable participation does not necessarily mean that all stakeholders are involved in all decisions, but involvement depends on who is affected by an issue or interested in it. During design conversations, the flow of the conversation and the possibility of contributing to it should then be organized in such a way that everyone’s voice can be heard. Group work strategies to achieve maximum equity during conversations were described.

**Suspending Mindsets**

At all three sites, the participants embarked on a process that challenged them to create something new. The impetus for putting aside accustomed ways of thinking differed, and the experiences were embedded in the historical context.
Those teachers at the Gymnasium who had previously worked in the education system of the GDR were standing in a vacuum because the known system was declared obsolete. But, based on the remarks of the teachers participating in the research, they welcomed the opportunity to put aside the accustomed ways and to work on creating new ones. As already described, the process was limited and superceded by mandates, but the attempt was there, supported by independent thinking, as the comments previously cited (e.g., “…we can decide everything as long as it isn’t against the law”) and involvement in the INIS project illustrate. The teachers also noticed the readiness of parents to engage in something new, but observed that it could not happen all at once, that “we cannot overthrow everything at once. There are little developments, and they pull other things along.” The tug between daily problems and suspending mindsets in creating a vision and mission statement is illustrated by this comment:

“What I observed with the parents is that in the end they always revert back to the ancient problems, even when they are not on the table. They do deal with the topic at hand, but then, in the end again get on the topic, ‘well the class schedule needs to improve… the cancellation of classes has to disappear…. ’ Somehow they always find themselves and their problems” (Teacher H).

At the International School, teachers observed that suspending mindsets does run into certain limitations set by the surrounding education system. They want to accommodate new ideas and take a holistic approach to student development, but they are also required to use a curriculum that is geared towards breadth and compartmentalization, rather than depth and integration. The surrounding system imposes limitations, but personal attitudes can also cause obstacles. Teachers mentioned having to overcome their own tunnel vision and saw administrators struggle with giving up power and old hierarchies.
Some at the U.S. School District observed that suspending a mindset might be more challenging for teachers than for parents, because teachers might take suggestions for change as an affront to the quality of their work or feel that what they are doing currently is perceived as not being good enough:

“I think it is harder with the teachers than the parents. For most of these things, maybe not everything, but for most of them [the parents] it is easier because it is their children. They see it is going to benefit their child. You don’t step on their toes. …Just in looking at what kids are doing today with electronics we get upset with them because they should be writing. They need to be writing those facts, but our kids will need to use electronics. We don’t let them go there, because we think that’s bad because that is not the way we learned it. They are still sitting in their class and raising hands. It is so hard for us to let go of that. … The community can be all about it, the administration can be all about it, but if there is no movement by the teachers, when they feel comfortable at shutting the door and going on with business as usual - nothing changes, not really” (Teacher R).

Teachers mentioned that seeing the need for change is especially hard when the school is doing well, test scores are high and people are, by and large, happy with the status quo. Teachers in the U.S. School District, for example, remarked that the process of suspending mindsets seems slow, but observed that at a recent meeting on redistricting, people did think outside of the box and tried to get away from the industrial model of schools. The challenge is not to copy, simply, something existing:

“There is no model to look at. We are changing our whole district. Even when they are talking about small schools within our high school…. we went all over the country to look at models, but we are changing a whole district and our culture. Our culture has changed. It has changed. The decision-making is by committee. Everybody has had some experience with it, had some voice. It took a lot of years. If you are coming in from another district and look at it and try to recreate it – and you see how many years it took, it is almost discouraging. It is almost five years and here we are, we got all this to do” (Teacher P).

At all the sites, teachers commented on the challenges of suspending mindsets and accustomed ways of thinking and acting. At the Gymnasium and the U.S. School
District, teachers experienced a transition within the system. At the International School, the stakeholders had already agreed to subscribe to a certain educational philosophy that differed somewhat from the surrounding system and the ones they came from. They had to get used to working with that vision, but they did not experience a major transformation of the school while being there. Their struggle was, rather, to implement a vision while having to contend with rules, regulations and curricula mandated by the country’s educational authorities and also working to shed some of their own old habits.

*Inquiry and information gathering*

Any kind of design process, in the experience of the teachers, began with inquiry into needs, strengths and weaknesses. Opinions of major stakeholders were sought. Teachers talked about the use of surveys and focus groups. Through participation in the INIS project, the Gymnasium had an entire toolbox (INIS, webpage) available, which was used for self-analysis. The U.S. School District held focus groups with students and conducted community forums.

At all sites, the staff recently reflected on a vision and mission statement. At the Gymnasium and in the U.S. School District, a new one was developed, while at the International School the existing one was revisited and people consulted on how to translate it into a concrete learning environment.

At the Gymnasium teachers gathered information about vision and mission statements, looked at examples from businesses and other schools, and compared them to their goals. Teachers also participated in professional development workshops to learn
how one can work on a vision and mission statement in the context of schools. Exchange
with other schools, even internationally, was made possible by the INIS project.
Typically, the work for gathering information was divided up amongst various
committees:

“...We look at things first in the steering committee, to see what is doable. Then
it is presented and discussed in the teachers’ conference. Usually the people from
the steering committee who informed themselves about an issue do the
presentation. Sometimes experts are called in. Sometimes we decide amongst the
faculty if we need professional development on an issue. Or we went together on
a retreat and combine it with a nice get-together... and we focus on an issue and
examine it up close. We had good experiences with that, that the teachers reflect
and analyze a concrete issue, introduce it to the faculty, and this way we have a
broad basis and not everybody has to become an expert on everything” (Teacher
F).

In a similar fashion, teachers in the U.S. School district did intensive research and
reading on school change, new teaching methods, and other pertinent issues for the
development of a vision and mission statement. Inquiry was often divided up, with teams
or committees focusing on one aspect, and then the results were assembled together. At a
more concrete level, the high school, which needed to urgently make some changes
because of rapid population growth in the region, had a committee that visited other
schools across the country, gathering ideas and conducting inquiries.

Teachers pointed out that there could be problems if the inquiry and information
gathering process is not thorough. Issues need to be clarified for people not trained in
education, e.g., parents or people with purely administrative roles. One teacher used a
descriptive metaphor for such experience in the context of trying to get a point across to
other stakeholders: “It was like we were throwing them a basketball and they didn’t
know the rules of basketball.” Another research participant commented that the expertise
of teachers needed to be respected. Parents sometimes come with suggestions that are simply not doable, and then guidance and information are necessary to educate stakeholders who are less knowledgeable about the work of education professionals.

All research participants experienced inquiry and information gathering at the outset of any design process and saw it as indispensable. They described various ways in going about it. Looking at examples from other schools was frequently mentioned, along with reading relevant literature, coming together in study groups, having individual teachers research an issue and present it to others, or attending workshops.

Creating a shared vision

During the development of a vision and mission statement or the revisiting of an existing one, a shared vision is created or expanded. Teachers at all three sites had experiences in that respect. They talked about the lengthy conversations on what should or should not be included, the phrasing of statements, and the meaning of certain values. Teachers from the Gymnasium and the U.S. School District also had observations about the inclusion of students in the process.

Working on the vision and mission as teachers

The drafting of a shared vision was a process of reflecting on the goals, philosophy and practices stakeholders wanted to see in their schools. After initial conversations and reflections, a draft was typically developed, with work on different
aspects completed in small groups. Results were presented to stakeholders, feedback collected, the draft rewritten and circulated again, and so on, until a consensus was achieved.

A teacher from the Gymnasium summarized their process as follows:

“We got together in groups and divided up the various dimensions needed for the everyday functioning of the school and the ones that distinguished us from other schools. In groups, we worked on certain points. One group formulated something about contact with parents. The next group -- there was the question of education according to Christian norms, humanistic worldview -- and those were some of the issues we dealt with. Then we brought it all together and integrated it into the mission and vision. The steering committee collected it all, and two German language teachers wrote it. Before that happened, the different classes took on issues and thought about them. The class speaker handed those in to the principal in a meeting [parents too handed in their thoughts]. Then a preliminary vision and mission statement was drawn up and given back to the classes, parents, and parent representatives, and they read and gave feedback. The process continued until everything that ought be included was in it” (Teacher G).

One teacher remembered that work on the vision and mission statement took place in a good atmosphere. There were some questions about whether or not the term “Christian” should be kept or replaced by more generic terms related to values. A solution was then found with which all could agree, according to this teacher.¹⁸ Another Gymnasium teacher saw the vision and mission statement more as a mosaic. Different viewpoints are carried together, and some common understanding of values is achieved, but stakeholders might not completely subscribe to all aspects. This teacher found it valuable that not only teachers but also parents and students collaborated, but also observed that the teachers were still the guiding force, because they understood more of the issues. Another teacher thought that it is currently a somewhat fashionable thing to

¹⁸ The issue will be revisited in the context of some of the other themes.
develop a mission and vision statement. Businesses do it and schools now, too. He could have lived without it, but saw it as a very democratic process, and observed that now they have something that defines the school and that “just like the companies, we can advertise with the mission and vision statement.”

At the International School, as mentioned before, the vision and mission statement was developed when the school was founded. The current teachers all began work at the school fairly recently, and therefore had not participated in that process. They did, though, review and reflect on the vision and mission statement in order to understand its meaning more fully and create the learning environment accordingly:

“… We looked at the basic actual philosophy statement, and we looked at issues that might be around this, that teachers might have. And also we looked at how we could apply each section of this to the school life. And it was very much a think-tank type thing, and I think it was quite successful, … what came out of it was actually quite a lot of information. … It was then given to the management here, and then they can actually walk through with that, because -- there’s the mission statement. Then you have to do your strategy in how you want to apply that in policy and stuff like that. So I think that this is part of an ongoing process here at the moment. But yes, there is this consultation on the wider issues of ethos and what will suit the school. … I think a lot of things happened on that weekend which would be lost otherwise, and it would be a waste of energy if in fact they didn’t continue on to the next stage -- setting the policies and whole structures, objectives and all that” (Teacher J).

Several teachers at the International School remarked that it was a first for them to reflect in this manner on the overall vision of a school. Previously, they had just read it and shelved it. To consult together on the larger vision of an educational institution was a new and welcomed experience. They had previously consulted on everyday business issues such as problems with students, curricula and projects, but not on the overall direction of educational practices.
The U.S. School District, like the Gymnasium, developed a vision and mission statement very recently, and the experiences were fresh in the teachers’ minds. Here, too, a draft document was developed, in this case by the leadership team. It was then circulated, and the draft was rewritten until the consensus of all stakeholder groups was achieved. These remarks of two teachers illustrate the process:

“As a leadership team, we did a retreat and wrote the mission. We took it out to the community. As we wrote it, we had a lot of discussion, wording people didn’t like, wording people did like; change this and that, and it was an intense time. …Everyone fought for their ideas, and everybody was listened to. …There was kind of a consensus, but it was a lot of work” (Teacher P).

“We spent hours and hours and you look up there [points to poster of the mission statement on the wall] – there is sweat and tears up there and a lot of ownership. The word the and but or must or should. We would spend an hour on that conversation. I think that word needs to be that way. Then we released it and it went around. We did PTO [parent-teacher-organization] meetings. We went to every school. We went every morning to staff meetings everywhere in the township and read them to people and explained what they were and allowed them to have input to what they wanted. Then we had to come to the table again. We tallied up, saw how many agreements and disagreements there were towards different things. And that was hard, because we had to let go of some of those things. My blood is on this word and I want this word to stay in, but then I also had to release and say there are 20 people here who say, they don’t want that word, so obviously it is something to take a look at. It has evolved to something where now we as a group… and we see things so much different now than we did at the beginning. We now want everyone else to feel that same thing” (Teacher R).

Just like at the Gymnasium, some work was completed in small groups and then the pieces were brought back together. The teachers participating in the leadership team, which constituted the backbone of the effort to develop the statement, found that evening meetings did not allow for sufficient focus on larger goals, and so they had a retreat to finalize the draft. There was a tendency for group members to begin the process with their own immediate issues and then widen the view to see the whole picture. Getting
away in a retreat helped to achieve the needed detachment from daily chores and to see larger goals.

Involving students

At both the U.S. School District and the Gymnasium, students were involved in the shaping of the vision and mission statement, but the approaches differed somewhat.

At the Gymnasium, students talked about the statement during class time, with and without a teacher present, and then the student representatives to the school conference brought the results to that forum and participated in the acceptance of the finalized document. There had been previous occasions, in particular during a self-analysis as part of the INIS project, when students could voice opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. Older students could draw on that, while for younger students it was new to reflect on their school.

Two Gymnasium teachers, one who teaches fifth and sixth graders, and another who teaches upper level classes, described briefly how their students talked about the vision and mission statement:

“Well, we discussed it in class [in this case students were 11 and 12 years old]. Of course, you have to help them understand everything, compare first. That was actually quite interesting, because it became clear to the students what a vision and mission statement is and what their concrete wishes are. We discussed quite a bit, and in the end they decided on certain items that were of particular importance to them. And that was recorded” (Teacher B).

“As a homeroom teacher, I presented the vision and mission statement [draft] to the students [approximately 16 years old and older] and said, look at it, where do you feel represented. Is that your school? What is characteristic of this school, what is it that makes you enjoy coming here every day? We can integrate that
here. We talked it over in the class, and for some for the time the class speaker
did it alone with the group, and I was outside as homeroom teacher” (Teacher G).

At the Gymnasium, every homeroom teacher had an experience with student
involvement. Developing a vision and mission statement was new to the students, but at
other levels, students were used to co-determination. One teacher remarked that it seemed
to her that students did not necessarily see the immediacy of such a mission and vision
statement. In her class, the discussion was very calm:

“ They chose the easier path. They read it, talked about it, and … yes, we can
agree to it. Here and there a small change. But if there are things that affect them
directly – what do we do with the smokers’ corner? Where do we go for next
year’s graduation trip? There the contributions are a bit different. Then they are
much more ‘discussion happy’ and get quite intensely into arguments and try to
pull you to their side. Well, there is a bit of a different quality” (Teacher H).

The U.S. School District used a focus group approach. Teachers did not use their
class time for conversations on the vision and mission statement. It was an after-school
occasion with a sample of students and several teachers who led the group. They had
these recollections:

“We did a special six to eight-week study with kids where myself and 3 other
stakeholders went to the jr. high and high school. Different kids, some were
student council, some students at risk. We asked them what they wanted, what
they were upset with, what they felt. … And then we moved into building your
ideal kind of school. What kind of problems, concerns did they see, as well as
celebrations, things that were going well. If you could talk to your teachers, what
would you tell them, what you like and what you don’t like? … We put those
down, the good things and the bad. We did a lot of round robin, group discussion
about it. … And we’d ask them about their concerns. Because then we can take
that back to our committees and say look, here is the major voice, what we need
to look at, what kids are saying. … We brought food in, we fed them – you have
to do that. We brought the pizza and the candy and all that. We asked them to be
part of the decision-making, what they wanted for the next time. … That was fine.
I enjoyed that a lot” (Teacher R).
Teachers collected the students’ input given during these weeks and it was worked into the vision and mission statement. But once the focus group’s input was given, there was no further student involvement in the final form of the statement.

Sustainability of a vision

Sustainability was foremost on the teachers’ minds. Broad stakeholder involvement was seen as indispensable for a change project to continue.

“I think we did a good job of doing that, but it’s been a painful process and a long process, and I guess by painful -- I mean the time it’s taken, because there are people chomping at the bit to get going, and yet if you don’t take the time to create a culture and have the conversations, and you just jump in, it doesn’t sustain, it doesn’t sustain. We’ve done lots of changes in education, and they would fall back, and then we’d be jumping on bandwagons” (Teacher S).

Conversations on goals, vision and mission really never end. Those who are new to the district need to be supported in their process of taking ownership of the vision and mission statement. Even if there is a broad base of stakeholders, there still is work to be done to raise awareness and to help new staff become familiar with it. Teachers mentioned that the process does not end with having a vision and mission statement on paper. It needs revisiting, periodic reflection, and familiarization for new staff, students and other stakeholders.
Creating Strategies and Concrete Changes

When talking about designing concrete changes, projects and innovations, teachers tended to offer comments about idea generation, making ideas concrete, and follow through.

Generating ideas

In the experience of the teachers, the design process started with generating ideas. Needs or individual interests could prompt a search for ideas. School staff might become aware of programs and practices and want to incorporate them.

Conversations tended to start with brainstorming. Stakeholders typically brought up ideas and evaluated their feasibility. Talking with each other about ideas was seen as helpful, as a teacher’s remark illustrates:

“I really like my colleague because she is the same age, she is extrovert, but she is more mature, you know sometimes I can have a crazy idea, like the _ idea, and she, every time, can bring it down to the earth, and I think that’s great, to have these opposites to talk with somebody, if you want to create something with them” (Teacher N).

Responding to other people’s ideas without stifling the idea-generating process was perceived as somewhat difficult:

“… we were just even designing our beliefs and our mission statement and vision, we did have people who would just plop out ideas and so sometimes you would have to say that you disagreed, which is good, but kind of a hard thing to do sometimes because you’re kind of bashing someone else’s good idea” (Teacher S).

Teachers perceived it as helpful when ideas were voiced as suggestions instead of commands and when people just put their ideas out there and let them be shaped. It was
admitted that it requires a certain degree of detachment, of being able to let go and allow
one’s creative thoughts to be changed.

This kind of joint creative thinking is possible when the teachers do not work in
isolation, which was quite different from teachers’ previous experiences:

“I think you can do it in a Czech school as well, but it’s harder, and nobody would
consult it with you, like you don’t have a colleague for your classroom. You are
by yourself in your classroom” (Teacher N).

Who participated in any given idea generation process depended on the nature of
the issue. Commonly, those who would be affected by the implementation of an idea
would participate. If necessary, support from a larger stakeholder group, principals, or
others that had to be brought into the loop was sought, as in this example from the

*Gymnasium*:

“The idea with the school radio, that came from the students, and the students
presented it to the school conference. We thought about it and decided … and a
teacher agreed to serve as a resource. That teacher called the students together
and asked what is needed. And they came with a list: we need a microphone, an
amplifier, get funding …” (Teacher D)

If school staff became aware of programs or good practices developed outside the
school environment, they typically brought them to the attention of those who needed to
be involved in the decision-making, and if everybody agreed that it would be beneficial,
the program or practice was adapted to the local circumstances:

“It is usually common, already since years, that projects – sometimes a colleague
had heard of something, sometimes the principal gets something on his desk, in
the mail… Then somebody looks it over, presents it to the steering committee, we
discuss it: what do we think about it? What do we get out of it? Could we
benefit from it? That was the case with the taskforce *Saving Energy* and the
environmental taskforce” (Teacher A).
Whether an idea was locally generated or inspired by a practice some place else, the design conversation revolved around shaping the various ideas to make them suitable for the local environment.

Making ideas concrete

Once the ideas are generated, shaped, and the feasibility is taken into consideration, they need to be brought to fruition. While one could argue that this is where design conversation ends and implementation begins, the results are still intricately linked to the conversation and spell the difference between design conversation and mere conversation:

“Yes, actual classroom practice, and that is huge. It has to happen, … and I think one interesting thing to do is to take a series of different classroom settings and have people use the vision/mission and beliefs and analyze. If you want to know if we all have this common understanding of vision/mission and beliefs, get some classroom snapshots, videos of classrooms, and give us a checklist and say where do you see your vision, mission and beliefs being acted upon in this classroom and where are areas you don’t see it happening? What would you do differently to make that happen? Then that’s the acid test -- Can you see it? We are talking about true vision, so we have to see it” (Teacher Q).

It could be very frustrating and stifle any further attempts to converse about and design changes if nothing tangible results:

“We have in-service training, and it works like that. We work in groups etc., and in the end there is a discussion. But I am missing the results. Ok, that was lovely, the two days were great, it was very interesting, but what now - what is the school doing with all our nice posters and ideas? And that is what I am missing” (Teacher K).
Finding the moment where more conversation would be counterproductive and where implementation is needed seems to be difficult to determine. Some participants might be ready to implement, while others are still trying to understand the issues better:

“For me, my biggest thing, I have to maintain a sense of patience because again I have got all the background information, and there are things I know will work and we are not ready hear and so I don’t feel… I brought things up and they have been discussed and thought about, and it’s like we are not ready for this yet and for me that is a frustration, because I know they’ll work and I know there are things we can do to help to facilitate the conversations and the things we want to have happen. And my level of patience - I have to maintain a sense of it’s ok to not really go fast about things. That being said, I personally feel we are right at the edge of a large mountain that we are about to ski down, we have waxed the blades to use a metaphor, we got everything said, we know pretty much where the bottom of the mountain is, but we don’t know what is going in between, where to collect a breath time. Before you start anything, you have this (takes a deep breath) to go. That’s kind of where we are. Everything we do from this point on will impact how we do business. That’s taking the right steps and making sure people understand that this is that we are still committed to. These words that we have all said: we believe all these things, we have to act based on those beliefs, and we have to analyze our own practices based on those beliefs and what we understand the impact to be of what we are about to do based on those beliefs and what we understand about how kids learn best” (Teacher Q).

The pacing can go in two directions. The teacher cited above was of the opinion that the conversations are excessively prolonged, and he was eager for implementation to begin. Another teacher observed the need for thinking through changes a bit more carefully and making sure that they are really needed and that participants have the time to internalize and gain ownership of changes:

“The students and the parents tend to like to try things out. I rather say, let us complete a few things we have done up to now, improve them if we don’t like them the way they are, instead of trying too much with a plethora of good ideas… . I always say, the process is improving if it has a certain longevity and stability. My feeling is sometimes, constantly trying new things – this process is hard to internalize for the teacher and at times also for the parents. For example, … If I have a parent who has only one child, I tend to welcome the many new things. But then, when I have their second and third child and they ask for things that do not exist anymore … is that necessary? Can’t we just finish one thing? That
gives me sometimes a bit of a stomachache. Sometimes I see these changes, quite
plainly, as action for action’s sake. … I mean, I do abide by the concept of the
school, but sometimes I am of the opinion that too many new things are not
always right, because the learning it all is also difficult for the teacher” (Teacher
E).

Teachers also voice some frustrations about the limits of designing something by
themselves and wanting to make changes but being stifled by rules and regulations. In
the case of the Gymnasium, teachers were anticipating the pilot project

Eigenverantwortliche Schule [self-responsible/autonomous school], in which the school
is poised to participate. The project is designed to give schools more autonomy to decide
their own affairs and design any changes they wish to implement.

Teachers, in particular at the Gymnasium, observed an ebbing and rising in the
intensity of design work in groups. There seems to be a cycle, a time when many
changes are developed and implemented, followed by a period of settling in and
consolidation, where the changes take root.

Creating consensus

Creating consensus is the last step before implementation. All the processes
described so far lead ideally to creation of some kind of consensus, which can then be
implemented. The previous themes could have been subsumed under creating consensus
and some of the themes touched on here have previously been discussed in more detail.
Discussing creating consensus as a separate theme, serves, rather, to distinguish the
character of this step in design conversation from parliamentary voting processes.
Searching for consensus in abstract and concrete design tasks

The Research participants did not describe the reaching of consensus as a distinct event, such as a vote in a parliamentary process would be, but rather as a process that leads to a conclusion. Research participants shared observations about accepting diverse opinions and majority viewpoints, faction or interest group building, freedom to voice opinions, ideas, and recommendations, and the need for voting on issues.

Creating consensus was mentioned in connection with creating both shared visions and concrete strategies. According to the observations of several teachers, there can be a qualitative difference in the process of creating concrete strategies versus creating shared visions. A shared vision, as previously described, does not have an immediate effect on the actions of stakeholders. It is more remote, whereas creating concrete strategies has immediate consequences, and therefore the consensus seeking process can easily become contentious. A teacher found that discussing with her students where to go for a class excursion tends to be more difficult than talking about a vision and mission statement, because, as she expressed it, in the case of the class excursion, it is “now or never” (“da geht’s ja um die Wurst”). At the U.S. School District, which is transitioning from creating the vision and mission statement to designing concrete changes, teachers repeatedly voiced concerns that the latter process will be much more difficult. One teacher at the Gymnasium compared her experience in a previous school to trench warfare, a situation she luckily does not find at the school where she works currently, but she knows well that it can exist.
Pluralistic views

Accepting diverse opinions and dealing with opposition was seen as a routine aspect of jointly designing something new:

“I have to be able to cope with somebody saying – I’m simplifying – “that with our vision and mission statement, that is complete nonsense, what do we gain from that? We waste a day and there are no results”. OK, if that is somebody’s opinion, then you let it be and think that in time one can convince someone of the opposite” (Teacher A).

Teachers were quite aware that achieving complete consensus is not always possible. They generally viewed this as acceptable and referred to the nature of democracy, where pluralistic views and ways of doing things should be able to exist. Sometimes one would like to see consensus but it is not achieved, and one needs to learn to live with that. Teachers were also realistic enough to take into account that not everybody will work at the core of a project or innovation. People will pick and choose the degree to which they get involved, and that, too, was seen as acceptable, with the understanding that enough have to support an effort to make it sustainable:

“I don’t think we ever badgered someone for so long until he too agreed to a project. We also voted down a project, even though more than 50% of the colleagues favored it. But if more than 40% were against it, and then would not apply effort to it, and then it would not make much sense to pursue it” (Teacher H).

Teachers coached their students in understanding that it is acceptable to have different opinions. In the U.S. School District, this occurred when the students worked on defining their views about the school’s mission and vision:

“Their [the students’] discussions would get somewhat heated once in a while. One child might not agree or what might be very important to one child wasn’t that important to another. Then we would talk about that it is O.K. that we all feel differently about those things. Cause we did that in
our leadership team as adults. We would tell them ‘Guys, it is O.K.’ We
would say that same kinds of conversations, at a different level of course,
occur with us, adults” (Teacher R).

Pluralistic views needed to be integrated when the Gymnasium designed its vision
and mission statement. As mentioned earlier, there was some discussion, mainly
amongst teachers, as to whether or not it was appropriate to include the term Christian
values\(^{19}\), or if it would be preferable to talk about humanistic values as an educational
goal. It was decided to include both Christian values and humanistic values in the vision
and mission statement. Research participants differed in their views about whether or not
the issue was ever successfully resolved.

Criticism

As long as the diversity of opinions relates to the issues and is used to shed light
on different aspects of a task at hand, teachers seem to feel at ease with the
diversity, as the above citations show. There is, though, the possibility that
participants will turn the voicing of diverse opinions and recommendations into
personality conflicts, and then roadblocks are created:

“Well, anytime you get a group of people together, there are going to be
different kinds of personal conflicts, disagreeability, and it is just that. …I
will say, there has been one person that I have not had a disagreement
with, but whenever I made a recommendation, I felt like what I said or
recommended was not looked on favorably or there was always a reason
why it couldn’t be done. …And because she holds a particular position,
she is still on the committee, and yet she treats everyone kind of that way,

\(^{19}\) Religion is taught in schools in Germany. Students have the choice to take courses in Catholicism,
Lutheran Faith, or ethics. “Educating towards Christian values” is still included in some state standards
(Fishman, Sterling, 1993).
and as I watched this person do business, I realized that is how that person works, or does whatever it is that needs to be done, or finds her reason not to do it” (Teacher Q).

Faction building

On the way to reaching a consensus or design agreeable to all, there exists the distinct possibility that interest groups and factions will emerge, or that people will be very adamant about their beliefs. Some teachers admitted that they would get very passionate about their beliefs and wanted to push them through. They referred to themselves as being stubborn, wanting to win:

“Maybe we are not so detached from our own idea. I mean, often times, -- and I, because we are from such different backgrounds, what I am used to and what she is used to can be different. At the beginning, we might have some head to head – I say, I know, I tried this and this works – she says, I know, I tried this and this does not work. Being attached to that idea of saying I do not want to let go of this. But I found that you cannot go onward after a while” (Teacher L).

Research participants differentiated between interest group formation and the building of factions. They generally saw it as a normal part of the process that interest groups are formed and that some groups engage more in the development and implementation of one idea, and others in that of another. Some Gymnasium teachers observed that in their case, this is issue-related, and that at a personal, friendship level there is no cliquishness between different faculty groups.

In the U.S. School District, teachers saw the potential for some faction building around the issue of working with or without a facilitator. They mentioned that some appreciated the support of a facilitator, while others felt that preconceived ideas would limit their designs and that each individual school in
the district should come up with its own designs without being steered in a certain direction. If, in these situations, the opinions become hardened and the give and take, the communal shaping of a thought, idea, or opinion is not taking place, then two distinct factions can emerge.

Openness

In the view of the research participants, the possibility to voice opinions should be a given. They did observe that there are different styles of going about voicing those thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Some teachers recalled moments when things got heated, as here at the Gymnasium:

“At one point, the colleagues get noisy and refuse to complete certain tasks. It is not the case that you remain seated patiently until the very end. This is an attitude that emerged over the past years – if something is being bungled somewhere, you say it clearly. One still remains decent, of course” (Teacher H).

To prevent the open stating of opinions from becoming hurtful, a teacher at the U.S. School District recalls their strategy:

“We have to make sure that it all comes back to the table. We know that there have been people who didn’t like certain things and didn’t like something someone said. We talk about it, and it moves on from there” (Teacher R).

At the International School, another layer is added to the style of voicing opinions. Teachers come from different cultures and bring their style of being open into the communication pattern:

“I think culture influences how much we are willing to be open. Some cultures are more critical than others. Some are almost abasing, they want to be certain to be liked. Some are action oriented, stand out and stand up
to their rights. There can be some misunderstanding, then, with those kind of cultural differences” (Teacher O).

These kinds of differences in open communication would have an impact on shaping the eventual conclusion. Was everything said that needed to be said? Was everything understood in the way that it had to be understood?

Voting

At all schools, teachers stated that in most cases, they talked and talked until it was felt that a consensus was achieved. Hardly ever was there any voting. A teacher describes the consensus-creating process when designing the mission and vision statement at the U.S. School District:

“No, we really have not taken a vote. It’s just, for example, when we were making our statements, we would break up in committees and wrote statements and brought them all together. We looked at the pieces that were alike and the pieces that were different and said ‘alright, do we need to include these”? And then we would all tear it apart and go back, and bring it back together, and we’d put up a statement, and then we might start tearing it apart again, and we just kept that process going, and there wasn’t any voting, but you had an opportunity to say, ‘You know what, I can’t live with that, that’s got to go’” (Teacher S).

Some teachers said that they sometimes agreed for the sake of the community, even if they were not yet completely convinced of the outcome, as this comment illustrates:

“We worked it and worked it and worked it, and there have probably been, there could be times when someone would be sitting there thinking, O.K. it’s not exactly what I want, but I live with it, you know, and I think that it probably consensus” (Teacher S).
Coming to conclusions is very much linked to several themes elaborated on under attitudes such as listening carefully and being open. It means the culmination of a design process, and the conclusion reflects the quality of engagement on all the previous processes and the attitudes shown.

**Summary**

Design conversation is essentially a process. The teachers’ experiences helped to tease out various aspects of this process. The aspects are so interrelated that some overlap can be observed. To establish highly distinct categories and separate them would run counter to the underlying theory of systems thinking and chop up the fluidity of design conversation. Nonetheless, describing the various aspects of the process helps to acquire a comprehensive picture of design conversation.

Research participants spoke about shedding old ways of thinking, changing their mindset, and being open for designing new educational entities in uncharted territory. Typically, they began with inquiry and information-gathering on the issues to be addressed. This was the case when the goal was to create a shared vision and also when designing concrete changes. Once the information and background knowledge were acquired, ideas were generated. Brainstorming was a common approach. The various suggestions were then analyzed, feasibility contemplated, and consensus about adaptation and implementation sought. Along the way, involvement and equitable participation of stakeholders had to be
assured. Teachers spoke about the long conversations, the potential for conflict, and the reflection on values when conflicts arose. They mentioned the breaking down of hierarchical patterns and the strategies developed to ensure equitable participation.

The design processes mentioned hint at aspects of the design process described by Banathy (1993) of diagnosis of an issue, formulation of core ideas, values, and an image of the future system that will guide the design, looking at alternatives, and implementation and evaluation. (See earlier citation, p. 28.) Teachers emphasized the group endeavor and joint decision-making and valued the opportunity to engage in the process, despite the intense work necessary.

Observation of Meetings

Along with the interviews, a meeting was observed at each school. Selecting a meeting for observation was constrained by the fact that the locations of the sites were quite dispersed, and return visits were not possible because of the time and expenses involved. Therefore, the meeting observed had to be one that happened to take place during the timeframe of the visit scheduled for interviews. At the Gymnasium, a meeting of the steering committee was observed, at the International School a faculty meeting, and at the U.S. School District a leadership team meeting.

One meeting is only a snapshot and can give a researcher, at best, a glimpse of the communication conventions amongst participants. The purpose of
the observation was for the researcher to have a small direct experience of the life
world of the teachers when they interact in purposeful conversation. The meetings
were not pure examples of design conversation, but rather a mixture of discussing
business, problems and plans.

Two of the meetings were recorded, and one, at the International School,
was observed and notes were taken mainly chronicling the turn-taking, length, and
distribution of contributions amongst participants\(^{20}\). The recordings were
subsequently transcribed and are analyzed here in terms of turn-taking, length and
distribution of participant comments. The character of two of the meetings is
described here based on the audio recordings, and, for one, based on written
observation notes.

At all sites, the facilitator was someone with an administrative role. All meetings
were characterized by unobtrusive facilitation. A facilitator kept track of the agenda and
the flow of contributions, but not in a highly directive manner. Usually participants just
spoke up when they had a contribution to give, without raising hands and being called
upon. No voting was observed. When participants felt they had concluded a point, they
moved on to the next one.

The count of contributions given below is a very close approximation. Some
changes of speakers were hard to determine from the recording, because several people
spoke at the same time or the succession was very rapid and voices hard to distinguish.

\(^{20}\) The meeting at the International School was an end of the school year faculty meeting, and problems
with students and grade issues had to be discussed, amongst other items. Because of the confidential nature
of the issues, the researcher decided not to ask for permission to record.
Table 3: Contributions at meetings (all numbers are approximate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gymnasium</th>
<th>International School</th>
<th>U.S. School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of meeting</td>
<td>60 min</td>
<td>90 min</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>7 (faculty &amp; adm)</td>
<td>10 (faculty &amp; adm)</td>
<td>15 (fac., adm., parents &amp; facilitator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people contributing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people giving no contributions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of contributions</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of contributions in seconds</td>
<td>21s</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>27s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest contribution</td>
<td>180s</td>
<td>No longer than 150s</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortest contribution</td>
<td>1s</td>
<td>Under 30 s</td>
<td>2s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most contributions by one person</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven persons, all teachers, with one of them also being the principal, participated in the meeting at the Gymnasium, which took place at the end of the school day. They were seated around an oval table in the school’s office. The meeting lasted one hour. During that time, approximately 150 contributions were given, with the longest being three minutes long and the shortest just a second or two. The average length for contributions was twenty-one seconds. Overall, the conversation was characterized by rapid turn taking with short contributions. The principal spoke most often, with approximately forty contributions, and also gave the single longest contribution. Most of the time, he shared information and clarified issues. Since he was also the facilitator, he gave brief summarizing remarks to conclude a point and introduce the next point. Whoever had the background knowledge about an issue turned out to be the dominant contributor while it was being discussed. All voiced opinions and ideas. Some contributed more, others less, but no one person dominated the conversation excessively, except that the majority of the participants were men, and they gave more contributions per person than the women. On a few occasions, several participants spoke at the same
time or interrupted each other. Every now and then, side remarks and jokes evoked laughs. At one point, a digression into word games had everybody laughing a lot. Aside from the few lighthearted moments, the conversation was focused, and each issue was brought to a conclusion with a plan for further action. There was no formal vote. When it was felt that an agenda item was consulted on sufficiently and nobody had any more comments or objections, the facilitator summarized the results and introduced the next point.

At the International School, nine teachers and the academic leader met at the end of the regular school day. The seating arrangement was in a circle, in the faculty lounge. The meeting lasted for approximately ninety minutes. It was the last faculty meeting of the school year, and teachers focused on academic concerns related to student work. Since the interview was not recorded, only approximate length of contributions could be established: “short” for under 30 seconds, “medium” for 30 to 90 seconds and “long” for 90 to 150 seconds. No comments were longer than 150 seconds. A total of 156 comments were counted, 101 characterized as short, forty-three as medium-long and eight as long. Comments, questions etc. were usually brief and to the point. The academic leader served occasionally as moderator, but the conversation flowed without much moderation. During the meeting, a lot of information exchange took place. Those teachers who had the most information on an issue dominated while the issue was discussed. All participants gave contributions at some point, but one gave as few as two, while the facilitator gave 34. Participation of male and female teachers was fairly even. Again, no votes were taken. When one issue had been consulted on sufficiently, and no
more contributions were given, the group moved on to the next item. Participants took turns without much moderation or being called upon to speak.

The meeting at the U.S. School District took place in the evening in the district’s office. There were fifteen participants. Due to a sudden change of location, the seating arrangement was in rows with the facilitator standing in front of the group. It was explained to this researcher, though, that typically the chairs are arranged in a circle.

The meeting was approximately forty-five minutes long. Approximately 96 contributions were given, with an average length of twenty-seven seconds. The longest was over six minutes, and the shortest just one second. This longest contribution was an opening remark by the superintendent, who also facilitated the meeting. Nine different voices could be distinguished on the recording, which means that six persons did not contribute. Amongst the nine who participated vocally, the contributions were fairly evenly distributed. In contrast to the Gymnasium, the majority here were women, and they dominated the conversation. While the opening remark by the principal at the Gymnasium largely conveyed information, the one here by the superintendent was more a reflection and voicing of observations and opinions. Some light moments such as sharing of funny stories occurred, too.

Overall, the conversation at the U.S. School District was less businesslike than at the Gymnasium or the International School. Observations and opinions were offered on the formation of design teams in the buildings. At the Gymnasium, by nature of the meeting, participants had to take care of business such as budgeting, scheduling for the next school year, preparing for an upcoming visit of a county administrator that same afternoon, etc. They did shift into a design-type conversation at one point, when they
explored the possibility of multi-grade projects. Thus, at the Gymnasium, one point after the other was checked off within a tight timeframe. The meeting at U.S. School District was purely concerned with the formation of design teams for the individual buildings, analyzing possible processes and resources and reflecting on experiences. The participants did not have to come to a conclusion to be implemented right away, while at the Gymnasium some pressing issues had to be taken care of.

The meetings had different purposes. But it is noteworthy that, despite two being more businesslike and the other more reflective, a similar low-key facilitation and smooth flow of contributions unfolded. At all meetings, an occasional short back and forth between two participants happened, and participation varied from person to person, but no excessive dominance of a single person could be observed. In the U.S. School District some people did not contribute at all. After the meetings, the observer could still see some individual conversations continue. Those present seemed to be using the occasion to take care of some housekeeping tasks.

At all meetings, no direct confrontation could be observed. Opinions varied on issues, and ideas were batted around, but the tone was generally relaxed, which, as mentioned, was supported by occasional humor.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the teachers’ experiences were collected in a narrative in order to shed light on the key research question: *how do participants in design conversation describe their experience?*
Background information on each school established the context. It was pointed out that the comparison of the schools is limited. The education system of each country could influence design conversation processes. Are teachers used to local initiative or not? Did they have experience in participatory decision-making before working on the initiatives described here? Those could be factors, but the organizational climate at each school is not necessarily typical for all schools in the country. In fact, because the selected sites are spearheading innovations, they might be rather atypical for schools in their regions. Still, some of the teachers’ experiences described here relate directly to the education system and its history in their region; others could be interchangeable.

The themes that were established show that design conversation is based on values, first and foremost commitment to service, trust and dignity in interactions. Without such values, the ensuing processes of suspending mindsets and creating shared visions or concrete actions would be hampered. Teachers mentioned repeatedly that change processes are risky, and that one needs to be able to trust and feel the support of stakeholders.

The meetings observed and described above allowed the researcher to briefly witness the experiences of the teachers. The meetings were not purely dedicated to design. They did, though, show some of the processes the teachers had mentioned.

The experiences gathered here are further analyzed in the next chapter, during the discussion of the sub-questions.
Chapter 5

Analysis

Introduction

The key research question, how do participants in design conversation describe their experience?, was explored at length in chapter 4, Results. Based on an analysis of the teachers’ experiences and the meetings, observations are made here. This analysis refers to the sub-questions formulated initially. (See chapter 1, Introduction, p.9.) In this chapter, I will ask the sub-questions in the sequence they were initially posed. I will first discuss the teachers’ perceptions and experiences with stakeholder involvement, then compare the teachers’ perceptions to the observations made during the meetings. I will ask which variations in the experiences with design conversation could possibly reflect differences in societal and cultural settings and, in conclusion, I will reflect on the theoretical construct of design conversation and relate it to the experiences. After analyzing the results, I will discuss the limitations of the research, give suggestions for further research, and offer thoughts on the use of design conversation.

The Sub-questions

Sub-question 1: How do teachers experience and perceive the involvement of various stakeholders in the design conversation process?

Typically, teachers thought of three key stakeholder groups: parents, students, and administrative personnel. Teachers generally welcomed the involvement of stakeholders.
They mentioned the positive impact when parents get involved, not only to garner advantages for their own child, but also for the entire student body.

Research participants observed a learning process amongst parents in terms of getting used to working together in small groups, being comfortable giving contributions, and understanding the issues. The level of participation and the skill at formulating ideas and opinions varied. Because the stakeholder group is continuously changing, those who are new to the collaborative processes needed to become familiar and comfortable with it. They also always needed to be brought up to speed on the vision of the school or school district and understand the basic educational philosophy.

Focus on issues was emphasized. When stakeholders use involvement in the schools just to “polish their own image,” it can seriously detract from the work. As long as the focus is on what is best for the children, personality differences and faction building can be avoided, according to some teachers.

The need to coach and educate stakeholders who are not in schools on a daily basis, be they parents or policy makers in departments of education, was mentioned. People who do not experience the daily reality of schools may not have the understanding about what is doable, and might voice unrealistic wishes or tell teachers what to do in a very prescriptive manner. A teacher at the Gymnasium opined that the expertise of teachers should be respected, which is currently not always a given because of the low status of teachers-- a situation that is not confined to Germany, in this researcher’s experience.

Direct student involvement in design and decision-making about major school issues was happening on a routine basis only at the Gymnasium. At the International
School, the students tended to co-determine extra curricular activities. Those who live on campus participate in consultation about dormitory life, an aspect about which teachers could not share in-depth experiences. The U.S. School District, so far, has involved students in focus groups about the vision and mission statement, but not in actual design and decision-making.

Teachers at the Gymnasium mentioned that student involvement has become something normal and expected. Students have learned over the years to voice their ideas, initiatives and concerns through the designated channels. Teachers shared experiences about how they practice democratic processes in their classes when decisions are made on plans, be they excursions, projects, or similar events. Since this particular school begins with fifth grade, students as young as eleven years old learn to voice their thoughts, listen to others, and bring consultation on an issue to a conclusion. Teachers observed that participation by students was more intense when they could perceive immediate outcomes that would affect them directly than when they consulted on abstract concepts such as the vision and mission statement.

At all sites, involvement of the community at large in conversations was still very much in the beginning stages. Collaboration usually entailed joint planning of celebrations and special events. Only the U.S. School District had community groups involved in the design of the mission and vision statement, which was mentioned by teachers as positive, but their experiences revolved more around parent and student involvement. The International School drew occasionally on expertise from amongst the international Bahá’í community. One teacher recalled such an expert visit to be a great help in designing the learning environment of the kindergarten/elementary school.
Regarding collaboration with school or district-based administrative personnel, teachers commented positively about the flattening of the hierarchy. In the U.S. School District, they mentioned a transition to collaborative group decision-making, beginning with a new superintendent approximately five years ago. These changes set the stage for the systemic change project and the resulting conversations that took place. Research participants observed that teachers had to learn to trust that their superiors were truly giving up power and were genuinely interested in collaboration. Deeply ingrained adversarial ways of dealing with each other were hard to put aside and still crop up occasionally when, for example, new contracts are drawn up and collective bargaining takes place.

Site-based administrative personnel at the Gymnasium and the International School are fewer in number than at the U.S. School District. Because the Gymnasium principal is also still a teacher, he is involved with the teachers day in and day out in this dual role and is perceived more as a colleague than a superior, which is reflected in the conversations. Similarly, at the International School, school-based administrative personnel and the academic and the administrative leaders were also teaching, which led to a peer relationship, rather than a hierarchical one. The International School does have a management team, which currently does not have teachers on it. Here several teachers expressed the need for more communication.

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21 The principal is much less involved in the evaluation and hiring of teachers than U.S. principals. Teachers are allocated to schools by state-level administrative entities. Therefore, one can assume that teachers generally feel freer to speak their minds to the principal than U.S. teachers would.
Teachers welcomed stakeholder involvement in conversations. They pointed out, though, some of the possible pitfalls mentioned above, such as stakeholders from outside the immediate school environment not understanding the issues very well, possibly making unrealistic demands, or seeking to profile themselves. They brought up the added workload, which has to be taken into consideration, because overburdening of participants would adversely affect conversations. They mentioned that trust has to be established first because, traditionally, relationships had been quite adversarial.

Teachers mentioned that those parents who care are the ones who get involved. They tend to be the ones who are used to collaboration and have a certain skill and experience level in connection with such involvement. Getting a broad base involved was still seen as a struggle in the U.S. School District, and was limited at the International School because it is a boarding school and parents live in dispersed locations. Soon after the political changes, the Gymnasium implemented a system for student and parent representation with design and decision-making powers. It became routine and teachers were used to it.

The site selection process likely prejudiced this positive outcome somewhat. Schools were chosen that held the promise of having design-conversation-like processes in place, with some success. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers welcomed involvement and saw it as a means for making changes sustainable.
Sub-question 2: How do observations of design conversation compare to participant perception?

The three observed meetings are too small a snapshot to allow a comprehensive comparison of all the many experiences the teachers talked about, especially since parents were present only at the meeting in the U.S. School District, and no students or other stakeholders from outside the school participated. Nonetheless, the flow of the observed consultation can be compared to some of the experiences the teachers described.

Teachers mentioned that they felt listened to and able to speak their minds. They usually talked about issues until some common understanding and consensus was achieved, and typically did not have formal votes. These processes could be observed. Participants could give contributions. They were not cut off. By and large, people referred to what was said, listened, and did not stray from the topic. While the degree of participation varied from individual to individual, nobody tried to hijack the conversation. Thus the values mentioned by research participants relating to dignity in interactions, including voicing thoughts, deep listening, and openness were visible. Commitment to service could best be seen in the fact that few were absent and that participation in the conversation was active, even though some seemed to be listening more than speaking. Participants in the meetings had been working together for quite a while, so there were no obvious differences in language. No obvious personality conflicts could be observed. The presence of an observer, though, would, likely contributed to people not demonstrating openly any lingering conflicts.
The processes teachers referred to included suspending mindsets, inquiry and information gathering, creating a shared vision, involving stakeholders, creating strategies and concrete changes, generating ideas, making ideas concrete, involvement, equity in participation, and creating consensus. In the short meetings, the processes that could be observed were inquiry and information gathering, generating ideas, making ideas concrete, and creating consensus. During each meeting, the typical flow of consultation began with someone giving information on the issue to be consulted on, then people voiced their opinions and ideas, at times adding information as needed. Once it was felt that consensus was achieved, the next issue was brought up.

The larger processes, such as suspending mindsets, were difficult to see in such brief meetings. Also, since the observation was limited to meetings that were scheduled to take place during the time of the visits, long-term processes such as suspending mindsets would be nearly impossible to observe. Some so-called “thinking outside the box” could be an indicator, and people certainly offered ideas, but within the framework of incremental changes in their respective educational institutions, not in the sense of radical changes and grand new schemes.

Equity in participation was facilitated by the relatively small group sizes. (See conversation analysis.) No special group work strategies were used, and the moderator could just let the consultation flow. Generally, people seemed to speak up when they had something to say.

Trust among participants was probably best illustrated by occasional light-hearted remarks, jokes and laughter, and also by people bringing up their concerns openly.
The meetings were not a pure illustration of design conversation, since business had to be taken care of, but they offered glimpses of design conversation during consultation on agenda items that required more creative thinking, and the selected values and processes mentioned earlier could be observed.

Sub-question 3: Which variations in design conversation processes and perceptions could reflect variations in the societal and cultural setting of the school?

Because the schools are located in different countries, the degree to which personnel can engage in autonomous design and decision-making is necessarily circumscribed by the policies and practices in their respective locations.

The US has a tradition of local control and stakeholder and community involvement through elected school board members, parent teacher associations and volunteer involvement. Here, the local control is currently eroding due to federal mandates and stringent standardized testing requirements. If this process continues, it could adversely affect the possibility of engaging in genuine design conversation. The teachers in the U.S. School District did not comment on these larger policies. Their comments, rather, indicated that they went about designing changes based on their vision and on local needs and circumstances.

In Germany, the education system was traditionally centrally controlled. Only now is local autonomy slowly being explored. The Gymnasium, as mentioned, is about to get involved in a pilot project, Eigenverantwortliche Schule (autonomous school), and teachers remarked that that involvement will likely lift some constraints and allow them to have a freer range for design and decision-making, similar to the days right after the
political changes when no school regulations existed, and their only limit was lack of resources. But despite the more centralized system, the teachers at the *Gymnasium* designed a variety of innovations and took the basic attitude that, as long as we are acting according to school law, we can develop what we want and deem necessary and useful.

The International School, as a private institution, is not embedded in the educational traditions of a specific country, but because it needs to be accredited in the Czech Republic, it has to abide by the regulations of that country. Faculty can engage in design within that framework. Teachers referred to those limitations in terms of what they can design, but not how they go about it. They said that because the faculty and administration are so diverse, the conversations revolved around establishing common meaning about educational practices, academic standards and behaviors expected of students.

How people communicate, issues of dominance, equity, voicing opinions, and listening were found hard to categorize by cultural background. All teachers spoke of a learning process that was strikingly similar at the various sites. Those teachers who grew up and began their careers in a political system characterized by lack of free speech and top-down planning learned to practice design in teamwork, just like the ones who grew up and worked in a historically democratic society. In fact, teachers in the U.S. School District commented more frequently about the flattening of hierarchies, developing trusting relationships, and getting used to collaboration amongst teachers and other stakeholders than did teachers at the *Gymnasium*.

Teachers at the *Gymnasium* described how conversations about school change sprang up as soon as they became possible after the political change in 1989-90 and the
school set about creating forums for involving teams of teachers and other stakeholders in design processes. By now, that is over fifteen years ago, and people got used to it. They now see conversations about school issues and ideas about changes as a normal part of doing things. Teachers did, though, point out that this particular Gymnasium is somewhat of an oasis, and that participatory practices can vary from school to school.

Teachers at the U.S. School District saw a flattening of hierarchies in their district approximately five years ago, a much shorter timeframe. They reported still having to get used to it and to learn to trust that their superiors really mean collaboration instead of following mandates. To converse with superiors, superintendents or principals about school change, was initially perceived as scary, which might have been caused by traditionally adverse relationships between teachers and administrators in U.S. schools.

The International School, as mentioned, has consultation as a modus operandi written in its mission and vision statement. In this case, the practice is not tied to conventions of a specific cultural group, but rather to a way of designing community life within the Bahá’í community. In the Bahá’í community, elected forums at local, national and international levels and the community at large engage in consultation to design and decide on community activities (Kolstoe, 2004). The founders of the International School, having grown up in that environment, wanted to make it the basis of the school’s way of conducting business and designing school life. Teachers who work there typically come to the school with knowledge of this practice. From their remarks, it is obvious that they are conscious of still having to learn to live up to the ideal of consultation, but the common goal exists.
One distinct difference between the Gymnasium and the U.S. School District can be seen in the way teachers described the building of trust. In the U.S. School District, special trust-building activities were relied upon and personal stories were told intentionally, in order to get to know each other better and speed up the building of trust. At the Gymnasium, long-term relationships, knowing others well, having tackled difficulties together and thus learning to trust each other were all emphasized.

After rethinking the interviews and observations, it is the similarities, rather than the differences, at the level of human interactions that are striking. Some of the experiences the teachers related were almost the same at all sites.

An example is the sessions with parents and/or teachers working on the design of the mission and vision statement or, in the case of the International School, translating it into concrete strategies. These descriptions of the group work strategies were nearly identical. Practices such as those do cross national boundaries. The Gymnasium teachers mentioned that through their involvement with the INIS project, they learned about educational practices in other countries. The teachers at the International School drew on diverse practices from their countries of origin and some also from consultation processes within a very multi-cultural and highly diverse Faith community. The teachers in the U.S. School District did not mention any international exposure per se.

**Sub-question 4: How does the process of design conversation in the cases explored diverge from or support the theoretical construct of design conversation?**

The values and processes underlying design conversation were, by and large, echoed in the experiences of the teachers. These values and processes had not yet been
achieved in their ideal version, but rather with varying degrees of approximation. Divergence is not really a matter of checklists saying, “We practice this but not that characteristic of design conversation,” but rather a matter of degree that is hardly quantifiable.

At all sites, forums were in place where stakeholders jointly engaged in conversations, exploring issues, seeking consensus, and designing new practices and projects. The terminology teachers used varied from the one applied to design conversation. People used terms such as consultation, discussion, or simply talking; they weighed pros and cons and advantages and disadvantages. The experiences and observations, though, indicated that they moved away from dichotomies to a more complex looking at all sides of an issue. They moved away from following mandates to group design and decision-making, where all affected could be heard and speak.

Establishing the boundaries of design conversation was found to be quite challenging. When did participants engage in taking care of business, and when did they engage in design of systems that would facilitate changes toward the achievement of their vision and mission? It was fairly straightforward when the conversations focused on the vision and mission statement, but when the concrete strategies are discussed, it is nearly impossible to draw a clear line because very concrete, business-type issues have to be dealt with.

The values and processes are not unique to design conversation, as the review of literature highlighted. The defining difference is the goal, to create a new educational learning system:
“When we consider the use of design conversation in educational change, the purpose becomes that of creating a new educational learning system” (Jenlink & Carr, 1996, p. 34).

If one wants to benchmark whether or not design conversation is taking place in any given situation, the above-cited description of the purpose ought to be used as a marker. Thus the question needs to be, are the various educational institutions engaged in creating a new educational learning system? It will likely be impossible to give a “yes” or “no” answer to that question. The following discussion will try to highlight some markers at each site that would or would not indicate that such a goal is in the minds of the participants.

The U.S. School District was the only site where participants studied intentionally and purposefully, as a group, the literature on systemic change, the same that also provides the theoretical basis for design conversation. They set out to create a vision and mission statement deemed to be sufficiently distinct from previous practices to characterize the change project as systemic change. Systemic change would mean that all aspects of an educational system are changed and a new educational learning system created. But, how drastic the change needs to be to qualify as something new is a matter of perception.

Teachers at the Gymnasium spoke of incremental change, of not being able to “throw it all out at once.” Their involvement in the INIS project was described as quality development, not systemic change, but the school faculty is continuously engaged in innovations with the potential to alter school life considerably over the years.

Participants in the systemic change project of the U.S. School District acknowledged the gradualness of change. The facilitator of the project offered this
opinion on that issue: “Even if it’s gradual, as long as they have that ideal design of a
different paradigm in mind, I am happy” (Reigeluth, 2005).

The International School has certain ideals of educating the whole child, and of
character development along with academic excellence. In a conversation with this
researcher, the academic leader admitted that the pedagogy is basically shaped by the
individual teachers and their preferences, but said that efforts are made to reflect on the
original vision and mission statement and also engage in the creation of strategies that
would make the school more distinctive in its learning environment. There were some
indicators that the International School is entering a renewed phase of reflection on its
goals and mission. For example, the teachers referred to studying the mission statement
and talking about how to translate it into practice.

It would really be a matter of defining new or different paradigm to be able to say
whether a school is practicing design conversation for the sake of creating a new
educational learning system. As one teacher from the U.S. School District mentioned,
“you have to go into the classrooms and see if change really happened22.” At this time,
one can observe at all sites that some kind of ideal vision exists and that stakeholders use
the vision to create strategies and incremental changes. Whether or not the vision is
sufficiently new to qualify their conversations as design conversations is, as stated, a
matter of perception. The distinction is made in the literature between industrial-age
schools and schools for the information age (Reigeluth, 1994). What schools for the

22 In this writer’s opinion, true change has not really happened as long as classrooms exist in which age
cohorts of learners study the same thing at the same time. Therefore, the question: what is new; what
constitutes a different paradigm?
information age might look like is still in the beginning, formative stages. At what point one can say that a new educational learning system has been designed, which is truly different from the old, is hard to determine.

Based on the research, it can be said that values and processes characteristic of design conversation were found reflected in the teachers’ experiences. The intention of designing a new educational learning system was voiced openly by teachers in the U.S. School District, but the process is only now at a point that concrete changes are about to be designed. Therefore, it is impossible to say that the learning system is distinct enough to qualify as new and that, hence, the conversations that lead to its design were truly design conversation. This applies to the other sites as well. At the Gymnasium teachers spoke more of incremental changes and quality improvement. The International School uses consultation to design projects, plans, and innovations, but how distinctively new they are or will be is, again, a matter of perception and also a matter of time, as one sees the designs being implemented.

Summary

The sub-questions asked specifically about stakeholder involvement, observation of conversations compared to the teachers’ perceptions, variations based on the diverse background of the schools and convergence or divergence of theory and practice.

While teachers valued the involvement of stakeholders, they observed that the teachers’ expertise should be respected and saw the need for educating stakeholders who do not work in the schools on a daily basis.
The observed meetings allowed a brief, direct view into the conversations. Some of the values and processes that emerged from the teachers’ narratives could be seen. Processes of information gathering, offering different views, and reaching consensus happened during the meetings.

Teachers at all sites, no matter whether their previous work experience was in an autocratic or democratic country, had to learn design and decision making in teams. All talked about transition experiences from receiving mandates to generating ideas and initiatives with their colleagues. The historical circumstances and larger education system policies varied, but the human relationships, the way conversations flowed, seemed to be more influenced by individual characteristics rather than cultural differences. Some teachers at the international school mentioned people of one culture being more open in saying what they think than those of another, but this could not be observed in the meetings. Long-term ethnographies might be necessary to isolate such relationships.

The process of design conversation in practice approximated the theory. It is premature, though, to try to answer the larger question of whether or not completely new learning systems were designed at the sites visited, because of the incremental nature of the change.

Limitations of the Research

Design conversation, by definition, includes not only the actual communication happening amongst participants, but also, along with the communication, reference is
made in the literature to forums for design conversation to take place, to participatory
democracy, inclusion and other values. The field is quite broad, touching on
management and leadership issues, stakeholder involvement, and other not purely
communicative processes.

The research was conceptualized as exploratory, phenomenological research of
design conversation. As a result, the experiences recounted by the research participants
covered a broad field and do not focus on the conversation processes alone.

In addition, design conversation was explored in different cultural settings, which
added to the complexity. But, because of the limited and small sample, the study should
not be understood as a comparison of design conversation in different cultures. Based on
the comparison, one can at best conclude that people from diverse backgrounds, having
grown up and worked as teachers, whether under autocratic or democratic systems,
learned to engage in design conversation-like practices and experienced somewhat
comparable transitions.

The study does not attempt to build a theory. The goal is to explore a
phenomenon. As mentioned, design conversation was only recently conceived as a
theoretical construct. Many more experiences with the practice need to be gathered and
related to the construct to allow for theory building.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

For the purpose of exploring the phenomenon, an overview of experiences with
design conversation was achieved, limited by the small number of research participants
common for a phenomenological study. The accounts gathered here can lead to further research. The research presented brought up a wide spectrum of themes that merit further exploration in the context of educational systems design.

A longitudinal study of sessions defined by participants as design conversation could probe in depth the communication processes that unfold and the learning processes that take place when participants attempt to practice the various values and processes called for.

Studies that could help to delineate the boundaries of design conversation would be helpful. Again, a longitudinal study at one site could help shed light on that issue. Conversations can be analyzed as to content that leads towards the larger goal of educational systems design, including detailed strategies. These could be contrasted with conversations that get mired in business minutia and development of best practices could be based on the results.

The effect of design conversation on sustainability of change projects would certainly be of interest. Teachers mentioned frequently that in order to make change permanent, stakeholders needed to feel ownership and to be engaged. In view of a history of failed educational reforms, this issue is worth exploring.

The study sites were internationally dispersed, yet they were located in regions where the preparation of teachers and the financial and societal support of the educational system are fairly comparable. The cultures represented in the sample are largely of Northern European background, including the U.S. site, where the majority of teachers and students are of Northern European ancestry. This researcher has had some personal experiences with consultation while engaged in volunteer work in Latin America, but not
in a school context. There, people with no or very little schooling were participating. Exploring design conversation practices amongst culturally and educationally more diverse populations would certainly be of interest and could support many education quality improvement projects internationally.\(^\text{23}\)

The research conducted here barely touched on the influence local knowledge could have when brought into the design process. A few teachers mentioned that people outside the school context, including parents as well as policy makers, do not, at times, understand the school’s issues fully and may come up with unrealistic suggestions. In this researcher’s opinion, design conversation would be ideally suited to give voice to local knowledge and, in particular, the knowledge of teachers and students, groups typically underrepresented in the school change debate process.

**Thoughts on the Use of Design Conversation**

When searching for research on design conversation, the examples found stemmed mostly from community development projects. For example, during the 1990s, a major initiative called *Communication for Social Change (CFSC)*\(^\text{24}\) looked at social change through horizontal communication. It established key components of a model:

\[^{23}\text{An example is UNESCO’s EDUCATION FOR ALL Initiative - GOAL # 6: IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION. This goal calls for improvement in the quality of education in all its aspects, aiming for a situation where people can achieve excellence. Source: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php}^{24}\text{CFSC is spearheaded by the Rockefeller Foundation and John Hopkins University’s Center for Communication Programs}
− Sustainability of social change is more likely if individuals and communities most affected own the process and content of communication.
− Communication for social change should be empowering, horizontal (versus top-down), give a voice to the previous unheard members of the community, and be biased towards local content and ownership.
− Communities should be agents of their own change.
− Emphasis should shift from persuasion and the transmission of information from outside expert to dialogue, debate and negotiation on issues that resonate with members of the community.
− Emphasis on outcomes should go beyond individual behavior to social norms, policies, culture and the supporting environment (Figueroa et al., 2002, p. ii).

The parallels between this model and design conversation cannot be overlooked.

The education system is certainly an integral part of any community and, as such, a community development affair. Still, when school change is attempted, the communication that needs to happen, when the users who form the community become involved in the design of the changes, seems to be an afterthought at best. Is the education system too much in a hierarchical straightjacket to look beyond its boundaries and find inspiration from practices elsewhere? The examples researched here show that teachers and other stakeholders can and do design changes and an ideal vision of their education system together, talk with each other, achieve consensus and implement changes. It is suggested that we need to learn more about this process in the context of the education system and intensify the effort.
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Appendix A

Guiding Questions for an Open-Ended, Semi-Structured Interview about Design Conversation in a School Setting

Title of the Project: TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH DESIGN CONVERSATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL CHANGE.

Principal Investigator: Helga Stokes, Graduate Student (ABD) of Instructional Systems
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Estimated interview length: 50 minutes.

The purpose of this conversation is to learn about your experiences as a teacher with processes referred to as “design conversation” and as practiced and experienced by you in your work environment.

In your experience, do you feel that there is participation by all or most stakeholders in important decisions that concern the overall learning environment at the school?

How do parents/ community members/ students/ representatives from business, higher education, etc. participate in the various forums/ planning & design meetings at the school?

Could you describe such meetings and share some anecdotes?

When the school was initially designed or the mission redefined, did you go through a process of envisioning an ideal picture of the school you would like to see with other stakeholders?
Als die Schule anfangs geplant wurde oder als mal die Erziehungziele und Philosophie neu entworfen wurden, haben sie mit allen Interessengruppen sich überlegt, wie die Schule unter Idealumständen aussehen sollte?

In your experience, did you feel safe to say what is on your mind? In your estimation, is that the case for all participants? Could you share an example?

Kam es manchmal vor dass ein(ig)e Gruppe(n) nicht ausreichend represäntiert waren oder dass man nicht auf manche Gruppen hörte? Können Sie ein Beispiel geben?

Did it sometimes feel that some groups were not represented sufficiently or not listened to? Could you share an example?

Versuchen Mitglieder einer Interessengruppe sich bei Mitgliedern einer anderen Interessengruppe einzufühlen und zu verstehen was die Anliegen der Anderen sind? Können Sie ein Beispiel geben?

Do people from one stakeholder group empathize with and try to understand what people from other stakeholder groups want to express? Could you share an example?

Kommen Teilnehmer typischerweise mit voll geformten Plänen und Entscheidungen zu einem Treffen und versuchen dass diese übernommen werden oder legen Teilnehmer meistens ihre Ideen/Pläne/Informationen auf den Tisch und dann wird beraten und eine Gruppenentscheidung getroffen? Können Sie ein Beispiel geben?

How do participants come to decisions? (Majority vote/ unanimous decision/ talking things through until everybody agrees, etc.)

Wie werden Entscheidungen getroffen? (Mehrheitsbeschluss/ Einstimmiger Entschluss/ beraten bis alle zustimmen, etc)

Does it sometimes happen that factions develop that lobby for a specific plan/ project/ solution to address and issue? Could you share an example?

Kommt es manchmal vor dass eine Partei sich bildet und diese einen spezifischen Plan/ Projekt/ Lösungsweg zu einem Problem durchsetzen will? Können Sie ein Beispiel geben?

When participants consult on and design innovations, do they consider the implications for the school/ district/community and all involved as a whole?
Wenn Beteiligte über eine Erneuerung beraten und diese entwerfen, ziehen sie dann die Auswirkung dieser Innovation auf die gesamte Schule/ Distrikt/ Gemeinde in betracht, auf alle Beteiligten?

Are the changes typically put in relation to the entire education systems?
Sind Änderungen normalerweise in Bezug zum gesamten Schulsystem gebracht?

Are connections to the society at large and the community taken into consideration?
Sind Verbindungen zur Gesellschaft im Ganzen und der Gemeinde bedacht?

What changed for you, in your role as a teacher, from the times when you worked in an environment where major changes were largely mandated by superiors, to now, where consensus on changes is sought and stakeholders participate in the design of innovations/changes? How did your communication with parents/ students/ administrators/ community members change?

Was hat sich in Ihrer Rolle als Lehrer geändert im Vergleich zu der Zeit als Sie in einer Situation gearbeitet haben wo größere Änderungen von Vorgesetzten vorgeschrieben wurden und jetzt wo Konsensus zwischen allen Interessengruppen ersucht wird und diese Gruppen beim Entwurf von Erneuerungen/ Änderungen teilnehmen? Wie hat sich Ihre Kommunikation mit Eltern/Schülern/ Verwaltung/ Gemeindemitgliedern/ geändert?
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