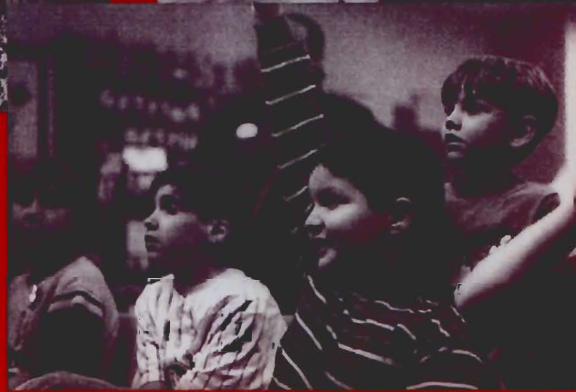
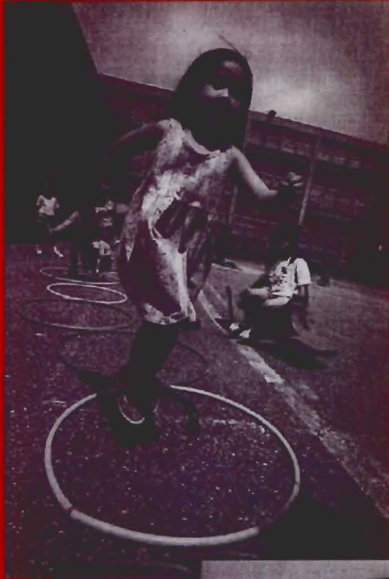


# Fostering a Culture of Respect at the H.A. Brown School



## TAKING STOCK / MAKING CHANGE

A Collaborative Action Research Project of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education  
and the School District of Philadelphia. Funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.



Fostering a Culture of Respect  
at the  
H.A. Brown Elementary School

by Linda Hargrow, Christine Perfecky, Susan Shucker  
with contributions from Lora Neal, Christina Spink,  
Stephanie Phillips, Theresa Walker

edited by Paul Skilton Sylvester

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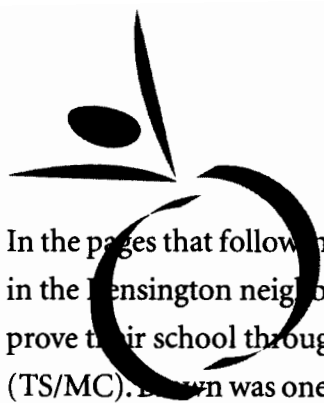
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## INTRODUCTION

In the pages that follow, members of the H. A. Brown elementary school community in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia tell the story of their efforts to improve their school through a three year project called Taking Stock/Making Change (TS/MC). Brown was one of five schools in the School District to work with “friendly outsiders” from the Graduate School of Education’s Center for Urban Ethnography (CUE) at the University of Pennsylvania. In this public school/university partnership each school staff studied their school and used what they learned as a basis for reforms—a means of school change known as action research. Also participating in TS/MC was the Webster elementary school, also in Kensington; the Bluford Elementary Science Magnet School in West Philadelphia; the Levering School in Roxborough; and AMY Northwest school in Mount Airy.

These schools were chosen to participate in TS/MC through an application process open to all schools involved in School Based Management/Shared Decision-Making, an initiative of the School District of Philadelphia that allows participating schools to make decisions at the local level, rather than having decisions made for them at the level of the central office. TS/MC called for a team of teachers, parents, and administrators from each of the five schools to perform school self-study, with the belief that continual stock-taking is an essential component of school-based change; schools must have the capacity to assess their decision-making and improvement efforts so that they can revise them.

In week-long summer institutes and Saturday retreats from 1993 to 1996, the five school teams worked with staff from CUE at Penn to learn ethnographic research methods such as one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, participant observation, surveys, and analysis of school documents. In addition, CUE staff consulted with the teams throughout the year as they carried out their research, analyzed their data, planned reforms, and gathered further data about what was happening in their schools.

Taking stock means looking more carefully than usual to see what you have at the moment. Ethnography documents the daily life of people and their points of view on

what they are doing. Ethnographers have realized that most of the time people are so accustomed to their daily routines and so busy doing them that they don't pay much attention to what is going on. Everyday life becomes invisible in its living. There is an ethnographic proverb, "The fish would be the last to discover the existence of water." That is why taking stock is necessary.

People in schools need access to what often remains invisible to them, so that they can solve the significant, everyday problems that block school improvement. Ethnographic research methods are important tools for problem solving. While Philadelphia schools had, for some time, examined a variety of kinds of data about school outcomes like attendance rates, standardized test scores, and report card marks, they were unaccustomed to considering information gathered through reviewing documents, interviewing, and observation—the traditional research methods of ethnography. Answers to questions like "How do we teach reading in this school?" "What do staff understand about how decisions are made?" and "When do students feel successful?" remained part of what was invisible.

Taking Stock/Making Change began with the assumption that the problems schools face, especially urban schools, are so severe that the pressure to do *something* can lead to a "ready-fire-aim" approach to school reform—with deliberation and reflection after the reforms have been implemented, if at all. When this happens, reforms that have been conceived and mandated from above are often not fully "owned" by local school staff, and educators become increasingly cynical about the possibility of real change. The TS/MC process is an attempt to break this cycle of cynicism by making educational improvement more collective, deliberate, and data-based; less a matter of lip service, more a matter of actual commitment.

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# FOSTERING A CULTURE OF RESPECT AT THE H.A. BROWN SCHOOL

by Linda Hargrow, Christine Perfecky, Susan Shucker  
with contributions from Lora Neal, Christina Spink,  
Stephanie Phillips, and Theresa Walker

edited by Paul Skilton Sylvester

For nearly three years, I have been working as a “friendly outsider” to the action research team at the H.A. Brown school. As an analogy for a problem that many of us see with many school change projects, I want to recount something that happened to me ten years ago.

When I lived in Boston, there was a “greasy-spoon” diner across the street from my apartment. One morning I woke up to find that the restaurant was gone—it was completely repainted, with a new sign that read “Taha Natural Foods.” When I went to try the food at this new establishment, the gentleman who used to stand behind the counter, was, in fact, still standing behind the counter. When I asked him who the new owner was, he replied, “No new owner. Same owner. Same delicious food!”

People who work in schools know that too often school change is like the change of this restaurant—changing the signs but serving the “same delicious food.” In striking contrast to this tendency, I offer the reform agenda of the H.A. Brown School. While the team initially set out to change one piece of their program, they soon widened their project, attempting to bring about change in the way that individuals relate to each other in the classroom, in the school-yard, in the office, and in all the other chance encounters between people who are drawn together as a school. What follows is the team’s narration of this process.

Paul Skilton Sylvester, Center for Urban Ethnography

## From Multi-Cultural Assessment to a Broader Focus on “Respect”

As the winter of 1993 was coming to an end, the staff’s morale at H.A. Brown was high. This feeling of well-being had been generated by the introduction of multi-cultural studies as a separate subject in the school curriculum to counteract the ethnic and racial tensions which existed in the community, and it was beginning to be felt within the school.

The source of these tensions had to do with the changing situation of the school’s neighborhood: H.A. Brown school is located in an area which, at one time, had been a manufacturing hub of Philadelphia, dotted with various factories and textile mills. Today, most of these are abandoned. During the same period that industries and some of the Anglo community members were leaving the area, Asian and Latino immigrants were moving in. What was once a white, working-class area is now about 50% white (non-Latino) with a continuously increasing population of Vietnamese and Latino immigrants.

The staff’s intent was that the newly adopted course of study would have a positive impact on relations within the school community.

The Multi-Cultural Curriculum was initiated as a means of bringing the school community closer together via cultural experiences, celebrations and theme-based literature from different cultures. For example, all races joined together to celebrate Tet—the lunar New Year traditionally observed by Vietnamese. The staff’s intent was that the newly adopted course of study would have a positive impact on relations within the school community.

Brown’s feeling of contentment did not last for long. At the first TS/MC Summer Institute in 1993, Dr. Frederick Erickson introduced the Brown TS/MC team (teachers Linda Hargrow, Lora Neal, Christine Perfecky, Stephanie Phillips, Chris Spink, Theresa Walker, and Principal Susan Shucker) to a new way of thinking about “culture”: culture not as just special practices that groups exhibit in their celebrations but as our



“shared standards for perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating the actions of others”—the very “water” that we as fish are swimming in.

The term culture when thought of in this new way referred not just to differences that kids brought from their home-lives but also something the school community itself “lived out.” Beyond Vietnamese or Irish cultures, there was also an H.A. Brown culture. The Brown team realized that change was needed in the school’s culture, and that this was not adequately being addressed by the study of native lands and the celebration of ethnic holidays. The anecdote below recounts one memory of a TS/MC team member reflecting on the kinds of problems being faced. In it, one can see the overlapping issues of ethnic conflict, the challenges of a multi-lingual community, economic pressures on the families of students, and ethnic conflict among parents.

Hurriedly walking to her room, the ESL teacher passed third-grader Hien. The child was teary-eyed and clearly upset, yet she wouldn’t say what was wrong. In a moment, she burst into sobs. The Vietnamese bi-lingual counselor was called, and she gently prodded an answer from Hien in her native language. The girl revealed that she had been taunted, pushed, and even slapped in the yard by a white classmate, Erica.





The ESL teacher sought out Erica and asked her to explain what was going on. Erica didn't deny her actions, but insisted that Hien looked at her the wrong way. "She asked for it." The teacher began to tell Hien's sad story to Erica, hoping to gain the youngster's empathy for her classmate.

Hien was a lonely child who lived with her father and younger sister. The father worked late and the two children stayed alone in the apartment with no relatives or friends close by.

Hien had also been told by her father that her mother abandoned her. Hien was frightened and needed friends, and the teacher asked Erica to try to be friends with the Vietnamese student.

Erica softened and began to ask some questions about Hien's life. Finally the ESL teacher asked Erica to go back into the classroom and apologized to Hien for hitting her. This suggestion instantly changed Erica. "I can't say sorry to those people. My mom said never to say sorry to them. I won't. My mom will get mad."

This incident was one of many reflecting the changing culture of the Kensington neighborhood and H.A. Brown itself with all its fears, misunderstanding, and hostility. Even

the faculty, who expressed the desire to break down stereotypes, sometimes unknowingly participated. In her TS/MC journal, Theresa Walker wrote one example of how teachers perpetuate the stereotypes they say they want to eradicate.

The teacher's lounge has been, and is considered, a safe haven to vent frustration over the problems with students. On this particular occasion, a teacher recounted an event that he had experienced with one of his students. During the narrative, the comment was made, "This is Kensington. What do you expect?" There in the room was Mrs. Smith, an elderly assistant in our school, and a person who is, herself, an active and positive part of the community of Kensington. When this comment was made Mrs. Smith did not speak up. Who knows what she must have felt? This kind of thing happens often and will continue to occur until someone dares to challenge these behaviors.

At this stage in Brown's development, racial slurs were commonly heard at the school. Vietnamese students were often thought to be Chinese by classmates and all Latinos were frequently labeled collectively as Puerto Ricans. Even the teachers' lack of knowledge frequently led them to identify very dark-skinned Puerto-Ricans as African Americans.

## Beyond Vietnamese or Irish cultures, there was also an H.A. Brown culture.

The process of literally "taking stock" of the H.A. Brown school situation during the 1993 Summer Institute led the team to changes in direction which were not anticipated. Assessing multi-cultural studies, within the narrowest definition of culture, was not enough. Observing ethnic celebrations and tasting foods of other lands was giving H.A. Brown only superficial knowledge of culture. Something much more basic was needed.

Although the families and staff of H.A. Brown shared parts of the same world, we and they saw this world differently; this often led to conflicts. H.A. Brown had to establish and nurture a culture of respect within its walls. We needed to change the "shared standards for perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating the actions of others." The team's plan was to collect data from four groups: the parents, the lunch/yard staff, the faculty,

and the students. This would give us input from everyone involved in reform. Every member of the school community would now be involved in creating the H.A. Brown culture of respect: students, parents, lunch/yard staff, aides, teachers, and the school principal.

## Interviews of Parents: Asking and Asking Again

In the fall of 1993, the Taking Stock/Making Change (TS/MC) team decided to interview parents in its self-study project. During the first summer institute, the Brown TS/MC team was quite impressed with the parental presence and input from other schools. We realized how wonderful it would be to have such support. At the same time we saw that we had not made our parents at Brown full partners in our multi-cultural studies. We did not know and had not asked them what they thought about the implementation of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum at our school. The parent interviews would therefore serve a dual purpose: they would show us if the parents were aware of the new course of study and what they actually thought about it.

Although the families and staff of H.A. Brown shared parts of the same world, we and they saw this world differently; this often led to conflicts.

Questions on discipline were added in order to clarify for the staff the parents' definition of discipline and the role they and the school should play in disciplining children.

Because our school is comprised of so many different cultures we decided that we should have representation from each group in those that we interviewed. The classroom teachers were asked to choose five students from their class from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, so that we could have cross-grade and cross-cultural data. Feeling that the parents would feel more comfortable speaking to someone who spoke the same language, we asked members of our staff from the various language groups to conduct the interviews. Center for Urban Ethnography (CUE) staff conducted a training session on interviewing: taking turns interviewing and being interviewed; discussing how one can put the interviewee at ease, not forcing their answers into your



own categories, and asking for clarification when needed. Then the school team, along with Paul Skilton Sylvester, decided which questions would be on the survey. The interview questions were divided into four areas: 1) general questions regarding parents relationship to H.A. Brown; 2) discipline; 3) the Multi-Cultural Curriculum; and 4) respect. Forty-four parents were interviewed. The results of these interviews were analyzed by the team, with Paul's assistance. For each question we asked, he grouped similar responses into a chart (Table 1).

Looking at such charts, the team was to look for patterns and exceptions. Later, when we presented our findings to the faculty or the lunch/yard staff, we made summaries for each area of inquiry (the Multi-Cultural Curriculum, discipline, and respect). In these one-page summaries, we distilled one or two main points with two or three paragraphs of discussion and a few key quotes, both typical and aberrant.

Overall, in our interviews of parents, we found very positive attitudes about the H.A. Brown School. The overwhelming theme was that parents are pleased that the staff and principal care for all students (21i + 2f) and that they "like the way teachers teach," (6i + 2f). Numerous parents also said that they felt safe sending their kids to the school because there was not discrimination (4i + 2a). While parents of all groups were en-

TABLE 1: RESPECT SURVEY RESPONSES (PARENTS)				
QUESTION: Where do you see respect at H.A. Brown?				
RESPONSES:	Total	Latino	Native Speakers (NS)	Asian
From the kids	10i	1f	6i	1i
kids' bad language	2i		2i	
disrespect teachers/parents	1i		1i	
running in the halls				
not stopping when you ask them	1i		1i	
fighting	1i+ 1f			1i
outside the school building	2i			2i
in the classroom				
throwing paper	1f	1f		
hallways	1i			
In the yard	1a+ 4f+ 1a	3i		1i+ 4f+ 1a
kids in the yard	4f+ 4f+ 1a	1i		1a+ 4f
during recess	4f+ 4f	1i		3i+ 4f
at dismissal	1i	1i		
staff in the yard	1i+ 3a		1i+ 3a	
grabbing kids	3a		3a	
From a specific teacher (no others)	1f	1f		
Formerly in the yard but not recently	1f		1f	
Parents when the child is bad	1f+ 1i	1f	1i	
Graffiti	1i	1i		
Principal ignoring parent who wants to help	1a		1a	
Nowhere	19i	7i		12i
Key: Interview response = "i" Anecdotal response (from debriefing of interviewer) = "a" Focus group response = "f" Example: 2i+ 1a+ 4f means that this response was given by parents in two interviews, 1 anecdote from an interviewer, and 4 people in a focus group.				

<sup>1</sup>In anecdotes, sometimes the interviewer recounted that "some people said" or "many people said." For the purpose of adding this data to the numeric charts, they have been quantified them as follows: "a few" = 2, "some" = 3, and "many" = 4

thusiastic about the use of a multi-cultural curriculum at Brown (22i+4f), a number of Anglo parents felt that European American cultures were being overlooked (4i +4a). For example, one parent remarked, “Too much Black history. Too much Jewish history. They see these things happen every year....Is there a day for Italians? Is there a day for Polish?” Parents also had concerns that discipline be improved.

While our initial interviews revealed some resentments simmering below the surface, the team was nonetheless suspicious of how positive the results were, given that we had had experiences with discontented parents. In particular, we wondered if Asian parents were “sugar-coating” their responses due to a cultural value which gives special respect to educators. As one parent told us, “In Vietnam, they say ‘teacher first, the king second, and parents third.’”

The team was nonetheless suspicious of how positive the results [of the survey] were, given that we had had experiences with discontented parents.

To add depth of vision to our understanding, we decided to come at the same issues using different interviewing methods: first, we would use focus groups of parents; second, we would debrief the original interviewers about what parents had told them in informal discussions. As we suspected, there was more to the story than was revealed in the one-on-one interviews.

In the initial interviews some Anglo and Latino parents had expressed concern about students’ safety in the yard, although none of the Asian parents raised this issue. But in focus groups Asian parents did express the same concerns about their children’s safety in the schoolyard. Four of five Asian parents said that their child was bullied at recess, and more than one specified that problems were worst between Latino and Asian children (4f). Parents went on to say that when it came time for explaining the problems to the teacher, the Asian kids were at a disadvantage because they “could barely speak English.”

To see if it was only Anglo parents who felt that European American cultures were under-represented in the Multi-Cultural Curriculum, we asked a focus group of Latino

parents if they thought that the school respected and celebrated European American cultures. The parents were unanimous that they did not, except for one parent who responded, "Saint Patrick's Day?" (5f).

As we suspected, there was more to the story than was revealed in the one-on-one interviews.

Debriefing interviewers revealed concerns that Anglo parents had had but which had not found their way into interviews. The Anglo woman who had done the initial interviews, a resident of the neighborhood near the schools, told us, "As soon as you're interviewing they won't tell you anything...[When I'm just talking to them in the neighborhood] many say that staff in the yard are grabbing their kids....They want to use every four-letter word in the book, but when they see I'm writing they shut up."

Our principal, Susan Shucker, sent a letter to all the parents who participated in the survey. She thanked them for their responses and informed them that we were preparing ways to address their concerns.

## Research and Reform: A Three-Pronged Course

The areas of concern that had surfaced in the parent interviews set the TS/MC project on a three pronged course of research and reform focusing on 1) safety in the lunchroom and yard, 2) discipline in the school itself, and 3) making sure that European American parents feel represented in the Multi-Cultural Curriculum.

### **Prong #1: Collaboration with the lunch/yard staff**

The TS/MC team wanted to address the parents' concerns about the children's safety in the lunchroom and yard without bringing on defensiveness or resentment from the "lunchladies." To do this, the team decided that Paul, as the outsider, should ask to interview the lunch/yard staff about their ideas on how to improve the lunch/yard program. Because we, as a team, lacked any formal authority to change anybody, we hoped that people would change themselves if given support.

The data collection from the lunchroom and yard was the beginning of a series of reforms.



As it turned out, the lunch/yard staff were very receptive to Paul's offer and agreed that there was a problem. They were frustrated, angry, and eager for change. Lora Neal, the school's non-classroom assistant who headed up the staff in the yard, welcomed Paul's offer to interview the staff but suggested that he "shadow" her for a day to see what they went through each day. (Later, Lora became a member of the TS/MC team at the invitation of team-members who thought she would add a valuable perspective as a non-classroom assistant.<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> Officially, Lora's job title is a "non-teaching assistant." During the TS/MC it became clear that an important part of Lora's job is in fact teaching. We now refer to her as a "non-classroom assistant."



During the winter and spring of 1994, Paul

- “shadowed” Lora Neal, the non-classroom assistant who is in charge of the schoolyard during recesses, for a day,
- performed participant observation in the lunchroom and schoolyard on weekly basis, all the while taking copious notes,
- interviewed the entire lunch/yard staff. Wherever possible, we used the same questions that we had asked of parents to allow for comparison, as we would later with interviews of teachers and students,
- videotaped lunches and recesses three times per year for two years.

In our analysis of interviews with members of the lunch/yard staff, including the principal, non-classroom assistant, nurse, and volunteers, we determined that these staff members felt there were numerous problems. What was striking was that they were willing to talk about them. Some of the problems they identified were

- lack of respect shown toward lunch/yard staff by students, parents and teachers,
- injuries during recesses,
- the need for more effective methods to maintain control,
- too much fighting,
- lack of support by the principal.

Again, we tallied the results of this data collection into frequency charts. Because we had asked many of the same questions of the lunch/yard staff that we did of parents, we were able to compare their responses side-by-side. Table 2 is a frequency chart of

the same question detailed in Table 1, but this time it includes the data from eight interviews of the lunch/yard staff.

“Parents, they don’t [respect us]. A parent said, “You don’t do nothing but smoke.” Parents should let them alone. I told her that before. Don’t let parents come in.”

“If I say something to kids, they’ll say ‘shut up,’ or curse you out.”

“Parents. When you are talking to some of them, trying to explain. They say ‘Not my child,’ or tell the kids, ‘You’re allowed to talk back to adults, or if an aide touches you, you hit right back or tell me.’ What’s needed is listening, understanding our point of view.”

“A parent said, ‘We’re going to wait ‘til after school and jump this nigger.’”

From the chart we can see that disrespect loomed as a much greater problem for the lunch/yard staff than it did for parents. Whereas 21 parents said that they saw disrespect “nowhere” at Brown, no lunch/yard staff gave this response. However, with the parents that did see disrespect, the lunch yard staff (4i) agreed with parents (10i) that



TABLE 2: RESPECT SURVEY RESPONSES (LUNCH/YARD STAFF)

QUESTION: Where do you <i>not</i> see respect at H.A. Brown?					
RESPONSES	Total Lunch / Yard Personnel	Total Parents	Latino Parents	Native Speakers (NS) Parents	Asian Parents
From the kids	4i	10i	1f	8i	1i
kids' bad language	1i	2i		2i	
disrespect teachers/parents		1i		1i	
disrespect staff	2i				
disrespect themselves	1i				
running in the halls					
not stopping when you ask them		1i		1i	
fighting		1i + 1f		1i	1f
outside the school					
building		2i		2i	
in the classroom	1i	1f	1f		
hallways		1i		1i	
in the lunchroom	3i				
kids in the yard	3i	11i + 4f + 1a	4i	4i	3i + 4f + 1a
In the yard	3i	11i + 4f + 1a	4i	4i	3i + 4f + 1a
kids in the yard	2i	4i + 4f + 1a	1i	3i	1a + 4f
during recess		4i + 4f	1i		3i + 4f
at dismissal		1i	1i		
staff in the yard		1i + 3a		1i + 3a	
grabbing kids		3a		3a	
From a specific teacher (no others)		1f	1f		
Formerly in the yard but not recently		1f		1f	
Parents		2i	1f + 1i	2i	1i
Parents treatment of staff	2i				
Parents, when the child is bad					
Graffiti		1i	1i		
Principal		1i			
Principal ignoring parent who wants to help		1a		1a	
Everywhere		1i			
Nowhere		21i	9i		12i
Key: Interview response = "i" Anecdotal response (from debriefing of interviewer) = "a" Focus group response = "f"					

students were frequent perpetrators of disrespect, and that this disrespect happened most frequently in the yard.

Whereas there was evidence that parents were angry about staff grabbing kids, the lunch yard staff spoke more of verbal disrespect (including threats of physical violence) by parents (2i) and a lack of responsiveness from the principal when they reported children being unruly. For her part, we later found out, the principal felt overwhelmed by the number of disciplinary cases that the lunch/yard staff brought in to her and had started being selective about which problems she would give her attention to.

## They were frustrated, angry, and eager for change.

The data collection from the lunchroom and yard was the beginning of a series of reforms. The group decided to meet on a regular basis and discuss their jobs and ways they could make the program better. Lora Neal was selected as the chairperson. During the 1994-1995 school year, the lunch/yard staff met with Paul at least once per month.

The principal attended these meetings at least three times. The following issues were discussed:

- Who's in charge of the lunchroom? in the yard?
- Pairing of lunch/yard staff—there are 4 assistants. Originally, the two most experienced worked together as did the two with least experience. Should we consider different staff arrangements?
- Handing out playground equipment—in the beginning, Ms. Neal was getting trampled by crowds of students all wanting the balls, jump ropes and other games.
- Should we use table captains?

- Procedures for lining up in the lunchroom and in the schoolyard.
- Extent of lunch/yard staff's authority—What should be brought to the principal? Which problems? And how should lunch/yard staff handle them?
- Methods of disciplining those who misbehaved in the lunchroom and schoolyard.
- How to prevent and/or reduce the number of injuries occurring during recesses.

By the end of the 1993-1994 school year, the group had come up with a plan. Some parts of the plan went into effect in June, 1994; others were held until September, 1994. At these meetings, the lunch/yard assistants finally agreed to switch pairings so that a more experienced person worked with a less experienced one. The group also discussed how to handle various problems: The more experienced shared techniques with the newer assistants; Paul suggested options; and Susan Shucker, the principal, offered her own ideas and those ideas she drew from conversations with students. For example, she explained how she got one idea that has proven most successful.

I used to eat lunch bi-weekly with the Students of the Month. One Tuesday, as we were sitting around and talking after lunch, I asked the third and fourth graders, as I usually did, what ideas they had to make the school better. One girl said without hesitation, "No boys in the yard." The other kids immediately agreed—even the boys. They liked the idea of recess and kickball, without the girls. To me it had the added benefit of reducing by half the number of students that we had in the lunchroom and yard at any one time. So that's how the idea of separating the boys and the girls came about.

The plan consisted of

- separating the boys and girls during lunch and lunch-recess,
- students lining up by gender when the bell rang and coming up separate stairways to the classroom,

- buying playground equipment and developing a method of distributing the same,

Each facet of the program was a hard fought victory discussed and ironed out by the group at their periodic meetings.

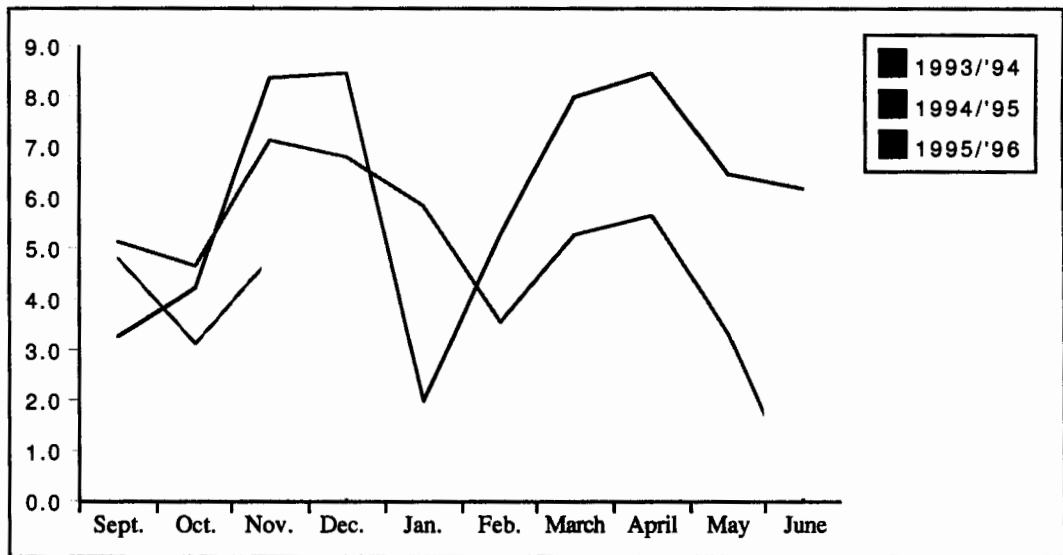
- students eating at one set of tables and then waiting at another set of tables to go to the yard,
- establishing a system of rewards—playing with pogs—for those doing the right things and waiting to go out in the yard,
- teachers introducing lunch/yard staff to students in the classrooms to reinforce the point that teachers and assistants are a team, that students had to listen to assistants, and that assistants would notify teachers of student lunch and yard behavior.



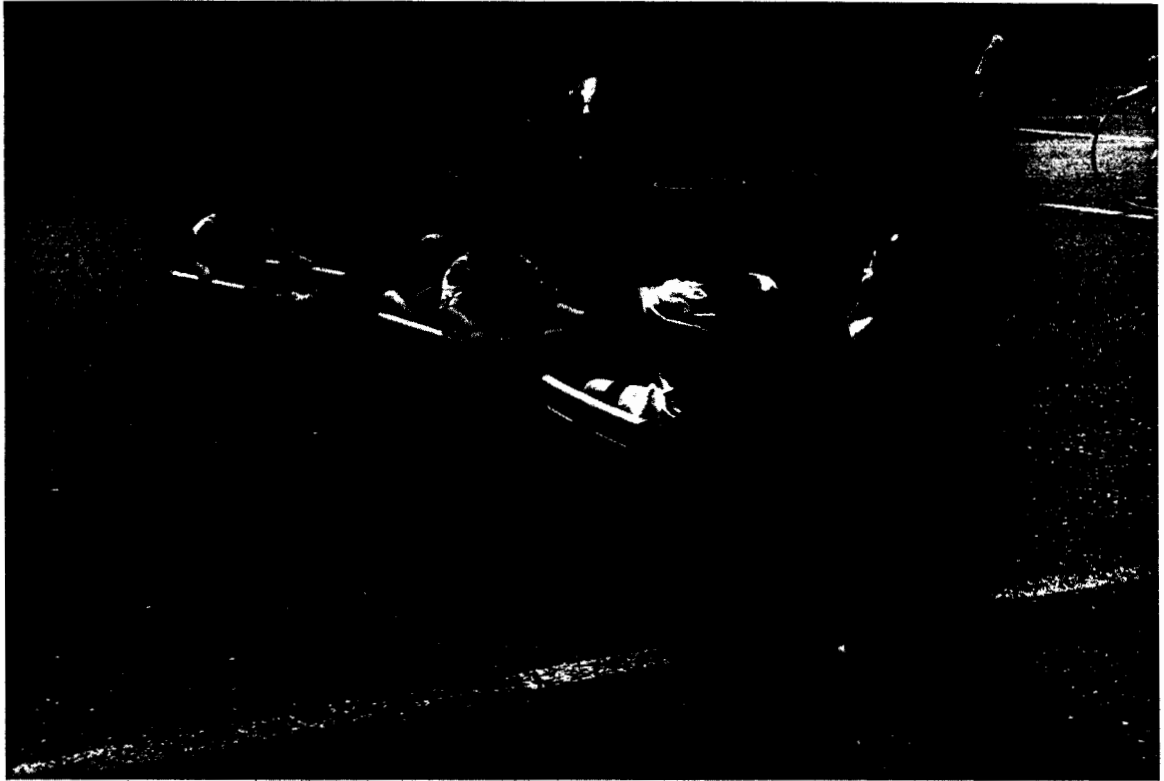
What has resulted from these meetings and this plan?

The behavior in the lunchroom and schoolyard is vastly improved. This is documented both by the number of discipline referrals to the principal and by the reduction of injuries seen by the nurse (Figure 1). The lunch/yard staff have worked out systems for every part of the lunch and recess program: lining up to enter the lunchroom, distributing lunches, cleaning up trash, sitting at another set of tables after eating, lining up to go to the yard, distribution of playground equipment by standing around a painted circle, disciplining students who misbehaved by having them stand on the wall for designated periods of time, collecting equipment, and lining up when the bell rings. They also have done the same for indoor lunch (when it is necessitated by inclement weather). There is a system for sitting in the auditorium, for going to the bathroom, for lining up when the bell rings. What's important and impressive is that each facet of the program was a hard fought victory discussed and ironed out by the group at their periodic meetings.

FIGURE 1: IMPACT INJURIES PER DAY FROM NURSE'S LOG



The number of impact injuries and number of ailments reported to the nurse also declined, thus showing that fewer children were getting hurt at recess. It is believed that this is directly related to the increase in structured choices given to students in the yard, to improved discipline procedures, and to increased knowledge of strategies for addressing conflict and misbehavior.



There is no doubt that the lunch/yard staff feels very differently about themselves and their role in the school. Through their series of meetings, they have discussed, revised, and refined their plan. If something is not working, they suggest another way. The group finally decided that Mrs. Elizabeth Wagner, Senior Food Worker, would be in charge in the lunchroom and that Mrs. Lora Neal would be in charge of the yard.

If something is not working, they suggest another way.

Non-classroom assistant Lora Neal said, in response to the question, “How are things different around here since we began this project?”

Fewer fights, fewer children running around in the building, less children in the office. I think it is a bit more organized now as far as the lunches with the boys and girls separate....I’ve seen maybe a 75% change...

In response to the question, “Have things changed on your job?” she said,



My duties have changed. It's for the better. It's a lot more responsibility. I have to handle the games. I have to keep the kids in line. Handing out equipment. It has changed; it's less stressful. I don't holler and scream at the kids as much as I used to. It's a lot easier now with the boys and the girls being separated. There's less kids out in the schoolyard at lunchtime.

### Prong #2: Discipline

The parents were not the first ones to raise concerns about declining "discipline" at H.A. Brown. The TS/MC team itself had raised it as a central concern when they first began discussing a focus for their action research. During discussions of the role of culture in the life of schools, we expanded our goal from "improving discipline" to "creating a culture of respect." Nonetheless, "discipline" remained as a "sub-topic" within the larger effort to foster respect. When push comes to shove—when respect has not yet materialized—teachers still have decisions to make about "discipline."

The team's first research/action pass at the issue of discipline was a Saturday morning staff development meeting devoted to improving the staff's understanding of dis-



ciplinary concerns and to planning reforms based on their learning. The faculty spent the first part of the meeting looking at disciplinary referrals that they had sent to the office and answering the questions: “Was it necessary to write a ‘pink slip?’ What else could have been done?”

“Discipline” remained as a “sub-topic” within the larger effort to foster respect.

Following this, the group discussed changes for the rest of the year. Among the changes implemented were the following:

- Students caught being good would be sent to the office at the end of the day so that their name could be read over the PA and they could receive a small prize.
- Lunch detentions: teachers volunteered to take turns running a lunch detention for extreme misbehavior in the hallways, which was agreed to be a problem area.

During that same spring, the TS/MC team was analyzing the interview responses of parents. In our interviews, we had asked a number of questions which tried to help us understand parents beliefs and practices of discipline in their own homes, and their expectations for discipline at school: What does the word ‘discipline’ mean to you? What do you think the school’s job is regarding discipline? What do you consider is acceptable behavior for your child and other children? What do you consider is unacceptable behavior for your child and other children? For what reasons would you like to be contacted by the school?

We presented our findings to the faculty at a Saturday staff development meeting devoted to improving disciplinary procedures. In retrospect, our findings were not surprising. Overall, parent concerns about discipline emphasized obeying rules, and punishment (14i + 1a). Respect of grown-ups was stressed by Latino (5i) and Asian (4i) parents, whereas native English speaking (NS) parents were divided among a num-

ber of responses in what they stressed. For example, they raised the issues of not fighting (2i), kindness (1i), and respecting others (1i).

In their beliefs about punishment, many NS parents (6i) stressed taking away privileges (6i) or calling the parents when the child misbehaves (4i). Many Asian parents advocated increasingly strict punishments for continued misbehavior (6i). Latino parents tended not to specify a type of punishment.

In the Fall of 1994 the TS/MC team tried to tap the perspective of the teachers and classroom assistants [CA's] on issues related to "creating a culture of respect": discipline, the Multi-Cultural Curriculum, and the dynamics of respect itself. In written surveys and follow-up interviews, we used many of the same questions that we had asked parents and lunch yard staff to allow for comparison of their responses. In addition, we did a content analysis of tallied teachers "pink slips"—disciplinary referrals to the principal.

The following are some of the key findings from the interviews of teachers:

- When asked "What do you think the school's job is regarding discipline?" Teachers felt strongly that it should have a school-wide code of discipline (7s). Others stressed that the code should clarify consequences (2s) and that this code should be stated to the parents (2s).
- The worst disciplinary problems were "refusal to follow directions / total disregard for the teacher / and breaking rules" (4s + 2i) and disrespect (3s).
- There were short ladders of consequences. When asked "What are your disciplinary procedures?" there were a wide variety of responses although the ladders of escalating consequences were rather short. Most people listed only one or two levels. Only two teachers listed a third step such as calling a parent.
- The worst time of the day was after lunch (5s + 5i).

**TABLE 3: TEACHER RATINGS OF PROPOSED REFORMS**

Scale	1 Very Bad idea	2 Bad idea	3 OK idea	4 Good idea	5 Great idea
<b>I. Discipline—Ideas proposed based on data from teacher interviews</b>					
	[Number of responses = 12]				Average Rating
	Finding ways of dealing with discipline problems in school rather than waiting for the parents to do something				4.8
	School-wide code of discipline with consequences set for each offense				4.7
	Get a time-out room (where students can think about good ideas and how to behave if it is possible later!)				4.5
	Staff development about discipline and handling students				4.25
	New alternatives are needed for dealing with the kids who always come to the office				4.25
	Reinforce the buddy system (where students are paired together to help each other)				3.9
	Staff nominates teachers who are good disciplinarians (but only with the principal's teacher's permission, we take care of the discipline and handle the situation at an IPAT)				3.75
	Paying teachers who want to take on unruly students (and who are good at discipline and generate ideas for dealing with the unruly students)				3.5

<b>III. Respect—Ideas proposed based on data from teacher interviews</b>					
	[Number of responses = 11]				Average Rating
	Quiet time after recess and lunch				4.5
	Emphasis needed on teacher respect for students				4.5
	Greater support for teachers				4.3
	Collective attention on how to deal with unruly students				4.0
	Emphasis needed on strategies for dealing with unruly students (not just discipline but learning)				4.0
	Finding ways to "unwind" children after lunch				3.9
	Sharing strategies for dealing with unruly students				3.9
	Emphasis needed on strategies for dealing with unruly students (not just discipline but learning)				3.8
	Avoid a victim mentality (that is, "I'm not the problem")				3.7
	Support for those teachers who are struggling with unruly students (and who are good at discipline and generate ideas for dealing with the unruly students)				3.6
	Support from the "discipline" staff (i.e., teachers who deal directly and regularly lowering students self-esteem)				3.6
	Paying teachers in a "discipline study group" to find ways to "unwind" children after lunch				3.6

<sup>3</sup>One respondent wrote in this comment: "Have teachers take disorderly students periodically. Teachers should take turns with unruly students." One respondent left this question blank.

## FIGURE 2: SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CODE

### GENERAL RULES

These rules apply to the classroom and other areas of the school. The problems are handled by the adult in charge of the area.

1. Disruption of instruction is prohibited.
2. Show respect to all people and property.
  - a. Keep hands and feet to oneself.
  - b. Use acceptable language—no name-calling or profanity.
3. Obey all staff members.
4. Radios, jewelry or expensive toys may not be brought to school.

### CONSEQUENCES

1. Name on board
2. Three checks=recess detention by classroom teacher
3. After three recess detentions, contact parents
4. Ten-minute after-school detention with teacher
5. Thirty-minute after-school detention with NTA
6. Pink slip—principal notification
7. Principal actions
  - a. Two more after-school detentions
  - b. After third detention, conference with parent
  - c. In-school suspension
  - d. Out-of-school suspension with number of days increasing to three

### NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES

These rules apply to all areas of the school. These behaviors are to be brought to the attention of the principal or designee immediately. The following are prohibited:

- 1) Bringing a weapon to school; using any item as a weapon
- 2) Defacing school property—writing on walls, using bathroom improperly
- 3) Stealing
- 4) Assaulting a staff member
- 5) Using profanity to any staff member
- 6) Severe fighting in the classroom
- 7) Leaving the classroom or instructional area or the school without permission

### CONSEQUENCES FOR NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES

- 1) After school detention—#7
- 2) Clean up mess—#2
- 3) Replace—#3
- 4) Conference with parent
- 5) In-school suspension
- 6) Out-of-school suspension

- Most teachers contacted parents only for negative reasons.
- Teachers felt deeply disrespected, mainly by students (7s + Ii) as opposed to by parents (2s + I i) or administration (Is).
- When asked “How do you see staff not caring or being insensitive to the needs of children? (No names, please.)” the most frequent response was “verbally lowering students self-esteem” (7s).

After looking at summaries of the data, teachers brainstormed reforms. The following week, teachers were asked to rate the reforms on a scale from 1 to 5. The average ratings were then calculated (Table 3).

Following the distribution of these results, the Brown faculty began making a number of changes:

- The faculty developed a school-wide code of discipline to allow for consistency from teacher to teacher (Figure 2).
- The faculty voted to adopt a program called “Teacher on Patrol,” (TOP) in which teachers who had a child who was disrupting their class could call the office for assistance; the office would then call the teacher’s lounge or classroom for the TOP; this teacher would then immediately go to the class and help ensure that that student stayed quiet and seated.
- A staff development workshop was held regarding “Managing Disruptive Behavior” to help teachers learn constructive responses to behavioral problems.
- The School District of Philadelphia provided staffing for an “accommodation room,” (often called a time-out room) for schools around the district.

### Prong #3: The Multi-Cultural Curriculum

The original interviews of parents had pointed to the Multi-Cultural Curriculum as an area of concern (along with the lunch/yard situation, and schoolwide discipline). As mentioned, the parents were concerned that European American cultures were being overlooked for other cultures in the curriculum. This was the entry-point for TS/MC's involvement in the Multi-Cultural Curriculum. In this section, we will discuss the changes that came out of the interviews of parents, the interviews of teachers, and the interviews of students.

After the TS/MC team had analyzed the interviews of parents, we drew up a summary of this data and brought it to the wider faculty, including the "Europe Committee" which planned that segment of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum.

The faculty's response was that the parents were right—on one level. So far, there had been no program to celebrate the cultures of the many Irish, German, and Polish Americans who attend the school. On the other hand, these cultures *were* scheduled to be studied in upcoming years—we had not yet gotten to them in the cycle of the curriculum. The faculty alternated the focus of their study from year to year: the first



year of the cycle, some grades would study Africa while the other grades studied Asia; the next year, some grades would study the Caribbean/Latin America while the others would study Europe. While the school was in the first year of the cycle, and the school was filled with artwork and artifacts from African and Latino cultures, it looked as if the non-Latino whites had been forgotten. The problem was not with the curriculum so much as with their communication of the curriculum to parents. Parents needed to be better informed about the schedule of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum and the country which each grade was focusing on.

The problem was not with the curriculum so much as with their communication of the curriculum to parents.

Beyond this, the TS/MC team saw another implication to the parents' concern: we felt that when a region of the world was studied, it was important that classes focus on the cultures of origin of their students. When grade three was studying Europe, it was not enough for a class to study Italy if most of the European American children were of Irish descent.

That year there were changes made. Efforts were made to inform the parents about the cycle of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum so that no one felt left out: the principal sent home a memo, the outline of the curriculum was highlighted in the student handbook, the curriculum was explained at Parents' Night, and information about the multi-cultural celebrations, assemblies, and other events was included in the monthly school newsletter. However, the TS/MC team felt that the faculty had not responded to their appeal to focus more on the cultures of the school's children, rather than on countries which were less represented or with which faculty members felt "more comfortable."

However, this was our first pass at the Multi-Cultural Curriculum. Interviews of teachers and classroom assistants brought up a number of other points:

- When asked what they thought the purpose of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum was, teachers stressed that it should help decrease prejudice (7s) and help students to understand why people act as they do/help them learn to relate to one another (6s).



- When asked what concerns or fears they had about teaching about other cultures, the faculty stressed the fear of their own inadvertent cultural insensitivity and ignorance of the subject matter (14s + 10i).
- When asked “What help do you need?” teachers stressed sources of information: either materials (7s + 81 ) or people to come to speak from other cultures (4s + 8i).

At a faculty meeting, teachers were presented with a 10 page summary of their responses concerning the Multi-Cultural Curriculum. In small groups, we brainstormed possible reforms in response to the data. The following week, teachers were asked in a memo to rate the ideas from 1 (“Very bad idea”) to 5 (“Great idea”). The responses were then averaged to come up with a rating for each proposed reform (Table 4).

Based on the teachers’ responses a number of reforms were implemented (or attempts were made to implement them). The most popular reform proposed was the directory of positive role models of people who were willing to come to classes to speak about their life experience. To compile this directory, a checklist of 50 or so topics, ranging from “life as a Latino immigrant” to “life as an Irish immigrant” to “discrimination” to “being a union member” was made up. This memo was translated by our community assistants into Spanish and Vietnamese. At parent conferences during report card week the memo was distributed to parents. Oddly, only four were returned.

So we tried again. The memo was reprinted and sent home with children. This time, five were returned. At this writing, it still remains unclear why there were so few responses. A clue might be found in the response of one community member, intimately involved with parents at H.A. Brown, when Paul asked her about the low response. She said that many of the parents she knew did not feel like they know enough about their home culture, and so did not feel like they could come in to speak about being an Irish American or a German American.

This response corresponds with a concern that the TS/MC team had had since Dr. Frederick Erickson spoke about “invisible culture” at the first summer institute. Fred’s talk reminded them that while culture is often thought of as something “out there”—the celebrations of Ireland or Puerto Rico—it can also mean the something “right

TABLE 4: TEACHER RESPONSES TO PROPOSED MULTI-CULTURAL CURRICULUM REFORMS					
Scale	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Bad idea	Bad idea	OK idea	Good idea	Great idea
II. The Multi-Cultural Curriculum: Ideas proposed based on data from teacher interviews [Number of responses =12]					Average rating
Compiling a directory of positive role models who are willing to come to classes to speak about their ethnic heritage, or their job, or their immigration experiences, etc.					4.5
More emphasis on "getting along" and not just holidays and celebrations <sup>4</sup>					4.4
Positive role models of all ethnic groups to speak at assembly					4.3
Staff development on understanding any of the ethnic groups at Brown					4.2
Positive role models & motivational speakers of different ethnic groups to speak at assembly					4.2
Time is needed to work on assessment					4.2
Have Fred Erickson, a professor of education at Penn and an expert on issues of culture and education, come to speak at Brown. (He has offered to do this at no charge.)					4.1
Have a speaker come to talk with teachers about cross cultural understanding					4.0
Staff development on how to use kids' knowledge of their own cultures so that teachers need not be the expert on their culture					3.9
Using an advisor from the Roberto Clemente Center					3.7
Paying teachers from the multi-cultural study group to present ideas they have that seem to be working at an IPAT					3.4
Paying the multi-cultural study group to assess the present goals of the MC curriculum and to develop performance measures/standards for it					3.4
Paying teachers who are interested in forming a multi-cultural study group to work together to improve their own Multi-Cultural Curriculum					3.3
Paying the multi-cultural study group to develop strategies for bringing issues of "getting along" into the MC curriculum					3.3

<sup>4</sup>Two respondents left this question blank.



Culture is often thought of as something “out there”—the celebrations of Ireland or Puerto Rico—it can also mean the something “right here.”

here”—the shared standard for perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating the actions of others. We were concerned that the school’s Multi-Cultural Curriculum, with its emphasis on holidays, was still not teaching kids about the deeper significance of culture. In the poll cited above, teachers gave a high rating to the idea of having Fred Erickson come and talk about culture so the team asked him to come to speak.

At a Saturday morning staff development meeting, Fred discussed the difference between “visible” and “invisible” culture, and the importance of this difference for planning curricula.

I think that some of what I have to say you may find a little different from the usual way that multi-cultural curricula and teaching are thought about...[In the field of multi-cultural education there is] an emphasis on what some of us have come to call “visible culture.” Much multi-cultural curricula has emphasized that: food habits, holidays, dress, knowledge about historical figures, facts about geography, and so on. There’s nothing wrong with that...but in a sense, it’s only the tip of the iceberg because so much of what we learn [is invisible in the sense that we are no longer even aware of it].

...Cultural discovery, especially in the invisible culture domain, involves a kind of process of reflection by which we begin to make the invisible culture that we’ve got, visible to ourselves...How many people here either are now or ever have been married? Most of you. One of the ways that we learn about visible culture and—most profoundly—invisible culture is by having in-laws. (laughter) That’s one of the first ways that we pick up, in a kind of intimate way, that other people have other subtly different assumptions about how to do things.

I remember, in my first marriage, being very puzzled the first time my wife and I went home to her family’s for Christmas, and I realized that all kinds of things that I had assumed about how Christmas Eve would happen and Christmas morning would happen, were different than the way we did it in my family. One of them was that they had the presents opened on Christmas morning, and in my family it was in the evening; but also, in their family it was necessary that each person opened their present one at a time. And everybody commented on what that present was. (laughter)

We didn’t do it that way in my family. We didn’t open everything all at once, but there was an *overlaying* of opening and looking and passing around, and whatnot. And I found this one-present-at-a-time sort of spotlight on whoever it was who had the present quite disconcerting. I was in my mid-twenties. I wasn’t a five year-old. But nonetheless, there was a subtle cultural difference—and we were white! (laughter)

Fred went on to say that when we recognize this other dimension of culture, all of us, teachers, parents, and especially students, are experts on culture. He said that while cultural difference often leads to cultural conflict, it need not necessarily do so; often the difference is the way we find to fight about deeper issues: “If you want to start a fight, cultural difference is a great way to start a fight, but the fight isn’t fundamentally about culture,” he said. Furthermore, one of the ways that we can defuse cultural tension is

to help students become more reflective about their own invisible culture and to recognize the differences in the ways that people do things. One thing that we can do in the classroom is exploring our cultural autobiographies: thinking back to our childhoods, interviewing our relatives, asking for stories and then using the stories to communicate our invisible culture to others.

Following Fred's talk, teachers worked in groups to do curriculum planning. With teachers sitting in small groups, we brainstormed ways to make the invisible culture more visible, then grade-groups used this pool of ideas to plan for their particular part of the curriculum.

The process of identifying and developing a "culture of respect" has brought staff, students, parents, and community closer together.

Later in the year, our principal, Susan Shucker, initiated another change in the Multi-Cultural Curriculum; this time in assessment. Up until this point, teachers had used a variety of ways to assess students' work—through writing, map work, crafts projects, and so on. At the end of a unit on a given region, all of the grades that were studying Latin America, or Europe, or whatever the area it might be, those grades held an assembly at which each class made a presentation—a song, a dance or a speech.

At a TS/MC meeting, Susan Shucker raised concerns that the form of the mandated outcomes of the Multi-Cultural Curriculum were encouraging a one-dimensional approach to culture; that is, that by requiring everyone to participate in a "Latin American Assembly," teachers became focused on learning how to dance Salsa, and not studying what it means to be a Puerto Rican. As a result of her discussion with the team Susan decided that teachers should be freed-up from a requirement to participate in an assembly. Instead they would be encouraged to do an "exhibition" of some kind which asked students to demonstrate their learning.

The final collection of data on the Multi-Cultural Curriculum came from our students, the final group whose perspectives we wanted to tap to foster a culture of respect. As of this writing, we have not yet analyzed this data; a job that remains to be done.

The H.A. Brown story evolved greatly over the past three years. The process of identifying and developing a “culture of respect” by focusing on safety in the lunchroom and yard, school discipline, and our Multi-Cultural Curriculum has brought staff, students, parents, and community closer together. We realize, however, that our efforts must continue, as we evaluate and reevaluate H.A. Brown’s “culture of respect.” Our success in this endeavor will be measured by how well our staff, students, and parents respect and understand their own culture and the culture of others.

Our efforts must continue as we evaluate and reevaluate  
H.A. Brown’s “culture of respect.”

