

**THE WOMAN IN CHARGE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL:  
A CASE STUDY OF CAROL STEEN,  
PRINCIPAL OF WINSTON CHURCHILL HIGH SCHOOL**

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## ABSTRACT

This case study of Carol Steen, principal of Winston Churchill High School in Lethbridge, Alberta, provides a detailed observational record of what one female secondary school principal does. Through qualitative research methodology and grounded theory strategies, the data collected over 16 days of observation has been organized into five analytical frameworks. Carol Steen's role as principal is described in terms of her educational administrative philosophy, her organizational system, her use of language, her decision-making strategies, and her public relations habits.

Carol views her educational organization in terms of a circular structure with the administrative team at the core. The tone of her administration is invitational and she speaks the language of inclusion, encouraging collaborative partnerships to make proactive decisions for the school. The warmth and informality of her leadership helps to establish a joyful atmosphere throughout the school. By planting enthusiastic ideas that take on a life of their own, Carol cultivates a public relations image for the school. As a female secondary school administrator in 1996, Carol is part of the paradigm shift from a hierarchical to a collaborative educational culture, and from an impersonal standards-based environment to a personal, achievement-oriented educational environment. Through her vision of the school as a circle, her commitment to communication, and her delight in positive change, Carol Steen cares for the school of which she is in charge. Her administrative practice may be an indicator of the restructuring of educational theory and educational training that is still to come.

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BY AUDREY HILL

Illustration by Stephanie Janke

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

#### INTRODUCTION

Although women have flocked to the career of teaching for the last two centuries, women who lead schools, particularly as secondary school principals, are rare. Although there is a mass of literature about school administration, educational theory has been framed by researching the male experience and generalizing it to the female experience. While histories, case studies, and ethnographies have been written about men who administer, few have been written about the women who do so. This case study is an attempt to document the professional life of one female secondary school principal, and by doing so, to add to human legacy by describing, through the lens of a woman, one more experience of the educational administrative world.

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

"Women are destined to rule the schools of every city," said Ella Flagg

Young in 1909 (Shakeshaft, 1987, p.7) after her appointment as the first woman superintendent of the Chicago public schools. " It [education] is a woman's natural field and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership." (Shakeshaft, 1987, p.7)

Almost ninety years later, educational statistics show that Ella Flagg Young's predictions are still unrealized.

The reality that emerges from a comparison of the number of female teachers and the number of female administrators illustrates the underrepresentation of women in the formal leadership of schools. Statistics Canada 1985-86 indicated that 72% of elementary school teachers were women, but that only 17% of elementary school principals were women. 35% of teachers at the secondary level were women, yet they held only 6% of secondary principalships (Cusson, 1990).

In Canada, in 1991-92, 15% of men who taught were principals, but only 4% of women who taught were principals. While women accounted for 60% of the entire public elementary-secondary teaching force, they made up 24% of the principalships.

In the United States, the figures are similar. Statistics for 1985 indicate that although 83.5% of elementary teachers were women, only 16.9% were elementary principals. While 50% of secondary teachers were women, only 3.5% were secondary principals. Women were two-thirds of all school personnel, but only 3% of the superintendents (Shakeshaft, 1987).

In Canada, at the current time, 29% of elementary and secondary administrative positions are held by women (Statistics Canada 1996). These statistics indicate that the number of female educational administrators has increased by 5% since 1992. At the same time, however, 61% of all educators in Canada are women. Although individual women have, at various times, held every type of educational administrative position, the majority of teachers are women, while the majority of principals are men.

#### SAME-SEX ROLE MODELS

Research has found same-sex role models to be crucial for women who are choosing nontraditional career paths in an androcentric world (Biancalana, Mauer, 1993). Enrolled in a graduate program in administration, and intrigued by the possibility of an administrative position in the future, I tried to recover memories of administrative women who might have been same-sex role models for me.

.During my thirteen years of public school education, I was a student under only one female principal. Her name was Miss Kornelson, and she administered the Grade 1 - 4 elementary school which I attended for three years. Looking back through the years, her name and face jumped into memory. I can understand why. She was an enigma, a puzzle piece that did not quite fit the

picture constructed by the male administrators of my later experience.

I remember Miss Kornelson as a tall, thin woman with stern, grey features. Under her watchful eye, we filed through the hallways in straight lines on our way out and in for recess. If she occupied my childish imagination at all, it was to devise ways to avoid catching her eye and her attention.

One early spring day, my friend Vicky and I momentarily forgot her presence on the playground, as well as the school rule that prohibited "bumping" one another on the seesaw. Amid excited shrieks, and bone-jarring collisions with the ground, we suddenly became aware of her shadow falling across the playground equipment. After one look at her angry face, we meekly followed the direction of her pointing finger and ended up in the office.

A black and red rubber strap lay across Miss Kornelson's desk, and we were gripped with fear at what seemed to be our sure punishment. When the principal entered the room and quietly but deliberately shut the office door, my dramatic friend, Vicky, dropped to her knees to plead for mercy. I sat miserably behind her, ineffectually wiping at the tears that flowed down my face.

I remember Miss Kornelson's quietness as she sat down behind her desk, and watched us. Then she reached into her desk drawer and, instead of the strap, she laid a shiny quarter into each of our palms. Dropping down to eye level, she reminded us that the rule we had broken had been made for our safety, and that she knew we would take better care of each other in the future. I left the office, clutching the quarter, amazed at our reprieve, and pondering at the

mixture of strictness and gentleness in the character of this woman.

I have only vague memories of the other principals of my own school days; this in spite of the fact that I found my way into the principal's office on more than one occasion. Most of the principals of my memory are distant and indistinct - men who sat in their offices behind glass doors, who spoke at school assemblies, and who would not have known my name if we had met face to face unexpectedly.

I have been a teacher myself for sixteen years. I have worked with several principals, all of them supportive and competent, and all of them male. Studying at the University of Lethbridge, I have been reading the literature on school administration. I have found that among scholars, the job of school principal is also an enigma, quite unlike its textbook descriptions. There appears to be a lack of symmetry between theory and practice (Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, Hurwitz, 1984).

Few biographies of women administrators have been written. Histories, case studies, and ethnographies almost always center on the male principal or superintendent (Shakeshaft, 1987). Practitioners complain that the organizational theory they have been taught rarely explains what happens in schools. Further, theories and concepts that have emerged from a male consciousness may be irrelevant for the female experience and inadequate for explaining female behavior (Shakeshaft, 1987).

## REVIEWING THE LITERATURE ON EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

In 1967, Harry Wolcott conducted an ethnographic study of Ed Bell, principal of William Taft Elementary School. Using a case study approach, Wolcott observed Bell on selected days throughout the course of a school year. Wolcott concluded that the principal's role could be defined by the myriad problems and situations of school life, but that the position was viewed as a favorable one because of the prestige, acceptance and ego-gratification that it offered. He saw few opportunities for educational leadership saying that the elementary school principal exercised authority according to divisional policy and the demands that presented themselves rather than by a grand design of his own. The school was organized on hierarchical principles with routines that were bureaucratic and paternalistic. Patience and prudence were two characteristics that Wolcott found were needed by Ed Bell to fulfill the requirements of his role. At this point in educational research, no attempt was made to draw similarities or differences between Bell and female elementary school principals.

A few years after the release of Wolcott's study, the National Association of Secondary School Principals conducted a survey of 60 secondary school principals considered to be effective. Based on a structured interview approach - what the principals said they did, rather than an observation of what they actually did - the results drew a portrait of a hypothetical, exemplary secondary school principal. The study found that the principal governed the school in hierarchical fashion but

involved the staff in discussions of student behavior, school climate, and the development of short-range plans.

While Wolcott provided a thick description of one elementary school principal's experience, and the NASSP study focused on what secondary principals say they do, Dwyer, Lee, Rowan, and Bossert (1983) initiated case studies of 5 principals in an effort to derive grounded definitions of principal success and effectiveness. The participants were shadowed for three work days through the process of participant observation, and data was analyzed using a variation of the Glaser and Strauss (1967) method of searching for patterns, repetitions and contradictions. While the authors admitted the case studies might raise more questions than they answered, they offered the studies as an exploration of the linkages between organizational variables and concrete instructional processes. Their studies revealed the facilitative leadership of one female administrator, Martha Delling. She emerged from the study as a spirited, ambitious, energetic and caring leader. With the view to creating change, this principal led the school by dealing with people on a one-by-one level and by operating as an example and a catalyst rather than as a hierarchical leader.

Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie and Hurwitz (1984) found that there was an imbalance between the theory and the practice of school administration. After studying 26 principals, each observed for 12 full work-days over the course of three years, the authors concluded that the principals were middle managers, brokering between various interest groups. Morris et al. found that the job of

principal could be best defined as a balancing act. The principal was expected to respond to requirements for change while maintaining the stability of the school, and to be open to the community while protecting the school from it. No effort was made to identify the gender of the principals, or to allow their individual voices to be heard.

In 1982, Ortiz published research on the career paths of women, men and minorities in public school administration. Collecting data from 350 school administrators, Ortiz analyzed the findings to show how socialization and role theories help to explain the participation of its members. Ortiz initiated the investigation in order to discover why women and minorities were absent in certain positions and not others. Ortiz found that men experienced upward mobility into administrative positions, but that the trend to place women in educational administration was a downward spiral. Women who succeeded in administration were able to respond to role stresses only by becoming overachievers who were able to do well without generating resentment, or who were willing to remain socially invisible.

Charol Shakeshaft (1987) asked what might happen if we learned about the world of women in schools and then took that world into account when we developed theory and practice in school administration. She assembled research literature and joined these findings to surveys and interviews of administrators to trace how women viewed their worlds. She found that female administrators were leaders who displayed greater democratic and participatory styles of

leadership than men. According to Shakeshaft, women in administration communicated more with people, motivated more, and cared more about individual differences than men in educational administration.

Working outside the area of educational research, Helgeson (1990) chronicled the strategies and organizational theories of four successful American female leaders. Through direct observation of a working day, she investigated how four women who occupied national executive positions in major corporations oriented their lives. She compared her findings about female administrators to Mitzberg's (1968) study of male managers. Helgeson found that the four women she studied held similar views of their organizations as circular structures. The result of the circular model, Helgeson said, was greater ease in information gathering and disseminating, and more communication, inclusion, and interpersonal connections within the organization.

In 1993, Shantz conducted a literature review to discover the role of female administrators in today's schools. Her conclusions list the qualities of leadership that are conducive to establishing collaborative cultures in school settings. To build the risk-taking atmosphere of a collaborative culture, Shantz said women focus on staff development and involvement and on building collegial relationships and making proactive decisions. Shantz described female educational administrators as leaders who were focused more on caring than on rights and who were oriented towards democratic cultures of inclusion and equity.

A review of the literature on educational administration from 1967 to 1993 documents a significant shift in organizational structure and administrative attitudes, and in styles of leadership. The move is from hierarchical to collaborative organizational structures, and from bureaucratic and paternalistic routines to informal, equitable, and collegial ones. There is a change in attitude from exclusion to inclusion, and from an orientation towards rights to an orientation towards caring. Responsiveness within the organization is matched with a proactive stance that makes the development and sharing of vision fundamentally important to the educational administrator. Communication and the development of human relationships become essential components of the school culture. Women in educational administration demonstrate greater strengths than men in participatory styles of leadership, and in the maintenance of closely-knit organizations.

#### THE CALL FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Wolcott (1967) provided a detailed record of what an elementary school principal does. I could find no corresponding detailed observational record of what a secondary school principal does.

The NASSP (1977) study was an example of the move to validate normative data by using interview and survey techniques, but the study was based

on data collected from 54 males and 6 females. The data provided by the six female respondents was subsumed in the preponderance of male responses. What is unsettling is that assumptions have been drawn from these responses, and used to identify "effective" behavior assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior. If women's responses and experiences were different from the men's, these were not identified, and so have become invisible.

After conducting in-depth case studies of 5 principals, Dwyer et al. (1983) called for further research that would trace the actual consequences of principals' activities through the classroom and to the child.

Morris et al. (1984) attempted to close the gap between theory and practice by basing their discussion and normative conclusions on case study observations. Their text, however, has a generic flavor because no individual records of their observations were cited. The text is further limited because the conclusions entirely ignore the possibility that gender may affect the administrative experience and perspective.

Shakeshaft (1987) asserted that few studies document what administrators actually do during the day, and that very few of the studies that are conducted include females. She called for educational research that will reflect both the presence of females and the female world in educational administration. Central to the process of restructuring educational theory and educational training is the development and use of case studies of women administrators (Shakeshaft, 1987).

Thinking back to the female administrator who made such an early impression on me, I began to wonder how a female principal interpreted her role in the mid-1990's. What might it be like to be a female administrator, say, in the secondary school, where such a small percentage of principals are women? What would she experience? How would she interpret her experiences? How might she structure her world in order to perform the role of a secondary school principal?

I began a deliberate search to find a secondary school principal to study - a woman, somewhere in southeastern Alberta. My search led me to Carol Steen.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CASE STUDY PROPOSAL

Because of the call by researchers such as Dwyer et.al. (1983), Ortiz (1982), Shakeshaft (1987), and Shantz (1993) to undertake research that reflects both the presence of females, and the female world in educational administration, I decided to construct a study of a woman administrator at the secondary school level. I chose to study a secondary school principal because I teach at this level, and because it is the educational administrative position least occupied by women.

#### THE GENERAL QUESTION

What is the role of a female principal in a secondary school setting?

The focus of this research is to discover what role the principal plays in relation to the rest of the administrative team, the teachers, educational supervisors, support staff, students, parents, and the community at large. Research findings will be situationally grounded. An attempt will be made to enter the conceptual world of the principal and to answer questions such as: What

is she experiencing? How does she interpret these experiences? How does she structure the social world that enables her to perform the role of principal of a secondary school in Alberta?

## COMPONENTS OF THE STUDY

I propose to spend approximately one day per week for four months with a secondary school principal. This is a field study, conducted primarily at the school, or other locations in which the principal finds herself during the course of a school day. Extensive field notes will be kept to develop a case study of the principal, and these will culminate in a role analysis. My concern will be to understand behavior from the principal's own frame of reference.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The qualitative research design used will be that of a case study in which the researcher is engaged in a detailed examination of one subject. I expect to be involved in observation, description, dialogue, and open-ended interviewing. The research will be exploratory work, negotiated between myself and the principal. Analytical models will be built from observation, people's actual experiences, and people's own words. The research process will be flexible and will evolve, based

on the knowledge gained. The initial goals of the study will be to document the everyday life of the principal in the school setting, and to come to an understanding of how the principal conceives, realizes, and understands her role.

On a mutually-agreed day each week, I will be job-shadowing the principal, taking the stance of observer, as participant in the school culture. While my prime role will be that of observer, becoming a natural part of the environment will involve socializing, intense contact with the principal, empathy, and perhaps, friendship. I will take field notes on the basis of observation, interactions, dialogue, and informal interviews. These notes will be summarized every night, and the summaries shared with the principal. Emerging questions, patterns, and themes will be discussed. The feedback that results from these discussions will allow for collaboration between the principal and myself, and will eventually culminate in the role analysis.

#### PREPARATION FOR FIELDWORK

1. agreement of the prime respondent - the principal - involved in the case study
2. agreement of University of Lethbridge academic advisors
3. approval from the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee

4. introduction to the secondary school community
5. formulation and acceptance of the research proposal by academic advisors, and the prime subject of the case study
6. job-shadowing, observations, field notes
7. appointments for conducting open-ended interviews

## RESPONDENTS

Data will be collected through sustained contact with people in the setting where these subjects normally spend their time on working days.

- principal
- associate administrators
- teachers within the school
- support staff
- educational supervisors
- students of the school
- parents who visit the school
- community members within the school

## FIELD NOTES AND ANALYSIS

Data will be gathered approximately one day a week, during the months of September, October, November and December of 1995. The field of the study is the high school building and grounds. Raw data will be recorded through note-taking. After returning from each observation, interview, or other research session, I will describe what happened. I will describe people, objects, places, events, activities, and conversations. In addition, I will record ideas, strategies, reflections, hunches, and patterns that seem to emerge from the research. Memos, letters, records, newspaper clippings, photographs, or audio tape may form part of the data collected. Data will be verified by showing field note summaries to the principal. Throughout the research, I will be taking a subjective stance.

## FINAL ROLE ANALYSIS

A summary of field notes, observer comments, and ongoing analysis will be made at the end of each observational period. Raw data will be organized into themes that arise from the data itself. The focus of the role analysis will be to look for clusters of behavior norms and for conceptual patterns that apply to the principal's position in the school. These many include:

- how the principal acts
- how others act toward the principal
- interactions of others in the presence of the principal
- analysis of everyday procedures
- unspoken expectations
- how the principal sees herself
- explicit expectations that must be fulfilled
- signs of reference
- sanctions and props
- how the principal feels
- how the principal thinks

It is my hope that the final analysis will reflect the richness and diversity of what people said and did.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The case study subject, the secondary school principal, who was approached to participate in this study, gave assent both verbally and in writing, and asked not to remain anonymous. It was her wish that her name, and that of her school, be used both in the research process, and in the final role analysis.

The proviso made in this proposal is that she may request anonymity at any point

in the research process, and that she may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

Because of the principal's wish to be identified, the anonymity of the other administrators in the school will be difficult to maintain. As secondary respondents, they will also be asked to give written consent to this study. All administrators must agree to have their names used in the study, or all will remain anonymous.

Names and other identifying information of all other participants or respondents will be withheld or pseudonyms used. The staff of the school has heard a proposal for this study, and has given their consent and support. The principal proposed to introduce me as a researcher to all students, parents, and groups with whom she comes into contact while being observed. She will explain that the purpose of the research is a case study of herself, and will ask for verbal consent for me to be present as an observer. There will be no pressure for anyone to participate in the study in any context whatsoever. All interviews will be conducted on the basis of informed and voluntary consent.

The principal will help to make decisions about the study format, and the data analysis, and will be given a copy of the role analysis when it is completed. A second copy of the completed research finding will be presented to the academic advisors from The University of Lethbridge. A copy will also be placed into the library at The University of Lethbridge for the purpose of student reference and research.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be useful to me for my own personal and professional development. Having studied the research on women in administration, I feel it is evident that a role model is an important element in facilitating an entry into an administrative position.

Secondly, a role analysis will be of interest to the principal who is the case study subject, to be used in the process of personal evaluation.

Further, the role analysis of a female principal of a secondary school will be useful to women for the purpose of role acquisition. It will provide one more specific record of how a female administrator views her professional world, and so may contribute to the reconceptualization of administrative theory.

The study may assist the larger educational community to more completely understand the role of a principal in Alberta's secondary school system.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

I had been teaching for nine years when the superintendent of our division asked me to consider applying for an administrative position. The idea was a new one for me, and the timing was not right for my family, so I declined. Four years later, however, the request gave me added confidence as I began studying toward a graduate degree in educational administration.

Toward the end of my required course work, I began to look for projects that would meet my own particular educational needs. Considering a move toward administration, and having never taught under a female principal, I decided to design an independent study that would allow me to job shadow a secondary school principal. In preparation for the project, I began a review of the literature on school administration. In particular, as I read through journal articles and secondary text sources, I was looking for three strands of information. I wanted to discover the history of women in administration; I wanted to trace the methodologies used in other case study approaches; and I wanted to know the findings of other researchers who had studied individual women in the principalship, primarily at the secondary school level.

I began the search for an appropriate mentor, and also, simultaneously, for

a university advisor to guide me through the study. Establishing the criteria for my subject was easy. I had a personal interest in secondary school administration, partially because it was the level at which I taught, and partially because it was the administrative position most rarely filled by women. Tied to a geographical region near the university, I looked for a subject in a southeastern Alberta school division. While I certainly hoped to find a candidate who was considered "effective" and "successful" by the educational community and the community at large, I recognized that this credential was not part of the scope of my study. In my own mind, a woman would have needed to demonstrate teaching and administrative effectiveness to educational superiors in order to be promoted to the secondary school principalship. My focus was to document her professional life, and not to evaluate it.

I was assisted in finding current lists of public school principals by the secretaries in the Dean's office. While the lists indicated several female elementary school principals, and two Junior High School principals, they showed only one secondary school principal - Carol Steen, principal of Winston Churchill High School.

I called Carol in August of 1995, introduced myself, and explained my request. She turned the tables, and interviewed me for ten minutes, then made her decision. I suggested coming to meet her in early September. "Why not next Monday?" she said. "The sooner the better." Pleasantly surprised, I agreed. I was to discover that moving quickly on new projects and opportunities was part of

Carol's administrative style.

While I did not pursue any measure of Carol's reputation in the community, several university professors, Lethbridge public school teachers with whom I took classes, and acquaintances in the community volunteered their perceptions of Carol once they were aware of my study. Taken in sum, these comments gave me the impression that Winston Churchill High School enjoyed a favorable reputation in the community, and that Carol Steen was regarded as an innovative and effective administrator. I admit awareness of these influences in an effort to remain as objective as possible. The purpose of my study was not to validate such opinions, but to describe and to categorize Carol's administrative behavior. One of the dangers of ethnography is the tendency toward veneration of the prime correspondent (Gambell, 1995).

The first Monday spent in the school was an introductory visit. I toured the building, met the administrative team, and the front office secretaries. I was introduced to the school's teachers at a staff meeting. At each introduction, Carol seemed to take delight in announcing that I was interested in shadowing her. The staff and her associate administrators approved the suggestion.

I went back to the university to meet with my advisor, Dr. Cathy Campbell. Her first suggestion was to change the status of the study from an independent study to that of a final research project.

The next two weeks were busy ones spent reviewing qualitative research methodologies, and writing a research proposal. Bogdan and Biklen's 1982 text,

Qualitative Research for Education helped me to conceptualize the research problem and to design strategies for data collection, and data analysis. In writing the initial proposal, I followed J. Peter Rothe's 1993 guide Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide (1993). I submitted a copy of the proposal to the university's Human Subjects Research Committee; my advisor received permission to conduct the study from the Superintendent of the Lethbridge Public School Division.

Armed with letters of intent, permission slips for participants, and stenographer's notepads, I moved back into the secondary school environment to begin my observations. I experienced Carol's initial invitation into the school as a gracious and generous one. Despite the fact that my purpose in the study was to observe, and describe, and not to evaluate, I remain grateful for the welcome that she gave me into her professional life, and into the school that she administers.

It took a little time for both Carol and me to get used to the observer/observed relationship. On the first morning of observation, for example, I set up camp at the conference table in Carol's private office. Staff members and community members who met her there were introduced to me, and after a few initial questions, seemed to accept my note-taking presence quite matter-of-factly.

What felt more awkward to me was following Carol every time she moved into the wider building. Because she knew the space so well, and walks quickly, I felt quite literally like the tag-along shadow, a step or two behind her, never sure what would appear around the corner. As Carol greeted students, their gaze usually shifted quizzically to me. Offering an explanation for my presence in each

of these seconds-long encounters, was, of course, a sheer impossibility. I eventually found that a friendly smile and a "hi" were all the students needed to accept me as their principal's "extra".

In an effort to help me understand the context of her interactions, Carol frequently offered background information about an individual or a situation before she initiated a phone call or an interview, or just after such an encounter took place. While I appreciated the insights she offered, I wondered if her explanations were "slowing down" her day. Toward the mid-point of the study, these spontaneous explanations gradually disappeared. Instead, we used talking time after school hours to discuss the events of the day.

Taking the stance of participant as observer meant, for me, that my presence needed to be accepted, but that I needed to refrain from changing the situations that I was observing by participating consciously in them. This meant, after initial greetings, not participating in discussions, or making evaluative comments to Carol when we were alone. More than once, sitting in on meetings, or an interview, I had to bite my lips in order to avoid responding to the business at hand.

In spite of these constraints, my days with Carol were busy and eye-opening. I had no problem keeping copious field notes; I tried to catch as much verbatim conversation as I could, as well as to describe the settings and the characters and the action that swirled around me. I found, on transcribing my notes, that I ended up with approximately 20 - 25 typed double-space notes per

session, regardless of whether I stayed for a full day or a half day. Because I began to feel fatigued toward the end of a full day, I gradually shortened my observational periods.

During the course of the four months I was in and out of the school, I observed Carol in her office, in the hallways, in classrooms, at formal and informal meetings, in interviews with individual students, parents, and teachers, disciplinary sessions, staff meetings, school assemblies, and on the telephone. The activities at which I became an observer included such varied things as a barbeque, a district-wide administrators' meeting, an interview with a local newspaper reporter, an acting-out scene involving students from the assisted learning center, a phone call from a sick daughter, sorting the mail, listening to a tearful parent, eating lunch, and discussing marks with a teaching intern. The list could go on.

I became comfortable with my position as an observer, and began to feel that I had been assimilated as such, into the school environment. I introduced myself to visitors as Carol's shadow, and it became the quickest and easiest way to identify me. At the same time, because I was associated with Carol, I found that some of the teaching interns sought my advice when they caught me in the staff room. The assistant principals sometimes joked about leaving me in charge when it looked like all of them were going to be out of the building at a given time. Most of the time, though, once my presence had been acknowledged, they left me to my note-taking.

I know that my presence will have made some impact on Carol but it is difficult to know how her behavior changed during the times that I was observing her. On one or two occasions, in a room full of people, her voice would drop when speaking face to face with someone, so that it was difficult to hear what she was saying. At such times, I made no effort to move closer, and record the conversation. After logging many hours of observation, I could see consistent patterns of speech, and response, and behavior that indicated to me that I was seeing the authentic Carol.

Carol's request to have her name and that of the school used in the study gave me some pause. Initially, I wondered why. Two reasons seemed to present themselves. One was that there are no other female secondary school principals in the area, so that her identity would have been difficult to mask if the study was to remain placed in the general geographical area. Secondly, Carol articulates pride in her school, and confidence in her abilities as a principal. She seemed open to the reflection of herself found in the field notes, even when my observations caused her to reconsider some of her actions. The fact that all three of her associate principals also gave permission for the use of their first names in the study, added to the impression of the pride and confidence these administrators felt in their school.

Added to my note-taking, I used a watch on several occasions to do time and motion studies. I also read through Carol's last formal evaluation.

Throughout the time I was in the school, I read newspaper clippings about Carol

and the school, letters sent to and from Carol, and speeches that Carol had written. I tried to use audio tape in the office, but was dissatisfied with the quality of the recording, and decided not to use the tape recording for analysis.

Throughout the observational period, I made lists of patterns, issues, topics, and organizational principles that suggested themselves. In the process of analysis, I was guided by David Silverman's (1993) text Interpreting Qualitative Data. In particular, I used a simplified model suggested by Silverman of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) account of grounded theory. This involved these stages:

- an initial attempt is made to develop categories which illuminate the data
- an attempt is made to saturate these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance
- these categories are developed into more general analytical frameworks with relevance outside the setting of the field.

Even as I became more comfortable with the process of analysis, I was aware of the fact that I was the "key instrument", turning the living, breathing, feeling, moving, speaking moments of Carol's day into words written on a page.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A DAY IN THE LIFE

CAROL - AUGUST 21

I squinted at the street signs, aware again that I should probably look into getting some glasses soon. This should be the corner, I thought, and it was. I eased the tired Honda around the curb, and chugged slowly past Winston Churchill High School - sprawling, imposing, arches gleaming white. The grass was freshly cut, the flag snapping in the breeze, and the sidewalks swept clean of summer debris, and loitering students. The Grade tens would already be inside, registering for classes a day ahead of the Grade elevens and twelves.

I circled the block again, looking for a parking spot. Which area was designated for teachers? students? guests? service vehicles? I sighed, and turned down a residential street across from the school. For the next four months, I would be the principal's "shadow" here for one day a week. On this morning at least, I would park anonymously. Better hiding place anyway, I thought wryly. Teachers don't want to admit they drive rickety, rusty economy cars. Discovered, I might feel obligated to explain that it was my teenage daughter's car, and launch into the history of why I was driving it today. A tedious exercise.

The polished front doors beamed my reflection back to me. Wearing a business-minded navy blue suit, and sturdy, lady-like low-heeled shoes, I felt incognito.

Then the great, tiled halls swallowed me, and I was inside the cavernous machine. There was a hum of voices around the hallway corner, and a flow of students and teachers behind the glass walls of the spacious general office. As I entered, the secretary greeted me, and indicated a chair in which I could wait. Colleagues walked past each other with a nod and a smile. "Hey, welcome back. How was the summer?" I looked at the staff pictures on the wall and tried to match portraits to the faces I saw.

My musing was interrupted by a blur of black and gold swirling through the office doors, and a cheery "Good morning, EVERYBODY! Did ya start without me? Are we off to a good start? And look what I brought you guys from the divisional breakfast - a tray of strawberries and dip. Yum, yum. Help yourself everyone!" I saw a slim, middle-aged woman with raven-black, shoulder-length hair, bare legs, gold sandals, black culottes, and a gold blouse. She had eyes and a smile that seemed to take in everyone. Without being introduced, I knew this must be Carol Steen, principal of Winston Churchill High School. For a few seconds it seemed that all eyes were on her. There was a pause in motion. "It's going to be a great year!" she exclaimed as she set the tray on the countertop and disappeared through an open doorway to the inner office. My study had begun.

## A REPRESENTATIVE DAY

Taken in sum, my field notes captured a school life of intensity and motion. Monday, September 18th describes a range of interactions and activities that are representative of Carol's work day world. The experiences of this day are also part of my field study notes; some of the incidents and conversations may be referred to again to illuminate the case study categories drawn after the research was completed.

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

7:50 am.

Today, I meet Carol in the staff room. She is sitting with a group of staff members, involved in an informal chat. In about five minutes, the bell will sound to formally begin another school day at Winston Churchill High School.

As I move into an empty chair in the circle, Carol turns her sunny smile on me. The inclusive quality of that smile immediately puts me at ease.

"I always forget that another smiling face joins us on Mondays," she says. The staff discussion is animated and friendly, and interrupted by the technical summons to get to class.

Carol moves out into the hallway, too, and does a morning "walkabout", greeting students, and encouraging them to move into their classrooms. She greets many students by name, inquires about the weekend, and asks which class they are heading towards.

Today, Carol is wearing beige stretch pants, and a beige turtleneck seater, covered with a gold blazer. She wears a large, dramatic pin made of gold and silver, and earrings to match.

"A gift from my husband," she says, as I comment on the tragedy/comedy mask motif of the brooch.

I leave Carol's office for half an hour to meet with Ken, who is explaining his time tabling methods to me. After his explanation of the process, I ask him how Carol gets involved in time tabling. "We've divided out some of the key administrative duties between the four of us," Ken says. "One of the areas I'm in charge of is the time tabling. Carol, of course, keeps popping in to see how the time tabling is shaping up. She offers suggestions and perspectives." The whole administrative team discusses the implications of student registration demands and time tabling decisions.

Back in Carol's office, I ask her about her role in the time tabling process. "Basically, Ken's in charge of that," she says. "It's a very intensive job, and he's very good at it."

Carol is sitting at her desk now, and signing letters given to her by the secretary. They are requests to other schools to send cumulative files for the new

students who are registered at Winston Churchill. She remarks on the transient nature of the population, and asks, "Where is Fox Creek, Alberta?"

A student knocks politely on the frame of the open door, asking for the keys to get into the weight room. Carol gives her keys to him, reminding him to return them, and to be aware that he is responsible both for his own safety in the weight room, as well as for the care of the equipment. He nods.

Carol's daughter is at home today, and is not feeling well. Now, Carol calls her daughter's school to tell them why her daughter is absent. The German instructor walks into the room, just as Carol replaces the receiver. He brings her a copy of an essay written by a Churchill student, who participated in a trip to Germany during the summer. Carol remarks that she thinks she already has a copy of the essay, but will keep this one just the same, since she wants to be sure that it is put into the student's file. She tells me that this particular student is definitely going to be a candidate for the Ms. Churchill award at the end of the year.

"The Mr. and Ms. Churchill awards are our most prestigious awards," she says. "They are given to the students who have contributed the most to the school and community in a wide variety of areas."

"Would these be like a citizenship award?" I ask. She explains that the criteria for selecting the awards should be printed in the information in the student agendas. I check. Other awards are listed, but not the Mr. and Ms. Churchill awards. When I point this out to Carol, she leaves her desk to look at the agenda over my shoulder.

"They're not!" she exclaims. "I have to make a note about that. They should definitely be included."

Another student waits at the door to speak to Carol. He is a member of her student/advisor group, and requests to have a new individual timetable printed. She asks if he has lost his old one. He nods.

"Hey!" Carol exclaims, as the timetable is called up on to her computer screen. "You're not supposed to have a spare!" They briefly discuss the classes this student is taking, and how many credits he has accumulated.

"If you pass Science," says Carol, " and you will, you'll have enough credits."

The rest of her advisor group begins to crowd into her office, about twelve students in all. Carol calls out cheery "hi's" as they enter, and notes an absence. Another student is advised that he is absent from school too often. He pulls away from her slightly. She reads the slogan on his t-shirt and comments that she likes it. Then she reads the daily announcements. The students relax around the room as she reads. Several of them pick up the peppermint jar on her desk, and help themselves to a peppermint. Carol describes an opportunity to go to a Calgary conference on drugs and alcohol, sponsored by the Moose. Her facial expressions seem designed to elicit a favorable response from the students. She smiles, raises her eyebrows and nods her head. She calls the trip a wonderful opportunity.

One of the students questions why the U.S. Marine Corps are campaigning through their school bulletin. Carol's response is that the student has asked a very good question.

There are a flurry of short student questions. Carol responds, "Do you need some help?", "You can start anytime", "You let me know", "I can help right away, if you want to pop back." One of the students requests a paper he has left with Carol. She cannot find it, but promises, "I will find it."

The phone rings as the students begin to file out of the office. Has the secretary been keeping someone on hold, and waiting for this session to end? I imagine so. Carol's voice becomes sympathetic, and partially alarmed. "Hey, what's the matter?" It sounds like the call might be a personal one, so I leave the office to go to the Math classroom to which she will report in a few minutes.

The bell rings. The Math 24 students saunter into the classroom and find their desks. Carol comes in a moment or two behind them.

"I'm late," she announces to the class. She is carrying a loose bundle of clothing. "Is everybody dressed?"

She begins to organize the Math class into two groups. Some students were absent and need to begin writing a Math test; other students join the same group if they need more time to complete the Math test. She has brought calculators for students to use. They are soon at work in their individual desks on one side of the classroom. The students who completed their tests the previous Friday are debating what mark they will get on the test. If they receive 50% or more, they explain to me, they may leave the class, with full credits, or they can stay and attempt to boost their mark even higher.

Carol hands out the tests that are marked.

"So, like, what does this mean?" asks one young man standing in the aisle.

"So, like, sit down, and we'll discuss it," Carol replies.

As she perches on the top of one of the desks to discuss the test results, Carol speaks quietly to avoid disrupting those who are still writing. Her gaze shifts from student to student, making brief eye contact with each one. Three of the students have marks in the 50% range she tells them.

"Some of you have potential to do very well in this course. All of you have the potential to pass." She asks them to continue working on worksheets that were distributed at an earlier class, while she confers with one student at a time about their personal test results.

"Jon, you're so keen. Come up here. We'll start with you." From my vantage point, it seems that Carol is discussing the questions that students have done poorly on. The individual conferences are friendly, but also fast and decisive. I catch a few of Carol's phrases. "I want you to...", "Does that make sense?", "You know what I need to have you do?", "So what do you want to do?"

While she conferences with individuals, I read through Carol's Educational Administrator Effectiveness Profile. The profile was completed during the last school year, and Carol has voluntarily shared it with me. I jot down some notes about the evaluation that I hope I will be able to discuss with her at some later time.

A teacher walks into the room to claim the lost clothes. He chats quietly with Carol about their owner. He is introduced by Carol to the student that is sitting

with her. He makes an off hand remark; the student comments. The teacher leaves the room.

"He's crazy," Carol says in an affectionate tone. She resumes the student/teacher conference. I note that she assumes a similar body position to that of the student. He is rubbing his forehead; she begins to rub hers. She leans toward him, makes eye contact, and reacts with surprise and interest to the things he says. Her voice is low and attentive. The smile she gives him gives the conference an aura of intimacy.

One of the conferences is interrupted by the increasing volume of two students who are talking.

"Pablo and Adam." Carol's tone of voice is harder. "Are you finished those worksheets?"

"I was just going to get back to it," one of the boys responds.

"Good. That's great," Carol says. "Remind me not to let you two guys sit together next class."

"I'll be out of here next class."

"It will be my loss," she says.

Tim, one of the administrators, comes in to see Carol. They exchange a joke, and he leaves.

Carol breaks into a loud exclamation. "OW, Kurtis just got 85% on his final exam. He's out of here! Hand in your textbooks across the hall, and if you get lonely, come back now and then."

Back in the office after class, Carol receives a phone call from Terry, her husband. I hear "Hello, dahling", and turn my attention to a school photo album.

Another phone call. This one is from a parent who has been considering moving her daughter to Winston Churchill. She is calling now to inform Carol that they have decided to wait until the end of the semester. "That's a good decision," says Carol.

There is a lull in the office traffic. Carol comes to sit at my table. We discuss the importance of a belief system that is needed by a good administrator. Carol comments that there are core values that shape her vision. Students and teachers are what matter. It is important to her to create a happy, focussed learning environment - learning meaning academically, physically, socially, emotionally. The team approach in administration is best, she says. It means both sharing a vision, and building each other's vision. She describes some of the changes that she felt needed to take place when she assumed the position of principal. How did she introduce change when it meant changing long-standing attitudes and perceptions? Informally, she answers. Slowly, through verbal remarks that support the change needed, spoken throughout the year, at department meetings and staff meetings. When change involved changing a staff member's role or area of authority, Carol said she spoke to them privately, using a questioning approach. How have things been done in the past? How should they be done? She also indicated that she would use statements like "I don't feel it's fair to you to..."

Carol talks about the necessity of sharing a vision with administrative colleagues. When philosophies do not agree, she said, self-esteem can become beaten and bruised. She talked about making long-range plans - for example, a three-year plan - and about giving staff ownership of change, so that it could be carried on even with the absence of the leader who first initiated the changes.

As we talk, there is a knock at the door. One of the special needs students has brought Carol a sampling of her mushroom omelette. Carol comments about the delicious aroma.

The noon hour bell rings. The senior boys volleyball team is called to the office where Carol and Tim congratulate them on their weekend win. It is an example of the praise that Carol gives to students and to colleagues, verbally and through notes.

We move into the conference room for a Wellness Center meeting. Carol sits at the head of the table with the guidance counsellor who is chairing the meeting. Before the formalities begin, one of the student representatives says that she saw Carol pictured in a Lethbridge magazine in an article that featured her home. Carol comments about the article. A few comments about her home are made around the table. One participant questions whether her house is always as neat as the pictures seemed to indicate. Carol jokes about carrying the same plant from room to room as the reporter took photographs.

As participants of the meeting report on their activities, one respondent requests that the school return the materials borrowed from their organization for

the student leadership conference. I can see that Carol is immediately concerned about this. She takes notes, saying, "I'll take care of it." She comments about some borrowed cartons that got crushed and jokes about stealing some to replace the ones that crumpled.

For most of the meeting, Carol is a listener and a facilitator. She assists the chairperson by doing some quick photocopying. At one point, she parodies one of the speakers, a gentleman that she seems to know well. Her most active role occurs at the end of the meeting when she engages the student reps in a discussion of ways to advertise the wellness clinic so that more students will respond to the services offered.

After the meeting, she calls in the respondent who reported that borrowed materials had still not been returned to them.

"I'm bugged by the fact that you don't have that stuff...let's go look..." She talks to the janitor to see if the material has been shipped out of the school or if it is still in storage. He says he sent it to the divisional office. She calls the office to see if the material is still there. Although the information she receives is inconclusive, she assures the community worker in her office that she will pursue the matter until it is found. The worker leaves, and the phone rings.

A representative of the Moose would like to drop in to see her the next morning and to leave information about the student leadership conference in Calgary. Carol sets up the appointment time.

Carol and Tim, and a guest from central office, have an informal meeting

about the school football game coming up on Friday night. It seems that a student has threatened to make trouble at this game. The discussion centers around what proactive measures should be taken to avoid any trouble on Friday night. Carol is in favor of bringing the student into the office and talking to him; the other two participants of the meeting are in favor of "riding" out the situation quietly. They advise making sure that there is a police officer at the game, and then waiting to see what happens. Carol is not fully persuaded to their point of view, but agrees to try the wait and see approach.

We have a few minutes to talk about the difficulties involved in shuffling career and family responsibilities. Carol comments on how invaluable it is to have a supportive husband.

As we talk, Carol moves into the hallways to begin another "walkabout." She sees a student standing in the boot room at the back of the school. "Help me to understand why you're not in class," she says. The student says she is late, and "scared to go to class." Carol offers to walk her into the classroom. As they walk, Carol finds out the girl's name, and as much as she can about her family.

Leaving the latecomer in drama class, Carol runs into Tim in the hallway. He stops her momentarily to tell her he has found out that the city is planning new soccer and football fields. Couldn't they be zoned near Winston Churchill? He volunteers to get as much information as he can if Carol will make the connection with city hall. "You have more clout," he tells her. Carol listens to him, walking slowly, and using her shoe to rub out the black marks on the floors

of the hallway.

Back in her office, Carol calls her daughter. "Hi sweetie, how are you feeling?"

When she hangs up, the phone rings again immediately. Central office has received a request from a student to transfer into Winston Churchill. I hear Carol say "it's a shaky situation." The problem seems to be packed classes. She perceives a need to hire more staff, and advises the caller that the issue of hiring more staff will be raised at the administration meeting the following morning. She ends the call by referring back to the student. "Well, bring him in..."

One of the library workers brings a volunteer into the office. She is a university student who has volunteered to work in the library for one afternoon a week. Carol discovers that the girl is a previous graduate of Winston Churchill. Carol suggests a volunteer placement other than the library. "Let's go talk to the department head and you can tell me if you'd like to do that."

When she returns she mumbles that she had better write down the volunteer's name...the phone rings again. As she replaces the receiver, Carol turns to talk to the drama teacher about the student who was late for his class. It seems the student is frequently absent, and Carol promises to ask Tim to pursue the matter. One of the student teachers on staff lounges in the doorway, and talks briefly to Carol about her father, who is unwell, and asks Carol what she did on the weekend.

There are a few quiet moments in the office, and Carol starts to write a letter formally advising a student that he is suspended from co-curricular and extra

curricular events. The suspension is the result of an incident that occurred at the first back-to-school dance.

One of the guidance counsellors pokes his head into the doorway to comment on the good meeting at noon hour. Tim brings in a colorful Pepsi umbrella. Pepsi Cola has formed a partnership with the school and the umbrellas will be used to brighten up the school cafeteria. The company also supplies a score clock for the gym, a little cash, and a scholarship in exchange for a monopoly on the soft drinks sold in the school.

The school also has a partnership with TransAlta. The school places many students into work experience situations with them. I am informed that 85 students were placed into some type of work experience program the previous year.

The art teacher stops at the office door to question why a student from Carol's advisor group was marked absent when he was in his class that afternoon. Carol realizes she made an error in marking attendance.

"I hate it when that happens. I'll fix it right now."

Another phone call. A few quiet minutes to read the mail. The school bell, that signals the end of a busy day. And after school? At four o'clock, Carol will be meeting with the father of a student who has a brain tumor. What will the tone of the meeting be like? Will the father advise the school on how they can be of assistance to the student, or will he be annoyed because the counsellor took the student to the hospital emergency last week when she complained of head pain?

Carol is not sure.

"I'll have to play it as it comes," she says.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CIRCULAR TRAIN:

#### CAROL'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

"I've always felt that standing still is the same as going backwards. I guess I'm always looking for more, for life that is better."

- Carol Steen

"My model of administration is a circular model. A series of concentric circles. At the core is a set of common beliefs and values that build the philosophy of the school and the mission statement. The administrative team has to be at the center, buying into this philosophy and sense of mission, and the staff needs to be connected to this center."

- Carol Steen

To understand Carol Steen's teaching and administrative philosophy is to visualize a circular unit moving on a progressive track. At the core of the circular model are people-oriented values, and a belief in the team approach. The energy that moves this circle forward is the belief that positive change is not only

possible, but that personal and organizational success provides meaning and a sense of fulfilment for the individual.

## AT THE CORE ARE PEOPLE - THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE TEAM

### THE INDIVIDUAL

Carol is people-oriented. This focus is first reflected in her concern for her family and her continual communication with them. It is also articulated moment by moment through her working day, as she greets staff and students by their first names, and inquires about matters that are of immediate importance to them.

Her style of teaching and administering the school demonstrates her beliefs in personal responsibility, an individual learning pace, and the value of mentoring to encourage others to develop to their full potential. Her interest in individuals is communicated through the words and actions that shape her day.

Intrinsic to her work, is care for her own family. A day at the end of October has been filled with discussions about how to curb absenteeism in the school. It is a topic of real concern to Carol and one that she seems to be actively struggling to understand. Ironically, and yet symbolically, her first task after lunch on this day is to call her husband to see if her daughter has gone to school. "She wasn't

feeling well," she says to me. Her husband is a teacher at the city's alternative school. She is put on hold, and then advised that he will be given the message to return her call as soon as possible. Half an hour later he returns her call and in the course of their brief conversation they talk about whether it would be a good idea for their daughter to see the doctor at the walk-in clinic later in the afternoon. Even in the busyness of her own work day, Carol remembers her responsibilities to her family members, and carries an awareness of their schedules, and the projects that will shape their day. She carries the role of wife and mother naturally into the density of her workplace. "Hello, dahling," she croons when her husband calls. She plays the role of responsible mother, calling her daughter's school to report and excuse her daughter's absence. The close relationships she has with her immediate family sheds light on the warm relationships she develops with her students and staff members at school. She treats them as members of her extended family.

Carol's interest in individuals is apparent in her friendly and open approach in her office and the school hallways. It is Winston Churchill's policy to address both staff and students by their first names in order to encourage collegial working relationships. Carol's amazing memory for names and news, and the warmth and informality of her approach to people brings this policy to life.

As she walks through the hallways, she calls out "hi" to the students she passes. "Hi Lauren", she says to one. "How are you feeling?" The girl responds that she is still not feeling very well. "Let me know if you're ever in the hospital again," says

Carol. "I want to visit you." She stops in the counselling office doorway to speak to one of the counsellors. "Oh Brett," she calls to a student passing by, "You're just about losing it on the other side." Looking up, I see that the student being addressed is slurping on a frozen drink, piled high over the edges of his cup. Saying good-bye to the counsellor, she catches up to another student. "Cole," she says, "You're in a bit of ka ka when you get home today. Sorry, I caught you. Why did you skip school yesterday?"

As part of her hallway persona, Carol assumes personal responsibility for the condition of the school, and expects others to do so as well. As she moves through the hallways, she pauses to rub out black marks on the floor, or to pick up garbage. Often, she reminds others to do the same; sometimes her example is enough to encourage students to bend down to pick up a piece of paper as she passes them. In matters as small, yet as significant as these, she seems to be impressing the students that they are accountable, not only for their own lives, but also for the well-being of those around them.

"Walking the talk" is one of the ways in which Carol explains the example she sets in the hallways. Since one of Carol's messages is personal accountability, she makes a point of living that message in other ways as well. When she makes a mistake, and realizes it, she says so. When a teacher tells her she has marked a student absent in Teacher Advisor period, who was actually in attendance, Carol realizes she has made a mistake. "I hate it when that happens. I'll fix it right now," is her response.

Alternatively, when she feels she has been successful, she audibly celebrates her successes too. After an assembly, two media guests offer the observation that the assembly was totally different from when they went to school. "I guess it starts at the top," says one of them. "The energy was electrifying." "Well," responds Carol, "Tell the world about it!" Her comfort in accepting responsibility for mistakes that she makes, as well as promoting her own successes, also gives other individuals tacit direction and permission to do so in their own lives. The importance of the individual life - its successes and failures - is reinforced in the school.

Carol's concern with personal accountability is connected to her emphasis on the necessity for an individual learning pace. She teaches Mathematics 24. The Math 24 curriculum centers on practical consumer math skills useful for a lifetime - banking, loans, mortgages, income tax, etc. In Carol's math class, her students write a pre-test at the end of the first month of instruction. If they pass the exam by 50% or more, they are free to leave the class for the rest of the semester, and still receive full credit, or they may choose to stay in order to improve their final mark in the course. Carol develops the individual focus further by holding conferences separately with each student following a test, to discuss his or her strengths and to offer specific instruction on concepts he or she found difficult. Carol describes teaching as a process of planting seeds and watching them bloom in kids. There is a sense of joy in this evidence of individual growth.

In much the same way, Carol articulates a philosophy of mentoring. She has

taken as a personal project, the task of preparing an assistant administrator to be prepared for the role of principal. "It may seem scary to become a principal," she says. "A person questions whether it will change his or her personality. But you have to bring your personality to the principalship within the formal roles you have to play." Assisting someone else to grow professionally and to become more comfortable with an expanded professional role gives Carol a sense of satisfaction. "I get huge joy in seeing the people I work with be successful. Everybody that comes in her here has huge potential."

A journalist who is interviewing Carol for a newspaper article asks her whether there are any things left that she wants to do. She chuckles. "There's always lots I want to do. If you get out of bed, and put your feet down, and say, 'This is good', you might as well quit right now. The status quo is like standing still. If you have a passion for things, and energy, you still have a chance to grow. I think there's still tons of opportunities for me to grow, in my own life, and in my career, to make a difference."

Because she believes in her own potential, in developing her own abilities, and in bringing her individuality to the roles she plays, she extends that belief system to others. The result is a school in which individuals are recognized, are valued, and are encouraged to "bloom."

## THE TEAM

A belief in the team approach is also part of the people values at the core of Carol's philosophic circle. When Carol talks about the team approach, she bases her vision on notions of inclusiveness, connectedness, and holistic learning. The concept of learning is central to everyone in the school - students, as well as teachers and administrators. "The team approach in administration is best," says Carol. "It means both sharing a vision, and building each other's vision."

Carol sees sharing a vision as an administrative team as a prerequisite for transferring it to the staff and students. In the circular model of administration that she has constructed, the administrative team is at the center. The administrative team is built around values that are centered on students and teachers. And while the administrative team is also at the center of the whirlwind of school life, there are a myriad connections to other groups and individuals in the school community.

Being at the center of activity is part of a lifetime pattern for Carol. "My father used to say that I wanted to organize the whole family around my personal agenda," Carol says. "And I guess I did. I wanted to be involved in everything." While Carol personally enjoys the feeling of being connected to all of the activity around her, she also believes others need to have this sense of connectedness and inclusion as well.

The administration team she works with shares this ideal of inclusion. In a

variety of ways, staff members, students, parents, and the wider community are connected to the administrative team in order to build the concentric circles of a whole and healthy organization.

At Winston Churchill, this vision is reflected in circular organizational structures and patterns, and the emphasis on communication and consensus. At the time of observing Carol, she had not read The Female Advantage yet she clearly outlined a similar model of administration built on her vision of interconnected, concentric circles. Hearing about the administrative model called the web of inclusion, gave her pause for a few seconds. "It's called the web of inclusion?" she mused. "Isn't that interesting? I haven't read about it. It was just like an instinct to me."

Throughout the school, the circular pattern of inclusion is repeated. Staff meeting agendas are shaped by the administration as well as any other members of the staff; the meetings are facilitated, not by Carol, but by a staff chairperson. The Total Quality Transformation (hereafter referred to as TQT) process in which the school is engaged, calls for teams of administrators, teachers, and students to generate possible solutions to persistent problems that affect the school. The Wellness Center meets monthly; representatives from community agencies join the counselling and administrative staff, and student representatives to become part of the comprehensive counselling program at the school. Parents are invited into daily contact with teachers and administrators, if necessary, through the Teacher Advisor program and by calling the office. Parents physically join the

school's circles of inclusion through home and school conferences, parent/teacher workshops, and co-curricular activities. The business community becomes part of the school's circle through The Business Partners in Education venture, and through becoming involved in the school's work experience program. The school programming offers inclusion for all students, regardless of interest or ability, through option programs, special education programs, and the International Baccalaureate program.

Communication is crucial to meet the goals of inclusion and interconnectedness. Carol's door is rarely closed. Her open-door policy means that on any given day, a teaching intern, a substitute teacher, a former grad, a police officer, a parent, a student with attendance difficulties, the janitor, her secretary, or a community volunteer may stop in for a brief chat. To complete the circle, Carol often makes it a point to join the informal discussions that occur in the staff room before classes start in the morning.

The door is left open symbolically too through the positive emotional environment that she works to establish. Praise flows from Carol on a continual basis. "You did a great job." "He's awesome." "If you pass Science, and you will..." "You're a good Mom out there." Her informal banter also helps to establish a comfortable atmosphere where an open exchange of ideas is welcomed. "Love ya," she says as she walks away from a discussion, singing a fragment of a song into which she has substituted a colleague's name.

Receiving, disseminating, and sharing information is another way in which

Carol keeps people connected. It is a perpetual function for her. She is an information clearing house; by passing on information she also promotes new connections between others in the school community. The issue of absenteeism provides an example. Carol collects information from individual students about why they are absent so frequently, and she passes this information on to the staff. She speaks to the students about the teachers' concerns regarding their absences. She calls parents to discuss the absenteeism of their child, and brings back to the student's subject area teachers, the information that she collects from the home. She refers parents to their child's teachers. She engages the TQT team to work with a staff team to address the issue of absenteeism in the school. Part of the process will involve teachers and students working together on a problem-solving committee. As she relays information and "hooks" people together for a common purpose, Carol is expanding her own ability to understand why certain students are absent so often, and she is constructing approaches to minimize absenteeism in the school.

Holistic thinking characterizes Carol's personal style of administration and teaching. Wellness, implying academic, physical, emotional and social health, is a touchstone of Carol's leadership. She searches for a healthy balance in her own life, and uses her influence to encourage healthy relationships and a healthy environment in the school. She articulates this holistic concern as she establishes behavior guidelines for students. "I believe very strongly that no one has the right to hurt anyone's skin, bones, or feelings." Carol's idea of "team" extends even to

her commitment to conflict resolution processes. "The key thing I learned was not to own the problem. If your purpose is kids, you go from "I" or "me" to "us."

Engaged in the demanding task of administering a school, Carol's core values are people - the individual and the team - moving from "I" to "us" ... but to what end? Carol brings people together to embrace change and to celebrate success. While her focus is people, it is these two long-range objectives - embracing change, and celebrating success - that provide the direction in which the circle is moving.

## MOVING ALONG THE TRACK

### EMBRACING CHANGE

Carol says that taking on an administrative role means introducing change. Change, at Winston Churchill, has meant improved working relationships, partnerships with big business, the development of programs like the International Baccalaureate program and the Wellness Center. It has meant consolidating the athletic, fine arts, technology, and special education programs. It has meant work experience, and becoming involved in community initiatives, and bringing the community into the school. Carol expresses her commitment to positive change by supporting initiatives like Total Quality Transformation in the

school.

During the summer holidays, without input from her staff, Carol made the decision to invite the TQT facilitators into the school. This is an unusual process for decision-making at Winston Churchill, and there were mixed reactions on the staff as to the outcomes to be expected from the process. Partially for these reasons, and partially because of her commitment to positive change, Carol is very attentive to what is being said in TQT discussions. Her hope is that the process will isolate areas of concern and will build teams to improve school effectiveness.

Carol sees herself as an ideas person. "Having lots of ideas," she says, "is both a strength and a weakness. It makes me want to be involved in so much." On the day she is speaking, she has just coordinated a new type of recognition assembly for the school, is preparing a presentation to make on the weekend at a housewives' convention, and has accepted the task of facilitating the alternative school's staff retreat later in the month.

She sees huge tasks for the future, but this means changing long-standing attitudes and perceptions. How does she usually introduce change? "Informally," she says. "Slowly." The tools she uses, she says, are verbal remarks that support the needed change, private conversations, and a questioning approach that encourages visualization of changes and how they could impact the school. She acknowledges the need to give the staff ownership of the changes in a school, so that changes can be carried on even in the absence of the leader who first initiated them.

Asked about her ideas of progress, and how she manages to get the school and the staff to buy into her vision, she says, "We're all on a playing field, on the same continuum; some are ahead of the center, some are further behind. Put yourself somewhere in the center. There are people ahead with strengths that you aspire to. You admire others behind you for the growth they have shown. The idea isn't to force them all into the middle, because that would be impossible. The idea is to move the whole continuum in the same direction - to move forward, all of us, together, in the same direction, even though we occupy different positions on the continuum."

Carol's commitment to change requires tremendous energy. Some of Carol's energy comes from her dynamic personality, and some from her value system. Some may come from a recognition of the spiritual dimensions around her. "I'm not big on organized religion," she says. "I'm not opposed to it either. I think I'm very spiritual, but not very religious. Have you read the Celestine Prophecies? Now, that's my religion! How can I explain it? There's a spiritual dimension around me; I'm part of it. I'm sceptical of the prophecies of other religions. So many organizations are not walking the talk. They say all people are equal, yet some are not represented in leadership. I believe in the basic commandments, like the Ten Commandments, or similar things in the Book of Koran -to me these make the spiritual religion."

When it comes to matters that she takes seriously, Carol is quick in her response. "Take your job seriously, and yourself lightly," she advises. "I think we

need to learn to laugh at ourselves, and to celebrate success."

## CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Carol makes recognition of success an integral part of her day. She announces team victories over the intercom and invites individuals and groups to the office to congratulate them personally on their note-worthy accomplishments. She makes it a habit to praise students and staff throughout the day as she moves through the school. She reinforces academic success through her support of the student of the month program, recognition assemblies, and the awards program. She is keen about the Mr. and Ms. Churchill awards, given to students who exemplify outstanding citizenship qualities.

At the same time that she distributes praise and congratulations to others, she also asks for positive feedback from them for projects that she has undertaken. While she encourages others with her praise, she constantly receives praise for her own ideas and performance. The result is a climate of positive and creative energy that embraces the school population and circulates through it.

Imagine a circle of people, connected to one another through the dreams and visions that they share, moving along a track of change, celebrating their

successes together as they go. This is Carol's administrative model at work. This is her vision of educational leadership.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BALANCING PEOPLE AND PAPER: CAROL'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

"Administrators need an internal balance and an external balance. The internal balance is heart and brain. The external balance is people and paper."

- Carol Steen

Carol's work day is composed of hundreds of brief encounters. For much of the average day, she moves quickly from setting to setting. Although busy, her days do not seem harried. There is a smoothness that suggests a clear sense of purpose and a well-designed organizational structure. There is variety in the nature of Carol's activities that corresponds to a balance between people and paper.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL LEADER

Carol, the principal, is the educational leader of the high school.

Understanding of this role is woven through the activities of teaching, of attending meetings, of supervising and managing, of disciplining, of officiating, and of communicating both inside and outside of school. Her career path and personal organizational skills point to a woman who is aware of what it means to be a leader in the educational domain.

"Being a principal," says Carol, "is not much different from being a teacher, other than the buck stops here. It's like I've become the teacher of the teachers. If I can excite them to be their best, it moves into the classroom. Your teaching circle changes shape, but you still do all the things you'd do in the classroom. Helping individuals to develop and grow like you would with students who are not learning. All the things necessary for teaching and learning are still present...your classroom just has different bodies in it."

Even though she is "teacher of the teachers", Carol maintains an active teaching presence with the students by teaching one class. This year it is Mathematics 24. By doing so she keeps her own teaching skills honed, while staying in touch with conditions "on the front lines." As a teacher, she works and speaks energetically and positively. She lectures and writes on the board briskly, and spends considerable time with individuals. She hands out lifesavers in the classroom, and often stands at the door to say good-bye to students as they leave the room. Occasionally, she covers classes for teachers who have taken on a special project, and need class time to accomplish their task.

Carol also acts as a teacher advisor to a small group of students, as do the

other teachers in the school. The members of her group, approximately twelve students, crowd into her office at mid-morning during the Teacher Advisor (hereafter referred to as TA) period, and take a peppermint from the jar on her desk. As they lounge against the wall, or settle into the chairs in her office, she reads the daily announcements. Her voice is cheerful and her energy is infectious, as she promotes school activities and student opportunities. Throughout the semester, she will review their timetables, and academic progress, and offer encouragement to individuals in her group who seem discouraged.

Carol also notes absences from school - not a popular activity with her group. When she advises one young man that he is absent from school too often, he pulls away from her slightly. She notices the body language, and audibly reads the slogan written on his T-shirt. "I like it," she says. The student relaxes and settles back to listen to the rest of the announcements. The announcement time is an interactive activity in Carol's advisor group. One student questions why the U.S. Marine Corp is campaigning through their school bulletin. Carol's response is that the student has asked a very good question. There are a flurry of other questions. Carol responds, "Do you need some help?", "You can start anytime," "Let me know," and "I can help if you want to pop back." One student requests a paper he has left with Carol. She cannot find it but promises, "I WILL find it." In a few brief minutes, the advisor period is over, the students move to their next scheduled class, and Carol has made personal contact with how the management of the school is affecting individual students.

In a wider educational role in the school, Carol checks on the health of the various programs and curriculum departments. "Are they pumped?" she asks of the basketball team when speaking to their coach. She congratulates teams and coaches on their accomplishments on a personal basis in her office, and officially, at school functions. She concerns herself with even small details that will assist with the recognition of deserving students, such as checking to see if honor roll stamps have been included on student certificates. She encourages volunteers and teaching interns into the school to assist with various programs. She is open to new ideas that are proposed by the staff, and encourages new opportunities for students. Carol likes to point out available conferences and continuing education possibilities to teachers on her staff. She often initiates invitations to speakers who are invited to make presentations to the staff or student body. Through an intercom on her desk, Carol has immediate access to this educational community that she is leading. It is a role that is woven through all of the other roles of her position.

#### HEAD OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

The administrative team is at the center of the school's organizational structure. It is composed of the principal, Carol, and three vice-principals, all men. The key administrative functions have been divided between the four

members. One of the administrators is in charge of time tabling; one, of the International Baccalaureate program; another, attendance; but, all four assist each other. They meet weekly to discuss matters of school concern, and to make decisions to address the well-being of the school and the wealth of activity in the school. Carol chairs these meetings at the conference table in her office.

Together, the four administrators review the weekly calendar, the caretaker's schedule, the format of school events, the supervision of school events, and staff meeting agenda items. When routine matters have been set aside, the four administrators engage in either lighthearted banter or serious debate about issues that have been brought to light by the day's business items.

For example, at the end of one administrators' meeting, Carol remarks that the Halloween Dance has sometimes been trouble in the past, simply because of the nature of the event. She reminisces that she was unable to attend last year's dance, and then adds, "Seems like every time I go away, you guys have problems." She chuckles smugly, and the three men look at each other with raised eyebrows.

On another morning, the discussion is more serious. They are discussing the viability of the TQT process in the school. "I think the culture of the school is open to it," says one of the vice-principals. "I think the school culture is changing," says another. Carol speaks, "I think that's a fair statement. Where's it coming from?" Carol immediately affirms the speaker, and gives him a voice, judging his comment to be fair, even before she has heard the proof. "I think the school culture is changing," he responds. "Maybe I'm out to lunch." "No, no," says

Carol, "not out to lunch. Maybe dessert. But you're touching a cord that came up at the staff meeting. They're saying we have no time. There are things that happen that are out of our hands...they're stressed." On mornings such as this the time set aside for the administrative team to meet seems much too short.

Speaking to a reporter about the administrative team, Carol says, "We have a strong administrative team. There's no one super hero. The students were strong academically before I arrived, a credit to the teachers and administration ahead of me. We have made changes and additions. We have a team of people moving in the same direction. A strong team has become stronger and our kids benefit." Carol summarizes the strength of the school with a chuckle. " Strong administration, strong teaching, strong support staff. There's lots of energy in the office. I ask myself, 'Would I want to get up and go to work in that environment?' The goal is to answer 'Yes'. We want a welcoming, energetic, exciting environment."

## SUPERVISOR

Aside from leading the administrative team and being the educational leader, Carol provides a great deal of supervision within the school. In the morning before classes begin, she conducts "walkabouts", touring the hallways. She moves briskly, calls out greetings to staff and students and makes quick suggestions to

students about picking up garbage from the floor, or about getting to class on time. Often, she stops briefly to make inquiries about how an individual student is doing.

One morning, as she moves through the hallways after classes have begun, she notices a group of noisy boys playing with a hackey sack outside of the cafeteria doors. "You guys want to take that into the cafeteria? Thanks," she calls. The boys slowly move into the cafeteria. On her next circuit through the hallways, she pokes her head into the cafeteria only to be flagged down by the cook. "Can the boys take the hackey sack back out to the hallway?" she asks. "It falls into my soup!" Carol throws back her head in a delighted laugh. "That's the nicest way I've ever been corrected," she tells the cook and signals the boys back out into the hallway, with a caution to be quieter.

As she moves around the school during class time, Carol is also checking for students who are not on spares, but who are "skips." Peeking into the boot room one morning, she sees a new student huddling in the corner. "Help me to understand why you're not in class," Carol says. "I don't know anybody. I'm scared to go," the student responds. "I'll walk you into class," says Carol. As they walk, Carol finds out the girl's name and as much as she can about the family.

Part of Carol's supervision responsibilities are to ensure that staff members are assigned to the projects of the school, and that they fulfill their supervisory duties. Delegating responsibilities to a professional staff member is an interesting process of negotiation and repartee. After a committee meeting, Carol pulls one of the

teachers aside as the others leave. "Do you want to be a leader of one of the TQT teams?" she asks. There is obvious hesitancy on the part of the teacher. "I won't hold you to your answer right now, " Carol says quickly. "I'll let you gell on that." The teacher leaves, but it is obvious that the negotiations are far from over.

## MANAGER

Carol's management tasks within the school are greater, however, than the immediate day to day supervision of the school's activities. As the leader in charge of the educational program at the school, Carol hires new staff and evaluates their teaching performance.

Hiring new staff seems to energize Carol. It is a sign that the school population is growing, and that finances are in place to continue developing the Winston Churchill program. As part of the hiring process, Carol checks out professional references with colleagues in the division in order to short-list applicants for formal interviews.

It is important for both management and educational reasons to maintain good relationships with staff. Carol is empathic and sympathetic to staff members who come to her for support or advice. Much of the evaluation that she does appears to be informal evaluation, as she listens and responds to teachers throughout a normal working day.

For example, on a "walkabout" in the hallway, Carol bumps into the student council advisor. She tells Carol that she has been talking to the council about a fundraising idea - taking pictures, and printing them with a laser printer, transposing the face from the photograph onto another body. The customers, she says, could prescan the choices, which would include a variety of poses, such as sports and movie personalities. Carol listens, chewing thoughtfully on a peppermint. "It sounds really neat," Carol responds, "See what you can do."

Later on the same morning, Carol slips into the gym teacher's office to ask whether she has followed up on a phone message that was given to her. When the teacher responds that the task "is done", Carol asks about her cold, and then about the volleyball zone competitions on the weekend. "How are we doing?" Carol asks. The teacher responds that the team's chances are really strong, and that they have already "beat" all of the teams that they will meet later in the month at the provincials. Carol smiles as she turns to leave the office.

Through small incidences like these, Carol builds rapport with her staff and constructs an understanding of the staff dynamic in the school. With this knowledge, she can move toward the formal evaluation task. While I did not see Carol engaged in a formal evaluation process, she shared with me the results of her own most recent evaluation, The Educational Administrator Effectiveness Profile. She was satisfied with her evaluation and proud to share the results. Understandably, teachers in her school will benefit from being evaluated by someone who feels that the process is an empowering one.

Sorting through the administrative mail one morning, Carol notes an Alberta Education document sent to the school entitled Quality Teaching. One of the vice-principals mentions that he has already studied the document and found the connection between teacher certification and teaching competencies a shortsighted concept. It would be, he says, a real nightmare to institute. Carol accepts the feedback by nodding, and raising her eyebrows. "I'll look at it carefully too," she says. Clearly, Carol keeps the task of teacher evaluation in mind throughout the year, and is actively engaged in establishing a fair perspective before the actual evaluation paperwork is done.

The management of the building also falls into Carol's job description. She establishes the caretaker's duties and he keeps her informed of problems within the facility. She is informed about a new coffee stain on the library carpet, about the mess left in the bathroom by "the phantom pooper", about false alarms from the security system, and about water leaks in the pipes. On all of these issues regarding the physical plant, Carol is expected to make a decision and formulate a plan of action.

The decisions she makes seem to vary with the day and with the problem. She personally investigates the stain on the carpet, interviewing the teacher who was supervising a student workshop when the spill happened. She asks the caretaker to clean up the mess in the bathroom, and to keep her informed if it happens again. She discusses the problem of false alarms with the other administrators and resolves to confer with divisional office and the security service providers.

She dashes to answer the distress call of the caretaker and helps him to control the water flow from the broken pipe, before returning to her office to call for assistance from the maintenance department at divisional office.

While some of her management roles call for Carol to be highly visible, others are quiet and clerical in nature. She signs letters requesting cumulative files from other schools for new students. She hands out keys for the weight room to inquiring students. She approves or rejects student applications for admission once classes are underway each semester. She organizes information packages to give to the staff at the beginning of the year. She opens and distributes mail, and writes thank you letters and notes of appreciation to staff members and supporters of the school. In matters small or large, Carol, the manager, is interested in the things that touch the life of the school.

#### SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE

Carol's responsibilities as a principal also take her outside of the school on frequent occasions. Besides making frequent telephone connections with the superintendent and other personnel at the divisional office, Carol meets regularly with the administrators of other schools in the Lethbridge Public School Division to discuss matters of divisional and educational policies that will impact her school. Observed activities at the administrators' meeting included: a discussion of

three year educational plans, framing the divisional budget, and developing a calendar for the division's computer consultant.

Carol keeps her thumb on the heartbeat of educational change across Alberta in a variety of other ways as well. She is a member of the Provincial Council of School Administrators, and has served as the group's president and past president. She has been involved in developing the CALM curriculum, and Project 99, an alternate program for troubled adolescents. She works closely with the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge to offer continuing education opportunities for educators. She is a popular guest speaker and facilitator at conferences and workshops. She maintains contact with the school's business partners in education, as well as other community organizations. Her concern to maintain a good working relationship with the business community prompts her to find teachers willing to administer a survey sent to the school from a business interest group.

Outside of school, Carol is an active participant on committees, in clubs, and educational organizations. In doing so, she is representing her school, and acting as an advocate for her students and staff. She is also collecting information necessary for effective educational leadership, and is often able to impact decisions that will ultimately be significant, not only to her high school, but to education in the province.

## SCHOOL PERSONA

Inside of the school, Carol chooses a facilitating role at meetings, leaving the chair to someone other than herself. For example, at Wellness Center meetings, she sits next to the school counsellor who chairs the meetings, and acts as a co-host, a listener, an information source, and a facilitator of open discussion around the table. For example, at one Wellness Center meeting, the group is drawing up a calendar of theme weeks for the school. Another educator from the group remarks that "there are school holidays that week. We're gone the whole week, right?" "No, but nice try," Carol responds. "I'm in though," she adds, "if someone votes that way!" At times like this, the attention often shifts to Carol to clarify information, which she does in a friendly, and frequently, humorous way, to create group rapport. Her presence at school meetings appears to cement the importance of the gathering, and serves notice that she supports the work of the group.

Carol assists in drawing up an agenda for the staff meetings and she is an obvious participant in information sharing and discussion at these meetings, but she does not manage the meetings or control the time allotted to discussion items. At staff meetings, as at other gatherings, it becomes clear that Carol is an ideas person who prompts discussion, and from it, change. The Total Quality Transformation meetings within the school are a case in point. Carol joins eagerly into discussions with other administrators and staff members at these meetings.

Her commitment to the ideas-generating process is so great, however, that when the facilitators seem unsure of how to proceed, Carol quickly shifts perspective and becomes part of their discussion about how to continue the brainstorming and problem-solving process.

While she does not directly advise any student groups, or participate in student meetings, Carol frequently "touches base" with the student council executive and their teacher advisor. The tone of these brief informal encounters is both inquisitive and affirming. She stops a student council executive member in the hallway to ask about Halloween plans. "What will that look like? How will that happen?" she asks. When the student explains the Halloween plan to put a display into the school foyer, Carol responds, "That's wonderful."

While she cannot guide all school committee work, Carol does put into motion the policies and procedures that shape such things as subject area organization and special interest committees, such as a textbook rental committee. She concerns herself with how these committees are operating, what work is being accomplished, and what obstacles need to be overcome to fulfill their mandates.

Her concern with the dynamics of effective communication spills over into her organization of parent teacher conferences. How can stations for meeting teachers best be organized to facilitate easy access and enough privacy for a free discussion? Together with her administrative team, she generates a plan that builds on, and expands, last year's success.

## DISCIPLINARIAN

The communication ideal is central to Carol's management of discipline within the school. Her own conversations with parents are often the result of calls she makes when she has a disciplinary concern. In the role of disciplinarian, Carol frequently becomes a counsellor again, listening to parents' stories, gently reframing some of their perspectives, and offering next-step suggestions. She manages much the same approach when speaking to students, although, with them, her tone is often a little steelier.

Fairly often, these conversations involve students who are chronically absent or who have skipped a particular class. Occasionally, Carol deals with a student who has shown blatant disrespect for school rules or school personnel. In these cases, Carol's tone remains understanding but there is also a clear sense that justice will be served; Carol is not indecisive in dealing with disciplinary matters. In fact, hearing a rumor about potential trouble-making at the school's weekend football game, Carol called administrators together for a quick meeting. Her first instincts were to call in the boys identified as potential trouble-makers, and to speak to them before any disruptions occurred. The rest of the administration team convinced Carol to step up supervision at the event and to take a "wait and see" approach - one that does not seem to be second nature to Carol!

When teachers and other staff members carry complaints to Carol that involve taking disciplinary action, Carol also makes some immediate response. For

example, when a teacher complains that there are interpersonal problems between students in her art classroom and that two girls are harassing a third student, Carol immediately calls the two girls into her office. The disciplinary process is a conversational one, in which Carol leads the girls to describe their actions in the classroom, and to imagine the impact that those actions would have on them if they were the receiving party. The session ends with clear instructions to the two girls to end the harassment and to take responsibility for their behavior in the classroom. "What can you do to fix it? ...Not her, you ... Carry this talk with you...think about your attitude."

One October morning, Carol is reviewing mail in her office when a teacher rushes in and breathlessly announces, "Fight!" Carol jumps from her chair and strides through the outer office calling to Tim as she passes his room, "I need you." The two push their way through a crowd of students circling two grappling combatants in the hallway. As Carol and Tim approach, the fighters disappear into the crowd. Carol and Tim manage to move the gathered students through the hallway and into their classrooms. While Carol continues to monitor the hallways after this mid-morning break, Tim talks to individuals to try to find out who was fighting and why. After 20 minutes, the two meet in the office and Tim has an outline of the event to share with Carol. Carol praises Tim for finding the information saying, "The kids trust you." Together, they make arrangements to speak to the two students who are in conflict.

Carol is committed to proactive discipline, promoting the presence in the

school of the Lethbridge police officer assigned to Winston Churchill. The officer is invited to attend the first day assembly to open the school year, as well as to be present at extra curricular activities, and to confer with Carol, other teachers, and students within the school. Beyond the immediate issues of each day, Carol also tries to develop policies that are a response to disciplinary concerns, such as vandalism, absenteeism, tardiness, or smoking infractions. She reviews school statistics and drafts amendments to policies to alleviate as many problems as possible for the future. Part of this proactive process involves discussions with other high school principals both individually and at the administrative meetings. For example, at the November administrators' meeting, approximately 20 minutes is spent on discussing the smoking policies in various high schools. Carol remarks that she is seeking new angles to an old problem.

One of Carol's tasks after imposing disciplinary action is to write a letter informing parents of the incident that prompted the action, and the reason why this specific action was taken. The letter establishes which school rule the student has broken, and what conditions apply before the student will be welcomed back into the classroom. A copy of the letter is filed at the school; another goes to the superintendent. Writing these letters is necessary to bring closure to the disciplinary process and to re-establish the communication between home and school. Keeping communication flowing between school and home is very important to Carol. Her office is open to parents with questions and she is responsive to their inquiries. The disciplinary process is the catalyst for many

discussions with parents. The content of these discussions ranges from questions about the school's response to student actions, to discussions of underlying causes of the student's behavior, and agreement about ways to address the individual student's needs in the future.

#### HOSTESS, FIGURE HEAD, AND CHAMPION

Whether in small groups or large ones, Carol seems to be aware of her high public profile. In many ways, her personal image equals the school's image in the eyes of the community. Carol conspicuously displays framed newspaper clippings about herself and the school in her office. It is as if she invites visitors to notice her pride in the school's accomplishments, as well as her own, suggesting that the two are closely linked.

One of the phrases Carol uses most frequently is, "It's good for the school." This phrase is employed to explain why she has taken on new responsibilities or public speaking engagements, or to justify the greater work load of new projects within the school. It explains why she seeks public relations opportunities and enjoys media attention.

This close identification of the school and the person leads Carol to take criticism personally too. When a representative from a community agency complains that the student council has not returned some plastic boxes that they

borrowed for a student workshop, Carol's response is immediate. "I'm bugged by the fact that you don't have those supplies back. Let's look for them right now." She spends a good portion of the morning physically searching for the missing boxes, as well as interviewing the students, the student council advisor, the janitor, and the maintenance department at the divisional office to locate the supplies and return them to the community organization.

That the school is a second home to Carol is demonstrated by the fact that she plays the role of hostess on many occasions. When expected visitors enter the school, she is often the first to greet and to welcome them. When Winston Churchill hosts a meeting, Carol moves around the room, passing out juice and donuts, and making the guests comfortable.

Interviewed by a local reporter, she openly promotes herself, her family, the school, the teachers, the students, the City of Lethbridge, and the teaching profession. Her pride in all of these is unmistakable. As she speaks, she uses animated body language and visual aids to emphasize her points. She builds a warm and positive image through her enthusiasm and informality.

A high public profile is important to Carol. She uses it to conduct business, and to make change in the school. As she conducts her walkabouts one morning, Tim falls into step beside her. He is bursting with the news that a service club is planning to build new soccer and football fields in the city. Someone ought to go to city hall and ask for zoning for these facilities near Winston Churchill. "It should be you," he says. "You have more clout." It seems that much of Carol's

satisfaction in her job comes from using her positive public image to make changes that will benefit the school.

## PERSONAL ORGANIZATION

The huge variety of tasks that Carol undertakes suggests that her personal organization system is well-constructed. One sunny fall afternoon, Carol moves across her office, and pulls open a drawer at the bottom of her office cupboard. 20 stenographer note pads spill out on the floor in the sunshine. Carol sits down cross-legged beside them. "This is my life," she says.

Inside the stenopads are running notes about everything that Carol has done over the past 12 or so years. Names, dates, important occurrences, appointments, daily reminders to herself - all these and more are scribbled into these books. She can flip through the pages and muse, "This was a hard time for me," or "Things really changed for the better here."

There are lists - things to do today - things to do this week. Carol still uses this organizational system. At the end of each day, she circles the jobs that have been left undone and carries them forward to the next day. The stenographer pad is part of a clipboard portfolio that she carries with her wherever she goes. The portfolio also contains writing paper, cards, envelopes, and stamps. "At free moments," she says, chuckling at the thought of free time, "I always have

something to do."

Carol's career path itself illustrates her organizational sense. Carol graduated from high school at Winston Churchill, the same school where she now sits behind the principal's desk. Originally, she wanted to be a social worker, so she took a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and psychology, finishing the degree in two and a half years. Because she was playing on The University of Lethbridge volleyball team, however, she wanted to stay in school longer, and so she registered in the faculty of Education.

After graduation at The University of Lethbridge, she took a job as a counsellor in the public school system. After working in two Lethbridge schools, Carol took a one year leave of absence for parenting reasons, and then returned to teach and counsel at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute. Following three years of high school experience, she applied for a position of assistant principal at a junior high school. She filled the position of assistant principal at two different schools, before being promoted to principal, first at Allan Watson School, and then at Winston Churchill. Throughout these years, she worked on her Masters' degree in education.

Her career path in education shows a steady determination to experience new levels of responsibility and challenge. She demonstrates that her quest for personal change is not yet over when she explains that she would like to begin doctoral work soon. "It'll open more doors for me, if I'm looking for it," she says. "I've been blessed. Doors have opened for me, people have believed in me, and

given me opportunities when I needed them." Whether through blessing or determination, Carol's organizational abilities are clearly demonstrated both through her personal life and through the roles that she plays in her current position as principal of Winston Churchill High School.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SPEAKING:

#### CAROL'S USE OF LANGUAGE

"Help me to understand."

- Carol Steen

If there is one characteristic that binds all of her administrative abilities together, it is Carol's excellent communication skills. Her language draws listeners into a magical circle of warmth and possibility. Carol's language is the language of inclusion.

Whether she is expressing her own emotions, consciously empowering others, teaching, or organizing school life, Carol's words and gestures embrace those around her. At the same time, it is through her choice of language that Carol elicits information, and so constructs the understanding she needs to do her job well.

My first experience of Carol was through her voice. Seconds before she entered the school's main office where I sat waiting, I heard her voice in the hallway. "Good morning, everybody. How are we all this morning? Did you start

without me? Look what I brought you!"

An analysis of Carol's speech shows a pattern of language that elicits information, includes the listener in the action, and builds positive rapport. The catch-phrases of Carol's speech are: "Let's...", "Help me to understand", "What would that look like?", "How nice!", "That's a good question", and "It's good for the school."

#### INFORMAL AND HAPPY TO ESTABLISH WARM RELATIONSHIPS

Carol's tone and the words that she chooses are usually happy and informal ones, especially when she is engaged in personal conversation. The phone rings. Carol says, "Hello," listens, and then chuckles. "Oh good!" she exclaims. "Oh geez!" as she continues to listen, and finally, "That's great. I'm delighted!"

A reporter calls to ask Carol for an interview. The request is unexpected and seems to disarm and excite her. "You're doing an article on overachievers and you thought of me? Help me to understand what you mean by overachiever? Today? Oh, isn't this exciting!"

One of the vice-principals walks into her classroom to tell her about something funny that has happened. As he leaves, she turns to the class and says affectionately, "He's crazy." The students nod and some chuckle.

This informal use of language often seems to create connections between

Carol and others. She calls the principal of another high school when she is in the process of hiring to check on a reference on an applicant's resume. The conversation seems fairly formal and not very productive until Carol's tone becomes less formal. "Well, I was really hoping you could give me the scoop on her," she says, and for the next few minutes she listens to anecdotes that will help her reach a decision.

Carol also employs informal language to coax agreement from staff members, and to foster understanding with them. When delegating a task that no one seems to want, she suggests to a teacher, "Do you want to take a boo at it?" As she inquires about a colleague she asks another teacher, "Is she not a happy camper?" When a teacher comes to Carol to ask if she can help supervise a field trip, Carol also answers informally, and it seems, honestly, "Shoot! I wish I could go, but I have to fly to Ottawa for a conference on that day."

At a school assembly, Carol dramatically announces to the audience that the school teams are "... out there kicking butt!" The students cheer and whistle at this statement.

When a problem in the school arises, Carol generally responds informally and on a personal level as well. The janitor tells her that someone whom Carol has dubbed "The Phantom Pooper" has made another mess in the boy's bathroom. "Gee, that makes me cranky!" Carol says emphatically. The janitor smiles and nods in agreement.

Carol's quick responses, her informality, and her generally positive and happy

tone buy a ready acceptance from those to whom she is speaking. She is perceived as honest, and her motives appear translucent. Speaking to Carol is speaking to someone real, whose attention is on the present moment and the present interaction.

### EMPOWERING TO BUILD A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

It seems likely that Carol's determination to build the self-esteem of others is, or was at one time, a conscious decision. Praise is ever-present in her conversations, leading to the conclusion that empowering others has become second-nature to her.

Ken walks into the school office one morning wearing a pair of overalls over his suit. No explanation for the attire is given, or asked for. "You look great in those overalls," Carol says and then turns her attention to another task.

The rookies on the football team are required to dress up as girls on Hurricane Rookie Day. Carol sees one football player wearing a curly blonde wig and a flowered dress. "Come here!" she exclaims, "You look quite wonderful."

When she is speaking to worried parents, encouragement flows from Carol. "You're a good Mom out there. Remember that. Hang in there." When students see Carol in the hallway, they frequently want to tell her about their new projects or plans. Her responses seem geared to add fuel to their energy and

determination. "It sounds really neat...see what you can do" or "Good luck on that."

Even calling students by their first names seems to create a mood of positive energy. Carol's memory for names is fantastic. As she moves through the hallways on supervision, she addresses nearly every student she meets by his or her first name. There are 750 students in the school.

A grade eleven student is brought to Carol by another administrator because she has confessed to skipping classes. Carol quickly recalls that this student is also volunteering with some special needs kids in the special education program. "You're important to them, you know. They really need you, and look up to you." The personal connection and the positive remarks build rapport between Carol and the student.

This technique becomes very useful in her disciplinary procedures, as well as in discussions with troubled students. To a student who seems discouraged, and has pulled away from many school activities, Carol says, "You should go back to Tai Kwon Do. You're really good." A smile flits across the tired expression on the girl's face.

The Student Council will be welcoming a Japanese delegation to the school. The student council has asked one of Winston Churchill's students who takes classes in the Japanese language, to translate the welcoming speech into Japanese. When she sees this young man in the hallways, Carol calls out, "Remember you're our main man tomorrow!" He beams in response. A few

corridors later, she sees the student council executive member who wrote the original speech, and her praise is just as genuine. "Very nice statement that you're making!"

Carol employs the use of praise and encouragement to affect a positive atmosphere in her classroom as well. As she walks into the Math 24 room, she addresses a remark to a student sitting in one of the rows at the side of the room. "Nice to see you here. Your attendance has been real good." It is significant that her praise is attached to a specific behavior and is designed to encourage more of the same behavior in the listener.

Similar patterns of praise and encouragement mark Carol's relationship with her peers. In a meeting with the school's administrative team, Carol announces the date of a school achievement event. She is told that the date she has announced is wrong and that she should look for the achievement event on her calendar in December rather than November. Carol flips the page of her calendar. "You know, you're absolutely right! You guys are awesome. I have it there too!"

It may be worth noting that Carol rarely apologizes. If she makes a mistake, she occasionally scolds herself, but when speaking to others, she praises their concern or the attention to detail that has brought her mistake to light, rather than offering an apology.

Her enthusiasm and positive approach gives an emotional boost even to those who are routinely performing a job-related task. Carol phones Gilbert Patterson School to check on her daughter's attendance and speaks to one of the recording

secretaries in the office. "Hi, it's Carol Steen. Have you done attendance yet? Super! Is my daughter there? She is? Super! Thanks." The cheeriness of the conversation and the praise that accompanies it are certain to lighten someone's day.

Probably the greatest gift Carol gives others is her attitude of open and personal acceptance. This acceptance is extended to both students and adults. When a student pokes his head around her open office door and asks, "Are you busy?", Carol invariably puts down her pen and says, "Not too busy to see you." Nearly the identical exchange occurs between Carol and students or staff members half a dozen times a day. With some members of the administrative and teaching staff, the affirmation is even more affectionate. Begun as a joke, it has become a habit. "Love you," someone will call as a parting remark. "Not as much as I love you," Carol responds.

#### INCLUSIVE PRONOUNS TO MAKE DECISIONS

Carol builds the perception that she is integrally and emotionally involved in the affairs of the school by the casual and affectionate language that she uses. At the same time that she creates the impression that she cares deeply about school issues, she also draws others into the decision-making process, establishing partnerships with teachers, students and parents.

The pronouns "we" and "us" pepper her speech. When she uses the personal pronoun "I" it is usually in the context of imagining how the other person might be thinking or feeling. For example, when Carol is speaking to a student with nine unexcused absences in Biology 20, the question of whether the student should audit the course, challenge the course, or continue the course with better attendance is raised. "The most important part of this is: Can I get enough to make me successful in Biology 20?" Then, Carol employs the use of inclusive pronouns to generate solutions to the problem. "We need to talk to the head of the biology department - that would be Kevin. He could give us a better picture of what to do."

When Carol uses the pronouns "me" or "my" , it is generally to establish her personal response to an issue. She does so in ways that avoid confrontation and force the listener to consider the personality behind the response. For example, still speaking to the Biology student, Carol says, "My biggest need is to know that you've got the background you need, okay?" The student nods. "I understand," she says. "Thanks." What began as a disciplinary concern has become a joint problem-solving venture between student and principal.

## COUNSELLING TO INITIATE PERSONAL CHANGE

Carol frequently relies on the language of counselling to promote understanding of situations and people. Carol's past experience as a school

counsellor gives her a natural edge when she deals with students or parents in crisis.

At a meeting involving a troubled student, the student's mother, the school counsellor, and herself, Carol takes the initiative in the discussion. Her first statement clarifies her values to the group and communicates her commitment to join them in finding workable solutions to the student's problems. "I want you to know that you have a right to be here, to be educated, and to be comfortable and happy. If someone has broken that right, it needs to be fixed. I need to know what needs to be fixed and who you have talked to."

After hearing from both mother and daughter, Carol summarizes what she sees to be the heart of the problem and indicates her response to that problem. "Really, it seems to me that you're avoiding people. I think you're cheating yourself. There's a benefit in learning together rather than in learning alone. I know there's hurt and rejection, but we can fix it." Then she asks the crucial question. "So, do you want to fix it?"

When the girl says, "Yes", Carol cheers and exclaims. "Yes! Now, that's the Mandy spirit! It takes lots of courage to fix it when it's not your fault...I believe very strongly that no one has the right to hurt anyone's skin, bones or feelings... we can use conflict resolution to address that."

When the girl stalls at accepting this quick next-step solution, Carol uses inclusive pronouns and imaginative visualization to regenerate the student's emotional cooperation. "We need to get past the need to have someone in each

class who is a close friend. It's back to the confidence thing. What if everyone in the class wore, 'I like Mandy buttons?' Could you go in? Tomorrow I'll go in there and hand out 'I like Mandy buttons'" All four participants laugh. The girl is again an active participant in the process. Throughout the discussion, Carol uses body language to support her words. When she talks about smoothing some of the rough experiences the girl has had in the classroom, Carol "smooths" the table with the palm of her hand as she speaks.

After a little more discussion, Carol calls for a commitment. Her use of pronouns now changes. "Now you have a choice. Are you just going to feel rejected, or are you going to make new friends?" When the student indicates a willingness to stay in school and to participate in the conflict resolution process, Carol sets up an appointment time with the counsellor, and ends the session with a clear statement of direction, "Do this. It's important." This type of directive statement is rare to hear from Carol. It comes occasionally at the end of a disciplinary session, or as in this case, when agreement has been hard to reach.

Most frequently, Carol uses a counselling approach when speaking to parents about disciplinary concerns. "Kids lie because they want to avoid conflict," she says to a parent, framing the problem facing a student in the school. She engages the parent in the decisions that need to be made by her use of inclusive language. "Hmmm...let's refer him for an assessment, if that's okay for you and him. Then we can have a meeting and come up with an action plan to help him be more successful." She speaks softly. "yeah...yeah...it's an information opportunity."

The parent seems to need a chance to talk; Carol listens, empathizing with the parent. "Ah...ah... and that's the bigger issue...oh, darn, that's a sad story." She invites the parent to come to a parent meeting at the school the following Thursday and plants the idea that the facilitator is "a really neat lady...it might be a nice connection for you." The conversation ends with an encouragement to "hang in there."

#### INCLUSIVE QUESTIONING TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Carol frequently uses a questioning approach to build rapport. In talking to a parent whose child has skipped a day of classes, Carol turns to the computer for information, while verbally questioning the parent. "Do you think he missed the whole day? Yes, he missed a double class in the afternoon. What a rascal! He'll spend an hour here after school. I wonder where he was? He's a nice boy, Dianne. Don't give up on him."

Reporting to another parent on the telephone about a discipline concern, Carol uses inclusive questioning which seems designed to buy agreement or at least to establish a partnership perspective. "Don't you wish we had the vision of hindsight ahead of time? Don't you wish we had training for our most important role? Nobody said parenting would be easy. You're a good Mom out there."

Carol uses inclusive questioning when she is building rapport with a student

as well. Speaking to her Math students in individual conferences, she speaks in a low tone, leaning toward the student. She assumes a similar body position. For example, in speaking to Jon, who is rubbing his forehead, she leans her head on her elbow and begins to rub her head as well. She moves into a position where she can make eye contact and reacts with surprise and interest as he answers her questions. "Does that make sense? You know what I need to have you do? So what do we want to do?" The attentive voice and posture and the use of inclusive questioning establish personal rapport inside the atmosphere of a busy classroom.

That Carol uses questions to buy agreement and cooperation is also demonstrated when she gives advice to the facilitators at a TQT meeting. It is not really her role at the meeting to assist the facilitators; she is one of the group participants. And so as she offers suggestions to them about how to continue the process, her voice is inflected at the end of her statements. The higher tone makes her statements sound like questions and the facilitators seem to accept her input without any defensiveness.

#### QUICK AND DIRECT IN MANAGEMENT

When Carol is in an organizational or managerial frame of mind, she uses short and direct phrases and sentences to elicit information or pass it on. She sees the police officer step into the lobby one morning when she is not expecting him.

"Hello. Nice to see you. Why are you here today?"

She uses direct requests when speaking to members of the support staff. To the janitor she says politely, "Could you please do the bleachers? Now, please."

In a similar way, she addresses students in her Teacher Advisor Group in short statements and questions. "Do you need help?" "Sit, please," "Let me know", "Pop back later." In fact, "pop" is one of the short words that Carol uses most frequently. You can "pop in", she "pops out", and everybody is invited to "pop back." The expression seems to be symptomatic of the fast pace of Carol's school day.

When factual information is called for, and Carol has it, she also responds swiftly and directly. Several teachers are sitting in the staff room debating how to address letters to parents who are divorced or have re-married so that their surnames are different from the student's. Walking through the staff room, Carol hears enough of the discussion to announce "Simply address it to the parents." There is a murmur of assent as the door closes behind her.

Carol is frequently called on to clarify information at meetings. Her language here, too, is as direct and concise as possible. "It's the 16th. Thursday the 16th." Moving swiftly through her day, Carol sometimes verbalizes the obvious. "I'm here", she announces to the class as she breezes in. Or on another day, "I'm late," she says as she swings past colleagues in the hallway.

## VISUALIZING, BRAIN-STORMING, AND SUMMARIZING TO CREATE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

When Carol is working with individuals or groups to generate change, her language changes dramatically from the short and direct speeches that pepper the rest of the day. Change, for Carol, seems to require group brainstorming and visualization. When she has grasped a new idea, or the group has seemed to reach consensus on a new idea, she summarizes the decisions that have been made.

Asked at a Wellness Center meeting what format had been followed for parent information night the previous year, Carol responds in a way that gives the group a chance to make changes. "The plan was..." "What you could do is..." "I think we might..." The tone of her response gives the group licence to alter the plans for the current year's event, and after some discussion, they do make some changes.

When students and staff members come to her with a new idea, she questions them in an attempt to visualize the process and the product. "What will that look like?" she asks. "How will that happen?"

Carol employs the brainstorming mode of language when she makes plans with the rest of the administrative team. Often each new idea piggybacks on the idea ahead of it. As the group meets to plan the organization of parent-teacher conference night, Carol takes the role of chairperson. "We'll set up in the cafeteria again?" she questions. One of the other administrators reminds her how crowded

it was last year and suggests placing some teachers in the hallway. Carol picks up this idea but gives it a new twist.

"How about some in the band room? The music and phys. ed. departments perhaps?" The others seem to like the idea and nod.

When Bob reminds the administrative team about Education Week and the tentative plans for a pancake breakfast at the school with the staff and the ATA president, Carol's brainstorming and visualization processes go into overdrive.

"Will the staff be there at seven in the morning? Would we want to invite some of our partners in education? We'll need to advertise. Will we discuss this at the staff meeting? That would be a good time to ask."

As chairperson, she frequently uses both brainstorming and summarization skills. When the administrative team plans the pep rally, she verbalizes the processes of the group. "What will we need?" she asks. "Bleachers, chair, mike?" Tim nods and says that he believes certificates are being made by the computer people.

"Certificates" lists Carol. "Will you check up on that please?"

When Carol is trying to provoke change, she does much of the work in a conversation, both in asking questions that generate visualization of new ideas, and in summarization at the end of the conversation. For example, when a staff member comes to her with a complaint about a teaching intern, Carol fires back a volley of questions that seem intended, not to intimidate the teacher, but to generate some new thought patterns. "Have you talked to the intern? What

teaching suggestions have you given him? Does he seem to understand active teaching? He's not taking responsibility for the learning of his students. Have you talked to him about that?"

In a similar, but more subtle way, she addresses the administrative team about the supervision list for the Halloween Dance. "Did you guys look at the supervision list for the Halloween Dance in the staff room? It's only women and administrators who have volunteered to supervise. Isn't that a curious thing?"

When Carol wants to delegate a task to a staff member, she also initiates the discussion with questions. "Did I give you a little form like this?" she asks a teacher. "I came in on Saturday and did some work." When the teacher responds that the school is already involved in the project that Carol is speaking about, Carol arches her eyebrows and smiles. "I can respond and say we're already involved? Okay! Tell me about it." After listening, she muses, "Sounds like it might be something different. Do you want to coordinate this for our school?" The teacher has a "No, but..." response. "It might be worthwhile," says Carol. "You can do it while you've got your teaching intern." The conversation, begun with a question, has produced change, and ends with summarization and a clear directive from Carol.

Carol uses a similar brainstorming, questioning, and summarization technique when she engages in planning sessions with students. When a student representative on the Wellness Center committee suggests a workshop for students on exam stress, Carol responds, "That's a really good idea. Maybe just

before January diploma exams? I like that." Regarding another workshop suggestion, "Dealing with Difficult Parents", Carol asks the group how students would be encouraged to attend. "A 3 credit option? Pop for those who attend?"

When change and improvement are the issue, Carol's administrative mode is to become the facilitator of group discussion. She engages the power of open-ended questions, brainstorming, visualization, and finally summarization to bring a small group or a partnership to consensus.

#### AFFIRMATION AS DEFENCE

When Carol is questioned or criticized, which does not happen very often, she affirms the speaker, as well as making clear value statements about herself. She is proactive in her own defence, clearly issuing "I" statements that illustrate her feelings and beliefs about the issues at hand.

At lunch time one day, she meets a new teacher in the kitchen. Carol questions her about the high number of failures in her class as indicated on midterm mark sheets. The teacher grows defensive, and asks Carol if she would like to see her grade sheets so that she can prove how many assignments certain students are missing. Carol immediately begins to affirm the teacher. "No, no, I trust you," she says. "I was just wondering. If they're missing assignments they'll have to do something about that."

In the same way, when Tim indicates that he is struggling to share Carol's vision of the TQT process in the school, Carol responds on a very personal note. "I hope this is of value. I believe it will be of value. Are we satisfied with the status quo? Are we happy about it? I hope we keep an open mind." In dealing with potential criticism, Carol makes her personal position clear, and then does what she can to affirm the other speaker.

Only very rarely does Carol respond to criticism with a harder tone. At a school administration meeting, one of the administrators mentions that her attendance at school has been good this year, but in light of the upcoming special projects that she has mentioned, she will probably be absent fairly often in the future. "Now, here you go," he says laughing. Carol is upset at the implied criticism. "If it gets to be a problem, let me know," she says with a steely tone, "but not in jest." And then as if to soften her response she adds, "I've curbed my outside interests, so I could be here with the guys."

When the questioning technique that Carol uses so well, is turned back on her, she has a stock reply. At a meeting, a student questions her about staffing for a workshop that is being planned; Carol responds, "That's a good question." Carol uses this statement frequently when she is questioned. She says that the phrase means one of three things to her. One, that the question has raised a new idea in her mind. Two, that she needs to buy time to respond to the question. Or three, that the question has no real validity to her, so she uses the phrase in an empty kind of way to cover up a negative response.

## INTENT AND ANXIOUS IN LEARNING

In situations where Carol is learning something new, her communication is first marked by intent listening. Her attention and interest seem focused on the situation at hand, and she makes verbal assurances to study the situation, and to learn what there is to learn. At the same time, there are small expressions of anxiety that tell the listener that Carol is on new ground.

When I arrive one morning, Carol is anxious about a spill on the new carpet in the library. How did the spill occur? And how will it be removed? A teacher who was supervising a student workshop on the weekend, explains how the coffee spill occurred. Carol listens intently, her facial expressions evaluative. She assures the teacher she is not "on the carpet" for the spill on the carpet; at the same time, she is anxious to speak to the janitor about the best way to remove the stain.

Carol expresses her own anxiety directly. "I'm a little nervous about this assembly," she says several times before assembly one morning. She has put together a new recognition assembly format and she is not sure how students will respond. She is intent and focused throughout the assembly, and when it is over, she immediately begins to ask for feedback from students and staff. "How did you like the assembly? Was it good? Bad? How could it be better?" Carol collects feedback voraciously. She seems to weigh the words of others and collect comments for later consideration. "I analyse myself to death," says Carol, adding that it is very important to her to be reflective about her professional actions.

When a fellow administrator tells her he is sceptical about the wisdom of an Alberta Education document that calls for evaluating teacher competencies, Carol is instantly on alert. "Thank you," she says, "then, I'll look at it carefully too."

Checking through the Alberta Education guidelines for applying for CEUs (financial grants to schools based on credits earned by students), Carol notices something new. She calls her secretary into the office to share the information. "They fund schools full amount for native students living on crown land, regardless of what mark they get in the course. They're encouraging schools to let them in. Isn't that interesting?"

That interest in her surroundings results in Carol's observant analysis of the paper, the people, and the situations that are part of her world. Sitting in a meeting of 20 or more administrators, Carol whispers, "If we taught classes like this, people would mutiny. I'd do this differently. We should break into small groups more often." Listening to another speaker on the same afternoon, she decides, "He's defensive. He's not hearing what people are saying."

Frank about others, she is also frank when she speaks about herself. Someone has told Carol that she and a few other administrators dominate divisional administrative meetings to the point that others do not feel free to speak. Carol makes a quick decision. "You'll see a new me. I'm going to change and let other people have a chance." Then she mourns. "But it's going to be a long meeting if I have to be quiet!"

When she makes mistakes and realizes them, Carol uses the term "forgot"

instead of "I'm sorry." One morning she phones the divisional office and then realizes that she already has the information that she is seeking. "Forget that. Forget I called," she says.

When she recognizes that she has left a task undone for a meeting that she is leaving to attend, she berates herself, admitting that she has forgotten something. "I forgot to do that," she mutters, "Oh, Carol." The anxiety of the response and the intensity of her face and tone, indicate that she is incorporating this experience into new awareness and that the mistake will not likely occur again soon.

#### DRAMATIC AND ENTERTAINING TO BRING JOY

Carol's dramatic instincts are a happy twin to her use of inclusive language to build rapport with others and create a joyful, positive atmosphere. She uses puns and other forms of verbal humor, singing, dramatic gestures, mock irritation, and satirical impressions to make connections with others.

A student is brought to speak to Carol because she has been skipping classes. "Have you, Kendra?" Carol exclaims, slapping her forehead, leaning back in her chair, and groaning dramatically. The student laughs and in a new spirit of camaraderie, Carol talks about the advantages of regular attendance in classes.

The first few minutes of a meeting are a little strained as participants around

the circle identify themselves. "I'm Carol Steen, principal," says Carol. Just as she finishes speaking, a police officer's pager begins to buzz. "I did that!" she exclaims jubilantly. "I always make things like that happen." The laughter around the circle eases the tension and the participants look at Carol with more warmth.

At a Wellness Center meeting, Carol suggests changing the name of the upcoming parent workshop. "Why not make it Parent Empowerment Night instead of Parent Empowerment Evening? PEN instead of PEE. I'm going to a PEE meeting!" she says, wrinkling her nose satirically. There is laughter, but no motion to change the name. After some discussion about whether or not the workshop should be videotaped, Carol summarizes the group's discussion. "Sounds like taping might not be a good idea. The decision then is to be untaped and unplugged...Parent Empowerment Unplugged! PEU!" she exclaims, wrinkling her nose again. Again, there is laughter, but this time it is accompanied by a motion to change the name to Parent Empowerment Night - Carol's original suggestion.

Carol takes this irreverence to the divisional administration meeting as well. The mix seems to work for her. The superintendent explains that the word "sex" was used on a survey instead of the word "gender" because verbs and nouns have gender, but people have sex. Carol speaks up. "Some more than others..." The group laughs with her. When she hears that the survey found that males in the division use computers more than females, Carol adds in a stage whisper, "It's because they don't do laundry!"

Puns seem to come naturally to Carol. A student stops her in the hallway to say he thinks he deserves a recognition award for steer wrestling. "No, she responds, "but we're going to try to steer you in the right direction." He groans.

Frequently, Carol bursts into a phrase of song to change the topic or the mood during a discussion. After a long and frustrating discussion with a student, a tentative agreement is reached. "On a new topic," says Carol, "Your hair is blue!" She starts to sing "When I'm feeling blue..." The student relaxes and smiles.

She sings, too, with the staff. "Super Bob never made any money, " she sings softly to Bob who is sitting across from her at a TQT meeting. At a school administrative meeting, Carol is seriously and conscientiously running through a list of notices. "Tim, could you call.." she begins to ask, but she cannot recall the name of the contact person. "Frank....Zappa??" There is laughter around the table. "Sounds like the guy who sang the Coppertone ad," says Tim, and he and Carol begin to sing the Coppertone jingle.

This playfulness with language marks relaxed moments within each school day. A teacher brings a memo to Carol listing plans for a hallway mural. At the bottom of the memo, he has pencilled "Carol - to firm up." "What does this mean?" Carol asks in mock irritation. "Does this mean I have to exercise?"

While Carol's dramatic flair seems to arise spontaneously, there are times when she uses drama consciously to create an intended effect. A teacher comes into her office to complain about the need for more supervision on a school trip. Carol lifts a stack of reports from her desk, demonstrating the amount of work she

has to do, and offers to change jobs with the teacher. The teacher, of course, refuses the "offer" and leaves the office, presumably more content with her own job.

Speaking to a reporter, Carol begins stacking CEU reports in front of him. Dramatically, slapping down one bundle after another, Carol visually illustrates the amount of paperwork that an administrator is required to do.

Her dramatic sense is also used in storytelling when speaking to students in counselling situations. "You don't start a fight when you meet a bear in the woods," she says to a student, illustrating the concept that there is a right and a wrong time to be confrontational. The visual detail seems to bring greater understanding, and a lighter tone to the discussion.

Carol's use of humor and drama bring warmth and even a sense of joy to the interactions with the others throughout the school day.

#### POSSIBILITY-DRIVEN - CHEERLEADING AND MAGIC

Carol embodies the positive attitudes that she is trying to instil. Using a cheerleading approach, she introduces two guests to an assembly by saying to the student body, "We want them to know that WINSTON CHURCHILL IS AN AWESOME PLACE TO GO TO SCHOOL!" Cheering, stomping, and whistling follow her cheer.

In speaking to a reporter, she emphasizes her commitment to teaching in exclamatory language. "Once I got into teaching, I found a niche. I love to teach!...I'm teaching career and consumer Math - finances, budgeting, credit, mortgages. Marvellous course! Everybody should take it!" She sounds so enthusiastic that the reporter asks if he can sign up. "You can audit it," Carol says, "Drop in anytime." The tone of the conversation has been so upbeat, that, at the time, it seems likely the reporter will be in her classroom the next morning.

Carol is possibility-driven. She frequently uses the word "magic" in relation to educational and even organizational activities. When asked what she enjoys about teaching, she responds, "It's a magic that comes from planting seeds and watching them grow in kids...you can watch them blossom."

As she engages in problem-solving, Carol uses the visual concept of a magic wand to generate possible solutions. "If you could wave your magic wand, what would happen?" she asks a student who is unhappy at school. "I wish there was a magic solution," she says another time to a parent, concerned with transportation to and from school.

The use of the word "magic" does not appear to be accidental. Carol lives with an openness to the unexpected; her language communicates a sense of the possibilities and wonder of everyday living. A secretary comes to her, confused about the organizational principle used for listing students on a credit summary sheet. Carol deadpans. "By birth date," she says, and demonstrates, finding the birth date of a student first on their own computer system and then locating both

birth date and student on the sheet. The secretary is dumbfounded. "Oh my gosh!" she says, "Unbelievable!" Carol giggles, delighted. "Funny, eh?" she says, "Life is way too short!"

A daily delight in living, inclusive language, and infectious enthusiasm are what appear to power Carol's administrative style. Her interactions with others are built primarily around compliments - "You're lovely, Maria, I'm going to take you home" - engagements - "Help me to understand your hesitation" \_ drama, visualizations, and sheer enjoyment of other people.

One afternoon, Carol walks into the office to tell the story of how someone ran into her at lunchtime, and "wrecked" her car. "One of our students!" she exclaims. "He got out, saw me, slapped his head, and said, 'Oh DARN!'" Then Carol's irrepressible giggle makes an appearance. "He's such a nice kid!" she exclaims. The tension of the event has disappeared.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DECISION-MAKING:

#### CAROL'S METHODS OF RESPONSE AND PROACTIVE CHANGE

"I'll have to play it as it comes."

- Carol Steen

In the educational arena, the principal is commonly perceived as the person who makes the decisions. He or she has the responsibility to ensure that the school is operating successfully and has the power to make sure that it does so.

Observations of Carol at work suggest that decision-making cannot occur in the principalship without a solid base of role understanding, ownership, values, and information. On the basis of these, Carol makes decisions informally and responsively, or formally and proactively. Many of the decisions she makes, both formally and informally, are shared decisions. In fact, the role she frequently plays in decision-making is that of facilitator. Few of her decisions are autocratic; rather, she makes most decisions on the basis of consultation, collaboration, and communication.

## THE DECISION-MAKING BASE

### JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF ROLE

The Winston Churchill administrative team has "divided out the key administrative duties", suggesting that job descriptions have been discussed and formalized between the four of them. Carol supports the three vice-principals in their duties through offering suggestions, perspectives, and support. She verbally affirms their role in the school when speaking to other people about them. For example, in explaining how time tabling is accomplished, she says, "Basically, Ken's in charge of that. It's a very intensive job, and he's very good at it."

Just as Carol understands the role of the other administrators, she understands her own. It would seem that Carol's understanding of her role as principal comes from a variety of sources - her own past experience as a teacher working with a principal, her studies, her internship as a vice-principal, her contact with other administrators, directions from the superintendent, the formal job descriptions at school, administrative evaluation tools, and her day-to-day experiences of administering the school. This familiarity with her role allows her to react almost instinctively to the situations that present themselves. Speaking to a mother who pulled her student out of Winston Churchill several days after classes began, and now wants to re-enroll him in October, Carol's face settles into a thoughtful expression. "Mid-season transfers. Usually we don't do them. Most of the time it

means that kids have not been successful. Talk to the principal there. Be honest with him...If either he or you could call me back..." Her voice trails off as she listens to the woman on the other end of the line. Carol knows the precedence for managing this situation, yet one gets the clear sense that the principal's job description is a dynamic one, changing in response to the needs of the school, the staff, the students, and, in fact, the wider educational milieu.

Everything that touches the school, in one way or another, becomes a part of Carol's responsibility. When an issue arises, either there is a system in place to which Carol can refer the concern, or she delegates responsibility to another administrator or staff member to deal with the concern, or she deals with the issue personally. Each of these scenarios call for Carol's involvement; she works proactively with the staff to establish policies and procedures and systems that can manage many of the concerns that will arise throughout the course of a school year. For example, when a student inquires about an exchange program, Carol refers the student to the counselling office, knowing that this is where information about student exchanges is housed and can be explained to the student. Carol works with the staff to understand job descriptions and expertise, so that it is easier and more efficient to delegate tasks on an ongoing basis.

At the same time, she accepts that "the buck stops here." Whatever is not managed elsewhere, Carol takes on as her personal responsibility. Within the building, she knows she is not only the clearinghouse, negotiating responsibilities and delegating tasks, but also the court of final appeal when issues remain

unresolved and return to her. Understanding the complexity of her role is the base of Carol's power as a principal. From this understanding, she constructs a sense of her responsibility.

#### OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY - WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?

Without a clear understanding of role, there can be no clear understanding of responsibility. In following Carol and describing her conduct throughout her working day, it becomes clear what she perceives as her responsibility.

She feels a sense of ownership of the building and the programs and people in it. She demonstrates this sense of ownership of the building through actions large and small - picking up garbage in the hallway, standing up to close a door to the hallway during a meeting because the noise level outside has increased, assisting the janitor with a broken water pipe, assigning the task of opening and closing the school for a special event, and concerning herself with matters of income and budget that will affect both the physical plant and the people and programs within it.

Carol's sense of ownership of the educational and extra-curricular programs of the school is reflected in the questions she asks as she tours the building. In the gym office, she asks, "How are the coaches? Are they pumped?" In the computer lab, she announces, "I've come to see that computer slide show you told me

about." After the student presentation, they talk about upgrading the equipment in the lab by installing additional RAMS of memory. To a visitor to the school, she describes the importance of creating a happy, focused learning environment.

That she takes, if not ownership, then responsibility, for the people in the school, is reflected in her relationships with them. She sees the school as her "classroom" - larger, with different bodies, but with all the things present that are necessary for teaching and learning. Carol describes her role as that of being the teacher of the teachers, exciting them to be their best. In so doing, her influence extends into the classrooms and to the students. As she meets both staff and students, she questions them about their experiences and plans, supports their initiatives, and calls them by name. She engages in private conversations with staff members, showing obvious concern for them both on personal and professional levels.

One afternoon, she stops during her walkabout to speak to a staff member. The staff member reminds Carol that she is having surgery the next day, but that she plans to attend the parent meeting at school this evening, then go home, pack a toothbrush, and go to the hospital for the night. "Good grief!" Carol exclaims, showing through body language, mixed concern and admiration for the staff member. Then the staff member mentions that some disgruntled comments have been made by the basketball team about the fact that the gym will not be available for practice because of the parent meeting. "Don't worry," Carol says emphatically, "it's been booked since last May." The exchange is simple, and yet

through attentiveness and concern for the individual, Carol has met both a personal and professional need in this short conversation. The staff member has been reassured that the principal is aware of the stress under which she is working, and that she supports her program, and the way in which she has organized things.

She indicates that she assumes responsibility for the professional performance of her staff through the fact that teachers come to her for advice and guidance, and she offers it freely - how to improve a teaching intern's performance, where to find more supervision assistance for a field trip, what to do about a student who is disruptive in class, how to prepare for an assembly presentation, and what answer to give to the student council about an activity request.

At the same time that she assumes care and responsibility for others, Carol is careful to reinforce the autonomy and the authority of others in the school. When asked for advice about mentoring the teaching intern, Carol offers thought-provoking questions mixed with advice, but she leaves the working out of the relationship in the hands of the teacher mentor. She reminds a new teacher that she can make her own arrangements for a substitute teacher. She directs students to staff members for specific types of assistance, because that is their area of expertise. She reinforces the performance of the rest of the administrative team. "See how fast you got that information (about who started a fight)", she says to Tim. "Kids trust you."

Job descriptions are not static - they are negotiated and modified. After

reading my observations about how she became personally involved in solving the problem of the spill on the library carpet, Carol told me that she had spoken to the janitor and they had agreed that, from now on, staff could go directly to him to make arrangements for accidental repairs. She made the decision that he should have a "cleaning account" since such things as carpet cleaning should come under his job description and be done at his discretion.

In problem-solving discussions with students, Carol presents herself as a participant, but leads students to articulate the final decisions that are made and to be personally accountable for their actions. In the same way, she refuses to be held accountable for responsibilities that belong to parents. When an irate parent phones to question Carol about transportation to the school, Carol's tone is very polite. She advises the parent that the students are responsible for their own transportation outside of the school boundaries, unless they are in the IB program or in special education. She admits that the parent has made "a good point", advises her where to purchase bus passes, and ends by saying that she wishes there was a magic solution. She does not assume responsibility for this individual student's transportation to school, leaving the solution to the problem in the hands of the family.

The tone of Carol's administration is invitational - inviting other citizens of the school to care about themselves, the school, and their place in it. While, by her own admission, she overextends herself, saying "yes" to too many new projects, Carol is not a victim of chaotic circumstances. There is a clarity in her responses

when she assumes responsibility. "I'll take care of it," she says to a community member who is asking for some borrowed materials to be returned. She delegates duties to others on staff when something comes her way that falls under the job description or expertise of someone else. When a reporter calls for information about the International Baccalaureate program, Carol responds, "I'll put one of our counsellors on to this. He'll get students for you to interview. He'll do a good job for you." While she takes the initiative to visit the home when there is an accidental death in a student's family, she delegates the task of buying flowers on behalf of the school to the school liaison chairperson.

Carol takes ownership of the things that matter to the school, but she is not overwhelmed by this responsibility. Instead, she shares that responsibility with the other administrators, the staff, the students, and the extended educational community. She invites them to become partners in education at Winston Churchill, while accepting the fact that, ultimately, the praise or the blame for the success or failure of the school will come back to rest on her shoulders.

## VALUES AND MOTIVATION

Carol describes the importance of a belief system to a good administrator. She comments that teachers and students are what matter - they are the core values that shape her vision. Then she expands on this comment. What is important to

her, she says, is to create a happy, focused learning environment: academically, physically, socially, and emotionally.

Carol's values can be inferred from her actions. She sees clearly that the principalship does not exist separately from her; she brings her own values and character to the principalship. "A person questions whether becoming a principal will change his or her personality. But you have to bring your personality to the principalship." So it is Carol's values of caring for the individual, individual potential, teamwork, progress, positive change, collaboration, order, cleanliness, good humor, winning, and a successful public image that underlie the personal decisions that she makes. Further, her values lead her to frame perspectives and offer suggestions that will impact the decisions made collectively by school interest groups.

During the time I was at the school, Carol frequently demonstrated the thought processes that accompany her value-laden decision-making. In describing the difficulty of juggling career and family, Carol says "on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 represents 'Holy Cow, how-are-we-doing-this?' hard, I'd say it's a 10... but our kids always come first. When there's a family crisis, for myself, or my staff, that comes first." That care for the individual marks a central value that influences Carol's decision-making.

In working with administrators from feeder schools and requesting better transfer of information for special needs students entering Winston Churchill, Carol demonstrates her values of teamwork and creating positive change. "Not to

lay blame," she says, "but to solve a problem. It takes 2 to 3 weeks just to discover special needs in Grade 10." Her approach generates a spate of suggestions about how to handle this informational issue and an eventual agreement about how to address the concern for the coming year.

Describing the pull she feels toward continuing her education and earning a PhD in education, Carol talks about "a heart/brain conflict." The timing is just not right for her, or for her family to continue her education right now. She realizes that she holds simultaneous values of caring for her family and the school, as well as of expanding her own knowledge and opportunities. She rejects none of these value positions, but is aware of a tension that exists between them as she makes decisions that will impact both the present and the future.

One morning, a staff member brings a form for Carol to sign, reporting expenditures relating to an out-of-town event that she has attended. There is some discussion about whether or not the expenditures will be covered under divisional policy. If the date were changed by one day, it seems they would be. Carol sighs. "I just attended a workshop on honesty in the workplace," she says, shaking her head.

"Walking the talk" is a phrase that Carol uses frequently to explain why she behaves as she does. It is a clear indication that she is aware of her values and the importance of making decisions on the basis of them.

## INFORMATION GATHERING AND ORGANIZATION

Carol collects information voraciously and keeps it at her fingertips.

Developing and maintaining a knowledge base gives Carol an informed position from which to make quick, responsive decisions regarding the school business at hand. While it may sometimes appear that her decisions are impulsive, or case-specific, Carol's choices are actually based on accumulated information and experience, giving her the confidence to respond to the unexpected things that come her way.

Carol keeps running note of things that have happened, things to be done, contact persons' names, dates, and informal agreements reached. She carries the portfolio with these personal notes with her at all times and refers to them continually.

She schedules time daily to attend to mail. "Let's look at the mail," she says one Monday morning, and begins to sort the mail. "Okay, this is Curriculum Branch guidelines for Instructional planning. This goes into my personal "read it" file. This from the Fitness club...I just don't have time for that right now. Here's a memorandum from the Human Resources officer. That goes into the "this week" file. Oh here's a catalogue one of the teachers wanted to order a button-maker from...I'll put a note on this for her. Here's a Social Studies memorandum. I'll put a note on that for the Social Studies department head...I'll pass this report on the Use of the School to Tim. I'll give this magazine to one of the counsellors. Staff

surveys results. That goes into my 'read it' file." Carol reviews educational material that crosses her desk, before passing it along to a staff member. The result is that she is widely informed.

Having information readily accessible to her requires good organization systems in the school. The school is organized around a three year plan, one that is developed with staff input and therefore, ownership, so that it could be carried out even in the absence of the leader who first initiated the plan. Carol talks about the necessity of sharing a vision with her administrative colleagues to build this three year plan, and an understanding of timelines to accomplish it. Under this wide organizational umbrella, there are other systems that Carol relies on. The office staff keep both computer files and hard copy files organized so that she can retrieve information quickly and accurately. At the same time, she has developed her own filing system to organize personal materials for quick reference.

"I throw nothing of value away," says Carol, showing me files that contain copies of all the speeches and presentations that she has given. "I never know when some of this material may be useful to me again."

There are four cornerstones to Carol's decision-making - role understanding, ownership, values, and information. These four cornerstones build a solid foundation on which she draws as she makes decisions and on which she stands

after decisions are made. Without an understanding of role, a sense of ownership and responsibility, motivating values, and pertinent information, Carol would be stymied in making decisions necessary to the smooth functioning of the school.

## THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The decisions Carol makes can be loosely organized into two categories: responsive, informal decisions that are primarily personal in nature, and proactive, more formal decisions that impact the institution as a whole, and are more collaborative in nature. Her methods of providing closure to decision-making are largely the same in both cases.

### RESPONSIVE DECISIONS - INFORMAL, PERSONAL

"I'll have to play it as it comes," says Carol, and she must, for while she tries to plan her work and schedule meetings and appointments, much of the business of the day arises spontaneously from the circumstances around her. In matters of discipline, teacher concerns, parent phone calls, and drop-in visits from students and community members, she is called on to think as she speaks. She generates solutions to problems as they present themselves, establishing temporary

partnerships with teachers, students, and parents to make the process as collaborative as possible.

Two students come into Carol's office one morning to ask for permission to send one of the teachers to the local jail and bail charity event. Carol responds, "Ah, she's a good lady...but let's think. How will she feel about it? I could cover the last class for her, but she's got a little girl at home...Will there be someone to look after her? I think what we need to do is phone her husband and ask him what he thinks. How long will she be there? Search out the rest of the information. I'll dial the number for you and one of you can talk to him." Carol does so and organizes a file on her desk while monitoring the call that the girls make. In the end, the agreements are in place, and the girls leave excited about their project.

A Grade 12 student pokes his head into Carol's doorway. "Are you busy?" he asks. "Never too busy to see you," Carol responds. The boy inquires about the protocol for taking a special project. Carol quizzes him on his special project idea - a weight-lifting program - okays the idea in principle and refers him to the counselling office.

Another young man waits in the outer office to speak to Carol. He is hoping to reapply at Winston Churchill after leaving for several months. Carol asks him what he has done during the months he was away from classes; she reminds him of some of the disciplinary issues that surrounded his departure from school. "I like you," she says to him, "but you have not earned my trust." She ends the

conversation by suggesting that he attend another school for a semester, demonstrate that he can be successful at his studies, and then reapply to Winston Churchill if this is the school he would most like to attend.

In situations like these, Carol works alone, calling on her own resources and knowledge to frame the situation and to make choices that will benefit both the individual and the school. At the time of response, Carol uses her communication and counselling skills to generate decisions that appear to be mutually agreeable. She seems comfortable in these one-on-one discussions and the decisions appear easy for her to make.

Occasionally, there seems to be a clear sense of entitlement that moves her to give quick directives and suggestions to students and staff when she feels these are needed. "Come here," she calls to a student in the hallways, expecting compliance. "All IB students who visited the University of Lethbridge yesterday to the conference room right now, please," she announces over the intercom.

Carol is advised by a teacher that a student did not come to the office when he was sent there to speak to Carol regarding a disruptive incident in class. What will the follow-up action be? Carol immediately decides that she will call a conference involving his teacher advisor and his parents.

As she announces a TQT meeting at the school administration meeting one morning, she simply states that she expects all administrators to be at this meeting, and then prepares to move on to the next item on her agenda.

When a situation arises that gives Carol pause, she stalls in order to make an

appropriate response. She uses the phrase "That's a good question" to buy time to mull over the comment or concern before she speaks again. For example, at a Wellness Center meeting, the issue of confidentiality arises, since many of the community representatives have opportunities to meet directly with individual students. Carol listens attentively to the various speakers, and finally offers, "We have a form that can be used." A student representative questions her. "What if the family doesn't give consent?" "That's a good question," responds Carol. Her tone is warm and responsive, but she makes no attempt to answer the question. Occasionally, in a situation like this, Carol asks a question in return, such as, "How do you think we could handle that?"

Carol also takes the time to ask for additional information, clarification, or direction when she is not sure of how to proceed in a decision that needs to be made. For example, the local newspapers have reported a knife-wielding incident involving a girl from another school. Now, a few days later, this girl is requesting a transfer to Winston Churchill. "I need to phone the superintendent," Carol says to the other administrators. "I need some direction and clarification regarding our responsibility here....In fact, I wouldn't mind confirming this with the constable too... sounds like he was referring her to Winston Churchill."

Being responsive means making quick informal decisions, or making quick decisions about how a final decision will be reached. Although she does not hesitate to make on-the-spot decisions, Carol takes time to evaluate the interactions that have occurred throughout the day. This reflective habit adds to

the knowledge that she brings to a similar situation the next time she faces one.

She is willing to modify decisions based on immediate feedback when it seems logical to do so. For example, Carol asks her secretary to print the history of selected information regarding credit summaries. The secretary asks if it might not work just as well to highlight the information on the sheets that have already been printed. Carol's response is immediate. "Yes, yes it would. That would work then...I'll keep copies. It will make interesting documentation."

A teacher stops in to give Carol feedback on the new assembly format. "Good assembly," she says, and for a few minutes the two discuss the dynamics of the event. "Thank you for the feedback," says Carol. Another teacher stops in to see her. He says, "You have a smile in your voice...you're very good with that." Again, Carol thanks the speaker, and then confides how nervous she felt about the decision to try a new assembly format.

Carol constantly asks for feedback and thanks people for giving it to her. She cannot seem to get enough information; she collects feedback assertively. She gives positive feedback to others, and the positive feedback seems to flow back to her as well. When there is no one else around to support her decisions, she speaks to herself! She moves around her office collecting files and information to prepare a report for a meeting. When she has assembled the materials of choice, she sighs. "God! I'm clever," she says with a satisfied smile.

## PROACTIVE DECISIONS - INSTITUTIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE

### TECHNIQUES OF DECISION-MAKING

Carol employs a plethora of tools and techniques to generate positive change in the school. In proactive decisions that will eventually involve most of the members of the school community, Carol acts as a facilitator, stimulating thought, framing discussions, and summarizing information. At the same time, she acts as a participant, engaged in wondering, questioning, and negotiating with the rest of the group. Finally, she plays the role of judge, forcing a decision or commitment from the group, and then announcing the final decision.

Decisions that are collaborative and impact the school as a whole generally arise from gradual perceptions that change might be a positive thing. This perception may come from members of the staff, the administrative team, or from educational forces outside of the school. Because they are decisions that are consciously and formally made, they have a proactive quality, generating change that is intended to benefit the school at some time in the future.

At Winston Churchill, the perception that change is needed often comes first from Carol. "I've always felt that standing still is the same as going backwards. I guess I'm always looking for more, for life that is better," says Carol. When she has an idea for change, she begins to gather perspectives through informal conversations with her staff, other educators, students, and parents. When she has

assembled a picture of what the change might look like, she begins to drop remarks and ask questions that will stimulate the thinking of others.

Eventually, this process of change and decision-making requires a more formal component. Carol works with the administrative team to organize forums of discussion. She assembles teams and committees and interest groups to begin the process of exploration - wondering what changes would be beneficial, brainstorming, listing pros and cons. Throughout this process, Carol frequently alternates between being a participant and the facilitator. She frames group processes by asking questions and establishing discussion parameters. She joins into the discussion as well.

Carol models this decision-making process when she meets with a TQT sub-committee, exploring the problem of absenteeism. As the group assembles in her office, Carol shows them charts that list the total unexcused absences per student by week. "This will help us narrow down our project," says Carol. The group spends a few minutes looking at the charts. "I added them up," Carol explains. "For example, 45 periods missed by this student in September is the equivalent of 6.8 days. Now how are we going to analyze this? The chart gives each student's absences." One member of the group suggests giving the chart to the TQT process facilitator to analyze. Another group member volunteers that she would like to be involved in analyzing the chart. "We should have some students on this committee," suggests Carol. "How should we determine which students to use?" She moves toward her office door, and shuts it, as she listens to a variety of

suggestions. "Alright," she concludes, "let's decide which teachers to use and then use students from their rooms. We need Student Council kids, kids who participate lots, not at all, ESL kids..." Now the group offers suggestions about which staff member would be best suited to serve on each committee - attendance, lates, student council activities, or textbook rental. Carol comments, "Six is a good size of a team...there's no blueprint here...we can explore a bit." There are two follow-up suggestions that piggy-back on Carol's comment. "Okay," says Carol, "let's move on then." After more round table discussion, the group seems to conclude that the committee will involve 8 members - 4 staff and 4 students - 2 who are chronically late, and 2 who are never late. Carol summarizes this thought, and seems satisfied with the decisions made. "And I think we've had a bell, " she announces as she dismisses the group by rising and opening her door.

As I watch this small informal meeting around the conference table in Carol's office, I see Carol spreading the paper work for the group on the table in front of where she sits. Her role seems to be to articulate the purpose of the meeting, to formulate the discussion questions, to listen to suggestions, and to clarify comments made by others. She takes notes as she listens and she often turns questions asked of her back to the group. She announces final judgements when she senses that a consensus has been reached. There is no formal show of hands or other signal to indicate that the group has made a choice.

At some point, the discussions and preliminary solutions move into a wider arena - for example, a staff meeting. Carol champions the new idea, collecting

both supportive and dissident opinions. She works with the administrative team and the staff to negotiate a position that will be acceptable to most of the school shareholders.

Finally, Carol brings the group to the point where consensus is reached - not 100% agreement, perhaps, but a general agreement of the direction in which to move. The voting process is not used to finalize group decisions. Rather, as she senses consensus, Carol summarizes the thought processes of the group and announces the decision. Carol does not allow decisions to be deferred for long. If necessary, it seems she forces a decision from the group. She has seen the group through the preparation process for change and collaboration, and she likes to see results in her work.

Sometimes, Carol employs this more formal and collaborative method of decision-making in working with the administrative team to make decisions of a more limited scope. For example, she leads the group through a discussion about danceathon funds, trying to reach an agreement about the logistics of getting the forms and money turned in. She asks the group to consider the problem of giving refunds if, and when, they are needed. After some discussion, Carol seems satisfied that a workable plan has emerged, and as if by unspoken agreement, the four administrators stand and begin to leave the office.

## DECISION-MAKING CLOSURE

Carol brings closure to both informal, responsive decisions, and more formal, collaborative decisions in much the same way. After summarizing and announcing the decision, she leads her co-participants to generate a plan of action that will address the decision made. She identifies next steps and delegates responsibility for ensuring that these next steps are followed.

After the initial decision has been made, and the participants begin to enact the plan of action that has emerged, Carol assertively begins to collect feedback. She asks pointed questions of staff members and students to get the information that she wants, and does not seem to be afraid of direct and honest responses, even if they are negative. The comments that she collects from these informal surveys provide the material that Carol uses for reflection and evaluation on a personal level and on a professional level. It gives her the information and insight she needs to modify decisions and to continue the process of positive change in the school.

For Carol, the power of the principalship appears to rest on a base of role understanding, a sense of ownership, motivating values, and pertinent information. From this solid foundation, she confidently responds to the school business that presents itself to her, making dozens of decisions daily that impact

individuals, and in a more limited way, the wider school. It is from this base too, that she works collaboratively with the stakeholders of the school to make proactive decisions that have the potential for substantially changing the school culture.

That she has personal power is evident from the reactions of others to Carol's physical presence. That her personal power is intrinsically connected to the power of the group, is what maximizes the strength of Carol's leadership.

## CHAPTER NINE

### BEING AN AMBASSADOR: CAROL'S PUBLIC RELATIONS HABITS

"If there's something you like, well, tell the world about it."

- Carol Steen

Carol invites public relations opportunities, and uses those opportunities to articulate pride in herself and in others, and to plant positive ideas that will take on a life of their own. She deals with negative PR quickly and quietly, and is constantly alert to feedback that will help to avert a negative image. At the same time, Carol accepts positive feedback unpretentiously and openly, and seems fearless in connecting her personal image to the image of the school. She is active in promoting the success and well-being of others, and enlarges her own accomplishments by drawing others into them.

## ARTICULATING PRIDE

Carol expresses pride in herself, the people with whom she relates, and the projects with which she is engaged. When she uses praise, she does so clearly and confidently. She takes a personal perspective, and her tone is straightforward and unapologetic. About Winston Churchill, she says to a reporter: "We have a strong administration, strong teaching and strong support staff - a good staff." Can he miss her point as he plans his article? Can her staff fail to appreciate her statement when it appears in print? About the community of Lethbridge, she says: "It's a neat place to live and raise kids. I was born and raised in Lethbridge, and I'm darn proud of it." Carol verbally embraces the community, and is, in turn, embraced by it.

Before a Wellness Center meeting begins, one of the student representatives at the table mentions that she saw a picture of Carol and her home in a Lethbridge magazine. Community members who are also assembling at the table note that they, too, saw the photo. Carol jokes about carrying the same plant from room to room as the photographer took pictures. There is a familial tone to this conversation - the group is enjoying a story about one of its members.

Carol unhesitatingly shares information that is positive even when it reflects directly on herself. She gives me her Educational Administration Effectiveness profile to read, and says that she will be pleased to answer any

questions that I might have about it. This action seems representative of Carol's attitude toward public relations. If there's something to be proud of, she wants to "tell the world about it."

Carol instructs her students to do the same. Each one of them, she tells them at an assembly, is an ambassador for Winston Churchill High School. As ambassadors, what they do, and what they say, will represent the school in the eyes of the community.

#### INVITING PUBLIC RELATIONS OPPORTUNITIES

Carol recognizes public relations opportunities, large and small. She seems to seek the spotlight, and invites the focus to fall on herself and her school. When either planned or unplanned opportunities present themselves, Carol uses the situation to promote a positive awareness of the school.

Carol plans public relations initiatives for the school. The business partnerships with Pepsi and TransAlta fall into this category. While the businesses support the school with donations for specific projects - for example, a time clock in the gymnasium - the school promotes the business through product sales, and displaying the business logo. Carol makes a point of inviting representatives from the business partners to special events at the school. Both business and the school gain a heightened public profile from this arrangement.

Recognition programs within the school also draw attention to the good things that are happening on campus. Winston Churchill promotes achievement and good attendance through a School Bucks program. Teachers issue school currency for academic and attendance achievement, students "bank" these "dollars", and at the end of the school year, students use their accumulated "cash" to bid on auction items such as bicycles, CD players, and sports equipment which have been donated by community businesses. Being involved in a positive venture like this presumably helps the community to see the school as an institution that assists students to develop good employability skills, as well as to reach their academic goals.

When she plans a recognition assembly to publicize both in-school and out-of-school achievements, Carol invites two reporters from a local TV/radio station to the assembly. Officially, these media guests are there to advertise an opportunity for students to become involved in a Community Advisory Board. Unofficially, Carol uses the opportunity to get a favorable response about the school from two community members who can do much to promote it. She sets up this opportunity by asking the reporters to recall what their school assemblies were like when they were in high school. Both visualize assemblies with restless students which never seemed to end. "There was a lot of fooling around," says one. Carol commiserates. She explains that they are trying a new assembly format that they usually have pep rallies with jello wrestling, or else, academic awards. Her tone is collegial. "You're on the cutting edge," she tells them.

At the assembly, the students pick up the cheer and the challenge in her voice and flood the gymnasium with applause, whistling, and cheering. During the assembly, Carol continues to encourage student participation through her cheerleading approach, leading the student body to applaud, and whistle as awards are distributed.

When the assembly is over, she immediately asks for the reporters' impressions. Their opinions are very positive when placed in contrast to their own assembly memories. The two say they are impressed with the excitement, the applause, the awards, and the volunteers for the program that they have promoted. "The excitement was electrifying," says one, "but I guess it starts at the top." Carol beams. "Well, if you've seen something you like, tell the world about it."

Carol welcomes opportunities that come her way on a day to day basis to take the spotlight. At the secondary school principals' meeting, following the regularly scheduled administration meeting, she moves to take charge of the discussion. The arrangement seems to be an informal one; Carol is a central participant in the discussion of smoking policies even as she frames questions that guide the direction of the talk. Her active involvement in this group seems to be a component of the school's assertive public image.

In a similar way, when representatives from various schools meet at Winston Churchill to engage in Total Quality Transformation discussions, Carol demonstrates a concern to make a favorable impression. During small group

reports, a staff member from Winston Churchill gives an articulate and informed report about TQT initiatives at the school. Carol whispers a pleased and audible "Yes!" as the participants in the room applaud at the end of the report.

Certainly the school uses conventional advertising to promote its programs. A display board on the outside wall of the school advertises the drama Midsummer Night's Dream. The progress of sports teams such as volleyball, basketball, and football are regularly reported in both print and televised media. The International Baccalaureate program is often highlighted in both the news and in special community presentations.

It seems integral to her character to take advantage of the high profile situations that come her way. Hearing that the ATA president will be in Lethbridge and at Winston Churchill, Carol immediately recognizes the opportunity for creating an enhanced awareness of the school both in the community and with the Alberta Teachers' Association. She gives careful attention to the staff meeting agenda for that day - an important staff meeting "because the ATA president will be there."

Simply being aware, being visible, and being vocal give Carol many opportunities to promote herself and the school. While it is her awareness and her ability to articulate her thoughts that are her outstanding public relations skills, her visibility is impacted even by the clothes that she wears. She dresses to please herself, she says. Her style is bright, creative, and informal - colorful sweaters, large pins, hair accessories - and her attire often inspires comments or questions.

Carol seems to enjoy the attention.

She speaks brightly and expressively too. Her voice projects well across rooms and down the hallways. She carries herself confidently in attitude, dress, and speech, and uses her personal presence in addressing both planned and unplanned PR situations. This attention to public relations pays dividends in perceived power, as when Tim suggests that she speak to city hall about zoning for the new soccer fields because she has "more clout."

#### PLANTING POSITIVE IDEAS

One of the PR techniques that Carol uses is to plant ideas that will take on a life of their own. Through the statements that she makes, the dramatic gestures that accompany the statements, and the way that she speaks, she creates an image that is self-perpetuating.

Carol builds her own personal image on simple, enthusiastic, and very positive statements. "I love to teach," she says. Or "I get huge joy in seeing people be successful." In speaking about her, acquaintances repeat the very words that she uses to describe herself. "The thing about Carol," says a staff member to me, "is that she still loves to teach." "Carol enjoys seeing other people be successful," says a community member. It seems likely that the teachers, students, parents, and community members who articulate these impressions of

Carol do not consciously remember the similar statements that Carol has made about herself. Her public image, is in part, created by her own words, and supported by her actions, it is also sustained by them.

Carol uses the same approach when speaking about the school. "It's a neat place to be," she says about Winston Churchill. "There's lots of energy here." She describes the school as welcoming, energetic, and exciting, and it seems no accident that these are the descriptors that others also use to paint a picture of the school.

"We ask," says Carol, "would I want my own son or daughter to be in that class?" The statement is an important one. Parents who hear it, and who are concerned about the kind of classroom into which their children are placed, can find reassurance in the idea that the principal of the school uses the same rule of thumb to judge the effectiveness of a learning environment.

Carol seems to understand the power of dramatic visualization, as well as direct statements, to create the ideas that she wants to spread. To reinforce the fact that she has much administrative paperwork to do, she lifts and slaps down stacks of paper in several observed situations, for example, when speaking to a staff member, a parent, and a reporter. The visual picture of the stacks of paper and the associated sound of the heavy stacks slapped on to the desk reinforce the message that Carol works hard at her job.

Carol also plants the impression that she speaks articulately "off the cuff." At a TQT meeting, Carol is one of the small group leaders who will report to the

larger group. She spends some time in jotting down her thoughts. When the time comes for her report, she seems to speak naturally and informally to the group. She gets more attention from the group than the previous speaker because it seems she is speaking to them rather than reading to them. Yet, glancing down at her notes, it is obvious that she is, in fact, reading exactly what she has written. At the end of her report, she ad libs a few concluding remarks. This method of public speaking seems a very valuable PR skill, in that Carol conveys the idea that she is speaking straight from the heart. It seems a deliberate way of creating the impression that she has the facts of the matter right at her fingertips, and is concerned enough about the immediate situation to recall all of the pertinent information as she talks.

Through direct and positive statements, dramatic visualizations, and a warm and natural manner of public speaking, it seems that Carol deliberately spreads some of the ideas that she wants as part of her own public image and the image of the school. These ideas are clear and direct and take on a life of their own as they are relayed to others.

## EVALUATING FEEDBACK

Carol perpetually asks for feedback and evaluates feedback. This habitual stance is part of her public relations strategy. If the feedback she receives is

negative, she deals with it quickly and quietly. If the feedback illustrates ways to improve her performance or the school's performance, Carol is attentive. If the feedback is positive, Carol publishes it.

Carol seems to understand that a good public reputation is an invaluable thing. She actively works to protect the image of the school, as when she devotes a morning to finding material that the student council has lost. The implication is that repairing the damage to this partnership is an essential public relations responsibility, and well worth the time she invests in it.

One fall afternoon, the administrators meet informally to discuss a newspaper article about a girl who pulled a knife on a student at another school. The girl is not a Winston Churchill student, but is requesting a transfer to Winston. Carol talks privately inside her office about this news report and appears frustrated with the negative educational publicity. She calls the superintendent almost immediately to get advice on her alternatives in response to the girl's transfer request. There is obvious concern for the safety and publicity implications for Winston Churchill.

While she chooses to deal with negative PR quietly, Carol does not ignore criticism that comes her way. In listening to the parent who is complaining about the transportation arrangements to the school, it is clear that Carol is collecting information that she will evaluate and use for future decision-making discussions. "There's almost enough to say we should do something about it...and that's a good point," she says to the parent. In concluding the conversation, Carol gives her

own positive feedback regarding this parent's daughter. "How is she enjoying the school so far? I know she works hard at it." The conversation ends on a positive note, presumably helping to repair what negative impression the parent may have of the school.

"How are we doing?" Carol asks a team captain as she tours the building. "How did you like the assembly?" she asks a group of students. "How could that be better?" she asks a colleague. Asking direct questions, Carol also receives direct answers. "We're at the top of the league," says the team leader. From a teacher, she hears, "Good assembly," and the two discuss the dynamics of the event. "I wouldn't want an award," says a student in her Math class, and Carol responds, "You could get your award privately." Carol articulates appreciation for feedback. "Thanks. Good info to have. Thanks for the feedback."

Carol says she is an ideas person. Regardless of the tone and content of the responses she gets, collecting feedback helps her to generate ideas for improving the overall performance of the school. She sees herself as a very reflective practitioner - one who is always reviewing and fine-tuning her professional decisions. The act of collecting feedback adds to her public reputation as an open-minded leader.

The actual information she receives gives her an edge in managing the public reputation of the school both on a short-term and long-term basis. . Speaking directly to respondents gives her immediate opportunities to address areas of concern before they become critical to the school's reputation. When the

feedback affirms her leadership or the school's programming, she has an opportunity to provide additional information that will consolidate and extend the positive image of the school in the respondent's mind. Taken in totality, the feedback she receives is invaluable to the decision-making that will establish and maintain both her professional reputation and the reputation of the school in the eyes of the community.

#### BEING MOTIVATED BY WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE SCHOOL

The singular statement "I'll do this because it's good for the school" is one of the keys to Carol's public reputation. Carol uses this statement to explain the motivation for her actions. Articulating this thought is a public relations habit that makes a significant impact both on Carol's PR image and the PR image of the school.

When asked for an interview for an article that will highlight super achievers in the Lethbridge area, Carol responds that she will do it because it's good for the school. As she explains why she initiated the Total Quality Transformation process in the school, Carol suggests that she believed the discussions would bring about changes that would be good for the school. Carol justifies her work on projects, committees, and conferences in terms of the fact that her involvement in these activities will benefit the school.

The statement is important for Carol's own professional reputation. There would seem to be an advantage in being seen as a leader who considers the welfare of the school ahead of her own. There is reassurance for students, staff, and parents in the idea that they will benefit as a result of the energy of their principal, even through her activities outside of school hours. The statement would seem to provide food for thought as her colleagues try to connect Carol's in-school projects and out-of-school engagements with the greater life of the school. The question of how the school may benefit from Carol's actions may be an important part of the process of change in the school.

What is certain is both that Carol invests a great amount of energy into the projects that pique her interest, and that she shows a vested interest in seeing positive change in the school. Through the statements that she makes, she confidently and fearlessly connects her own professional image to the public relations image of the school.

#### PROMOTING THE SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING OF OTHERS

Visitors to Winston Churchill carry back out with them the impression that the school is a friendly and energetic place. In large measure, this impression and the public message that ensues from it, can be attributed to the hostess who greets them, establishes rapport with them, and tours them through the school, or

otherwise connects them to the educational life on the site.

At meetings, Carol acts as the hostess, passing out drinking boxes at one, stopping to chat briefly with each individual in the room at another. When a guest comes into her office, for example the local reporter, she greets him warmly, provides comfortable seating, makes eye contact, smiles, chats informally, and uses humor to establish an interpersonal rapport.

The open door policy, the peppermint jar on the desk, the various seating arrangements in the room, the magazines or coffee table books, the personal memorabilia on the walls - all of these props - provide an environment that offers acceptance and comfort to those who are welcomed into it.

When she is aware of ways in which she can contribute to the well-being of others, Carol seems invariably to do so. When students come to her with the idea of volunteering a teacher for jail and bail, Carol's concerns are with how her daughter will be cared for in her absence, or whether she will be at the jail and bail too long after a busy school day. She questions staff who have been absent about how they are feeling; she brings a hot meal to a student's family the day before his father's funeral. She compliments and praises staff members in personal and professional ways, both when speaking directly to them, and when speaking about them to others.

The net impact of this welcoming stance, the concern for individual well-being, and praise for others' achievement is one that is reflected back to both school and principal. Winston Churchill is perceived as a place where one can feel

comfortable and accepted. Carol Steen is seen as a perceptive and caring leader. Person by person, a public reputation is established.

## SHARING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Carol sees herself as successful, but she also indicates that she has had the right breaks at the right time, and that she has been supported through the years by family, friends, colleagues and mentors. She suggests that some of the recognition that she has received can be seen as symbolic. "For example, when I won the YWCA Woman of the Year award, I knew that there were many other women who could have won the award, so when I made my acceptance speech, I said, 'I accept this award on behalf of my mother who..., and my children who... and my mentors who.... and so on.'"

When she describes the school, Carol does so in terms of success. She takes as established fact that the students are academically strong, that the staff is a strong team moving in the same direction, and that the administration is strong and effective. While she may be the one who is in the public attention most often, she makes the vocal statement that "there's no one super hero." Part of Carol's public relations personality is to share the spotlight, so that when she wins, everyone associated with her wins.

## CHAPTER TEN

### REVIEWING THE ROLE: CAROL AS PART OF A PARADIGM SHIFT

#### THE WOMAN IN CHARGE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

Through this case study, I have drawn a role analysis of Carol Steen as principal of Winston Churchill High School. Five categories emerged as organizational principles from the data that was collected during the four months that I observed Carol. Carol's role as principal can be described in terms of her educational administrative philosophy, her organizational system, her use of language, her decision-making strategies, and her public relations habits.

Philosophically, Carol articulates an educational vision that is both circular and progressive. The administrative team is at the core of the school's circular structure, intrinsically connected to all of the individuals and groups that make up the school community. The circular unit is moving along a progressive track powered by the belief that positive change provides meaning and a sense of fulfillment for the individual. Carol lives out this educational vision through her concern for individuals, her commitment to the team approach, her drive to make positive changes, and her joy in celebrating success.

Organizationally, Carol works to establish an internal balance between heart and brain, and an external balance between people and paper. There is a sense of purposefulness about Carol that reflects an inner understanding of her roles in the school. These roles can be described as educational leader, head of the administrative team, school supervisor, manager, school representative, facilitator, disciplinarian, hostess, figure head, and champion.

Carol speaks the language of inclusion. Through questioning and asking for feedback, she uses her communication skills to construct the understanding that she needs to do her job well. The words and gestures that she uses seem designed to verbally embrace those around her, and to establish self-esteem, warm relationships, and an informal and happy atmosphere throughout the school. Carol's tone and attitude are generally positive and joyful, and she channels her attention on the present moment and the present interaction. Carol uses inclusive language and humor to build rapport and a sense of partnership with others. She displays an openness to the unexpected, communicating an awareness of the possibilities of everyday life. There is a cheerleading quality in her speech and mannerisms that embodies the positive attitudes she is trying to instill in the school.

Carol is both responsive and proactive in decision-making. Her ability to exercise power rests on a solid base of role understanding, a sense of ownership, personal values, and information. The tone of Carol's administration is invitational - inviting other citizens of the school to care about themselves, the school, and

their place in it. At the same time, she accepts the fact that, ultimately, the praise or the blame for the success or failure of the school will come to rest on her shoulders. Carol relies on her own resources, knowledge, and sense of entitlement and responsibility to make responsive decisions as she engages with people and situations throughout the day. Proactive decisions are those which will eventually impact the institution as a whole, and so Carol leads groups to make positive changes in the school through collaborative processes. She acts as a facilitator and participant in group processes. She brings closure to discussions, announces the decisions of the group, leads the group to formulate a plan of action, delegates tasks, and gathers feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the decision once the plan is implemented.

Through her public relations habits and skills, Carol establishes her own reputation and the reputation of the school. Carol seeks opportunities for the school to be in the spotlight, and plants positive ideas that take on a life of their own as self-fulfilling prophecies. She promotes the success and well-being of others, acts as a friendly and energetic hostess for the school, and works actively to protect the image of the school when she is able to do so. She justifies the work she does in the school and on projects outside of the school in terms of how her work will benefit Winston Churchill. In many ways, she connects her own personal image to the image of the school. She sees herself as successful, but when the spotlight falls on her, she uses her public relations skills to share the recognition with her school community.

## CAROL AS PART OF A PARADIGM SHIFT

From the time that Wolcott studied Ed Bell, principal of William Taft Elementary School in 1967, to the time that Carol Steen serves as principal of Winston Churchill High School in 1996, significant changes have occurred in educational administration. There has been a paradigm shift from hierarchical to collaborative cultures and toward the sharing of responsibility for educational purposes. Carol's practice as a female administrator of an Alberta high school is both a reflection of that paradigm shift, and a possible indicator of the restructuring of educational theory and educational training that is still to come.

There are more differences than similarities between Ed Bell, the 1967 elementary school principal, and Carol Steen, the 1996 secondary school principal. The similarities exist in the fast pace of the job and yet the satisfaction to be found in it. Harry Wolcott found that Ed Bell was ever on call, and required both patience and prudence to deal with the myriad problems and situations that confronted him throughout a working day. The same could be said for Carol Steen. Wolcott found that Bell was highly achievement-oriented and found prestige, acceptance, and sufficient ego-gratification in the principalship to see him through the demands of the position. Carol, too, is achievement-oriented, and enjoys prestige and acceptance in the principalship. She articulates a joy in both teaching and administration, as well as pride in the recognition of her success and the success of the school. The differences between Ed Bell and Carol occur in the

areas of philosophy, organizational structure, and use of power.

Wolcott found that Ed Bell was moved through the day by problems brought to him or created for him by others, rather than by a grand design of his own of what he wanted to accomplish. In contrast, Carol lives out an educational vision; she anticipates the kinds of situations that will present themselves to her, and has incorporated this proactive stance into her philosophical position. Carol believes that positive change is not only possible, but that it provides individual meaning and fulfilment. She lives out this "grand design" through her concern for individuals, her commitment to the team approach, her drive to make positive changes, and her joy in celebrating success.

While Bell articulated a philosophy that every problem is important, he tried to elude some details of the demands placed on him, assuming that pressing problems would catch up with him eventually. Carol, however, articulates a philosophy that every individual is important, and she goes to huge effort not to forget any of the details that are brought to her attention. Instead, she takes running notes of everything, paying close attention to the names and concerns, personal and professional, of the individuals with whom she comes in contact. She makes lists of all of the things she has to do, and carries forward to the next day's list any tasks that have not been completed.

Bell's school was organized in a hierarchical structure, and the routines in the school were best described as bureaucratic and paternalistic. Carol's school is structured on the model of a circle. The administrative team is at the core, sharing

values that are centered on teachers and students. Through the dynamics of the circle, the principal and the administrative team are integrally connected to all of the individuals and groups that make up the school community. Informality and communication mark the routines of the school. Relationships are collegial rather than paternalistic.

Wolcott found that there were few real opportunities for educational leadership, and that Ed Bell exercised authority according to divisional policy. He dealt with criticism by discrediting the competence of antagonistic sources. Carol sees herself as an ideas person and says that becoming an administrator means to introduce change. She engages in on-going education and reflection and initiates creative changes and improvement in the school through collaborative decision-making. While she operates within the parameters of divisional policy, she is constantly seeking for new angles to old problems, and is able to modify policies and procedures at her own school site when she feels it is beneficial to do so. When she is criticized, Carol is contemplative and polite. She makes clear value statements that illustrate her feelings and beliefs about the issue at hand. When she recognizes that she has made a mistake, she rarely apologizes; instead she affirms others. She praises the concern of others, or the attention to detail, that has brought her error to light.

In 1977, NASSP conducted a study of 60 effective secondary school principals. The average subject in the study was male, white, approximately 43

years old, and had earned both a bachelor's and master's degree. Carol fits these criteria, except for the fact that she is female. Like the principals from whom the study findings were drawn, Carol had more than 10 years of teaching, coaching or counselling experience before she entered the principalship. Like them, she is active in professional and community organizations, and sees herself as an initiator, facilitator, good listener, standard setter, friendly advocate, and role model.

The NASSP study found that the hypothetical effective principal communicated with parents through newsletters, telephone calls, advisory councils, surveys, and speeches, but not through meeting with parent groups. Carol uses these methods of communication too, but she also meets with individual parents when there are issues to discuss that involve their child, and she helps staff members organize parent information workshops that are held at the school.

Like the effective principal of the NASSP study, Carol meets with her staff on a biweekly or monthly basis. Carol does not chair the meetings; rather, they are chaired by a staff member, and Carol participates as an informed member of a collaborative group. The principals of the NASSP study used staff meetings to discuss student behavior and good school climate, and to make short-range plans. The meetings at Winston Churchill are also devoted to similar topics.

The NASSP study found that the effective principal focuses on the curriculum development process, but not on evaluation. At least on an informal

level, this is not true of Carol. She concerns herself both with development and evaluation, asking for continuous feedback from students, staff, and the larger school community, and reflecting on the information that she receives.

Unlike the hypothetical principal of the NASSP study, Carol credits her success to the support of family, friends, and mentors. In addition, like the NASSP principal, she also credits her success to the quality and support of assistant principals, teaching faculty, cooperative students, and parental and community support and cooperation.

In 1983, David C. Dwyer and associates conducted case studies of five principals in order to derive grounded definitions of principal success and effectiveness. They concluded that principals lived their school days at an exhausting pace - Carol's experience as well. They found that the presence of the principal permeated the whole of the school setting. Carol's cheery supervisory presence in the hallways, and her obvious concern for the health and well-being of individuals and school programs suggests that her presence, too, permeates the school community. She communicates a vision of exciting teachers to be the best that they can be, and to carry that excitement with them into the classroom. Sharing information and inviting others to join in collegial decision-making, Carol draws others into a recognition of their ownership of the school and its programs. She has a high profile in the school, leading assemblies, initiating teamwork, negotiating with teachers, and communicating with student leaders. Her presence

is felt in the wider school community at divisional administration meetings through her work on various professional and community committees and through media exposure.

While investing substantial time in mundane details, Carol, like the principals of the Dwyer et al. study, works with overarching goals in mind. Of the five principals described in this study, Carol is most like Martha Delling, principal of Boxer Heights Elementary school. Like Martha, Carol is spirited, ambitious, energetic, and a caring leader of a courteous and orderly school. While Martha exhibited concern for the achievement of children from low-income families, Carol expresses an interest in the concern for the achievement of all of her students - the special needs students as well as the International Baccalaureate students. Some of her concern about student achievement and innovative programming seems to stem from the fact that the school is funded by the government on the basis of the credits earned by students in the school.

Like Martha Delling, Carol has counselling skills, and leads by dealing with people on a human level, one by one. She is highly visible in the school community - an example, a catalyst, and a facilitator of positive change that will benefit the school.

Most of the qualities of the 26 principals described by Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie and Hurwitz in their 1984 study Principals in Action, apply to Carol's administrative leadership. She is an instructional leader and a decision-

maker. However, while she makes personal, informal, and responsive decisions on a minute by minute basis, she leads her staff through a process of collaboration and consensus in order to make proactive decisions that will impact the whole institution. Some of the conclusions of the Morris et al. study are articulated in a personal way by Carol. The study suggests that the job is largely what each principal makes of it; Carol says that being a principal is an open-ended job and that one brings his or her character to the principal. The study describes the principalship as a balancing act - balancing organizational expectations of stability with quasi-political requirements for change, and balancing responsiveness to the community with a protectiveness in shielding the educational organization from the community. Carol describes her struggle for balance in terms of a struggle to find a balance between heart and brain, and between people and paper. The balance she is trying to find for herself and the school is health - academically, physically, socially and emotionally.

Like the principals of the Morris et al. study, Carol is open to publicity, presenting her school as a success while at the same time protecting the organizational hierarchy from embarrassing publicity. In fact, Carol seeks publicity, and seems to fearlessly connect her own public image to the image of the school.

Morris et al. suggest that principals are loyal to the school site rather than to administrative peers, and that this extends the principal's feeling of isolation. Carol has a broad network of peers, ranging from her own administrative team to

colleagues on professional committees within the city, at the university, and on provincial and national educational organizations. She seems to balance her loyalty to the school site with her loyalty to the wider educational profession. Carol does not articulate feelings of isolation in the principalship.

In 1982, Flora Ida Ortiz collected data from 350 school administrators and drew a profile of career patterns in educational administration. She found role conflict in women who were in administrative positions. She discovered that, in general, women excelled unobtrusively and waited modestly for promotion. The picture does not fit Carol Steen. Carol expresses joy and a sense of fulfillment in her administrative role. She speaks of her ambition and her interest in assuming professional positions of greater power and responsibility. She dresses colorfully and attractively, speaks articulately, and seems to enjoy the spotlight that falls on her. She accepts praise graciously and openly promotes both her own achievements and the achievements of friends and colleagues.

Ortiz further discovered that women in educational administration were faced with several taboos; the greatest taboo was to do something that would make the dominants look bad. Other taboos were complaining about a job, making a request for a promotion, displaying emotions, or talking too much. Carol takes an attitude of good humored irreverence with her when she goes to divisional administration meetings. She makes light-hearted jokes, sometimes at the expense of the superintendent. She is alert and becomes involved in most of

the discussions around the administrative table. Interestingly, as Ortiz found true of other principals, Carol has been told by at least one colleague that she talks too much at divisional meetings.

Women in educational administration were expected to tolerate disrespectful joking, and were not allowed for present themselves as heroines in war stories, said Ortiz. Carol loves to banter with her colleagues; on the one occasion when she felt the joke at the school administration meeting was intended to convey a critical message, she responded swiftly and assertively, asking the speaker to be straightforward and not cloak his criticism in a jest. In speaking of past educational experiences, Carol tells stories in which she has figured as a resourceful and powerful person.

Ortiz concluded that women who succeed in school administration are overachievers - certainly this description has been applied to Carol Steen. Successful female administrators, said Ortiz, fall into one of two categories. Either they are able to maintain the delicate balance between always doing well and not generating peer resentment, or less successfully, they succeed through hard work and becoming socially invisible. Carol fits the profile of the administrator who is able to maintain a balance and who does well without generating resentment.

In 1987, Charol Shakeshaft completed a study entitled Women in Educational Administration. The characteristics that she outlined of an effective female administrator seem designed to describe Carol Steen.

The effective woman does not copy the effective man, said Shakeshaft. True of Carol. Women in administration spend more time with people, communicate more, care more about individual differences, and motivate more, said Shakeshaft. Carol's assertive style of collecting feedback, greeting students and staff, and recognizing individual achievements indicate that these descriptors, too, could be applied to Carol. Further, women display more democratic, participatory styles of leadership, and maintain more closely knit organizations, said Shakeshaft. Carol's leadership in collegial, collaborative decision-making, her care for individuals, and her drive to connect people within the circular organizational structure of the school indicate that these characteristics are evident in Carol's administrative career. As Shakeshaft found true about effective female educational administrators, Carol demonstrates that in matters of authority, climate, power, motivation, personnel selection, and community relations, her strategies differ from and overlap the strategies of males.

In 1990, Sally Helgeson conducted several diary studies of female administrators outside of the educational arena. Her conclusions drew a contrast between typical male managerial styles, and female administrative styles. Like the administrators that Helgeson described, Carol has constructed a vision of her educational organization as a circle in which the administrative team is at the core with web-like relationships and interrelationships occurring throughout the school. The circular structure allows her to have more direct access to anyone

within the school. Information gathering and disseminating, inclusion, connections, and strengthening the parts into a whole are functions of the circular structure.

Helgeson found that the administrator's day was characterized by interruptions, discontinuity, and fragmentation, but that women welcomed these informal and unexpected encounters. Carol's open-door policy, her warm welcome of unanticipated guests, and her willingness to be actively present to the concerns of the students and staff members who pop in to see her indicate that she, too, accepts and finds value in the fragmentation of her day. Responsiveness to the people and the issues that are brought to her play an important part in her over-all design for educational administration.

If there is any way in which Carol is not like the female administrator of Helgeson's study, it is that she does not schedule small breaks into her day. While she connects with family members via the telephone throughout the day, on the school site she works at an unrelenting pace. There are very few moments in Carol's day when she is not engaged with the people or the paper that constitutes her job.

In 1993, Doreen Shantz conducted a literature review through which she discovered that the schools of today and the future need to have collaborative cultures, and that women have the lead in the use of effective collaborative approaches. To build the risk-taking atmosphere conducive to a collaborative

culture, she said, several administrative components are necessary. The components that she articulated are evidenced in the administrative leadership of Carol Steen. Staff development and involvement mark the collegial, proactive discussion and decision-making at Winston Churchill. Greater equality exists as the focus falls on individual potential and achievement. Building a vision and sharing a vision are described by Carol as key elements of the success of her administrative team and the school at large. Through "walking the talk" in the hallways, assertively requesting feedback, vocalizing care for individuals, and displaying energy and joy in her duties, Carol role-models the positive, healthy, and communicative values that she is seeking to inspire. In administering the school, she is focused on human relationships and she is oriented towards caring rather than rights. As a leader, she is bright, competent, practical, sensitive, and committed to personal growth. Like the hypothetical female administrator that Shantz described, Carol is committed to the development of a democratic culture marked by inclusion and equity.

The impressions that last for me, after experiencing Carol's administrative leadership, are an awareness of a person who exhibits acceptance, warmth, humor, energy, hard work, achievement, praise, and joy, and whose days are marked by continual interactions with other human beings. As a female administrator in 1996, Carol is part of a paradigm shift from a hierarchical to a collaborative educational culture, and from an impersonal standards-based

environment to a personal, achievement-oriented educational environment. It is through her vision of the school as a circle, through her commitment to communication, and through her delight in positive change that Carol Steen is able to be, not only the woman in charge of the high school, but also the one who cares for it.

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