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The Culture of a Public School's Approach to Children with ASD: An Ethnographical Study

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By

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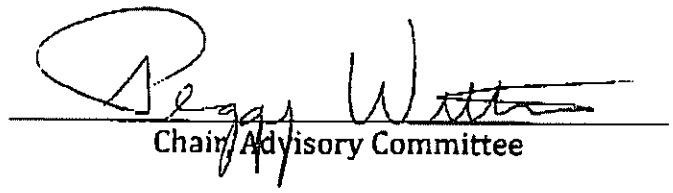

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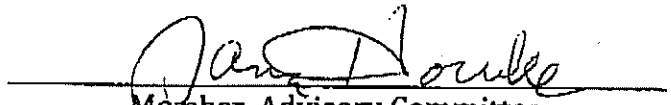

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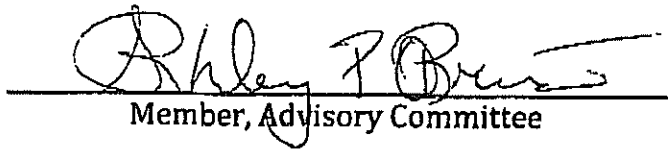

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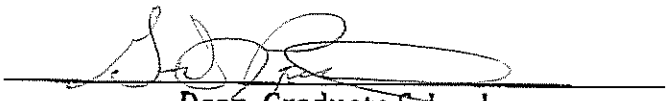

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THE CULTURE OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO CHILDREN WITH ASD: AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDY.

By

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Masters of Science in Occupational Therapy
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents
Cynthia and Gordon Marcy
for their unwavering support, and Marc Maxwell for his extraordinary editing skills.

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I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Peggy Wittman, EdD, for her guidance and patience. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Dana Howell and Dr. Shirley O'brien, for their comments and assistance over the past year and a half. My graduate thesis is better because of their assistance. I would like to express my thanks to my boyfriend, Marc, for his understanding and patience during those long nights of panic and stress. He encouraged me and made me stick with it. I would like to thank the members of my family: my parents Cyndi and Gordon Marcy for the home cooked meals, free internet access and printing; my sister Laura Patterson for her encouraging words; and my little brother Jonathan Marcy for giving me the basement for most of the late spring of 2011.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the number of students with disabilities mainstreamed into regular education classrooms has increased, as legislation and research have supported the practice. Due to the landmark Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and its successor, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), all children with disabilities have the right to be educated along with their peers. The philosophical support for mainstreaming, or inclusion, promotes the principle of "normalization," which holds that individuals with disabilities should be allowed to participate in the routines, activities, and the general lifestyles enjoyed by those who are not disabled (Greer, 1995). It also supports the principle of a free and appropriate public education in the student's least restrictive environment. The theoretical perspective used to guide this ethnographical study is the theory of inclusion, which is mandated by federal law and aims to promote the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream educational settings (Ochs, 2001).

With the rate of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is rising dramatically to an estimated one in 110 children according to the Centers for Disease Control (2010), the literature lacks a comprehensive description of the culture of public schools and their approach to the increasing numbers of children with ASD being educated within today's school systems. This study explored the

culture of a typical elementary school in Central Kentucky and its students with disabilities, in particular students with ASD.

Description of Research Question

Westridge Elementary School (WRE), located in Frankfort, Kentucky, includes several social groups, including faculty members (classroom educators, administrators, classified staff), students (with and without disabilities) and families (families with and without children with disabilities). The researcher used ethnographic methodology to gather, organize and interpret data to address the following research question, "What is the culture for students with ASD at Westridge Elementary School?" The researcher identified a set of sub-questions to further explore this research question:

1. What is the cultural emphasis on students with disabilities, in particular students with ASD?
2. What is the language used by cultural members of WRE in relationship to it's students with ASD?
3. How do the rituals used by cultural members of WRE relate to students with ASD?
4. How do the norms used by cultural members of WRE relate to students with ASD?
5. What occupations are cultural members participating in, and how do they relate to students with ASD?

Using Ethnographic Research

Because ethnographic research provides a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group (Creswell, 1998), it was determined to be the most appropriate method of research to answer the research questions. The ethnographic researcher examines the group's observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs and ways of life (Harris, 1968) through an "emic," or insider, perspective. This is done to gain a better understanding of the cultural group. The ethnographic process is typically done through participant observation, where the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people or through one-on-one interviews with cultural members (Creswell, 1998).

Ethnography is historically an anthropological or sociological research method, but has become widely used among healthcare professionals aiming to explore areas where quantitative research is lacking. Occupational therapists have been attracted to ethnography because of its ability to portray and interpret human experiences and meanings as described by persons who know their own local experience (Depoy & Gitlin, 2005). Spencer et al (1993) further explains that the physical aspect of the environment described in ethnography provides information about how routines and tasks are performed. Knowing the people and what they do allows the therapist to understand cultural roles, while examining the value cultural members put on occupations and tasks, allowing the therapist to understand the meaning of the occupations (Spencer et al, 1993).

Ethnography is one of the most in-depth research methods possible and its benefits include the depth of research collected and challenging cultural assumptions. This rich in-depth research is obtained through the process of eliciting stories, personal experiences, and the telling of events and is based on the development of strong relationships or bonds which develop between the researcher and the cultural members (DePoy & Gitlin, 2005). Ethnography is a design that is capable of moving beyond description to reveal complex relationships, patterns, and theory (DePoy & Gitlin, 2005).

Role of Researcher

In order to avoid the potential influence of cultural assumption, beliefs, and behaviors that are embedded within the culture, theorists agree that ethnographic research is best begun with an outsiders perspective, or "etic" perspective, which is defined as someone who is not a part of the culture being researched (Creswell, 1998). However, the researcher of this study has a history as a cultural member of the research population, and therefore also shares an "emic" perspective, or someone within the cultural group being researched (Creswell, 1998). For three years (fall 2005- spring 2008) the researcher held the position of low incidence special education teacher at Westridge Elementary School. At the time this research was initiated, the researcher had not interacted with cultural members of WRE for two years. Therefore, the researcher represents both the emic and etic perspective of the cultural group researched. Recognizing the knowledge and assumptions the researcher had pertaining to this culture as potential biases, the researcher

discontinued any involvement as a cultural member and continued the research process as a participant observer.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

In order to counteract any potentially biased knowledge of Westridge Elementary School, the researcher used a method identified by Creswell (1998) to identify, understand, and then eliminate potential biases that may have resulted from the researcher's experience as a cultural member. This technique is called *bracketing* and was completed by journaling and reflecting on previous experiences, beliefs about Westridge Elementary School, the culture believed to be associated with WRE, and ideas that could be identified as potential biases. Throughout the research process the researcher added to her journal by documenting reflections after interviews and observations. These reflections were reviewed periodically and added to as needed throughout the research process, as well as referenced during data analysis. An example of these reflections can be found in Appendix A.

Significance to Occupational Therapy

According to American Occupational Therapy Association, occupational therapy practitioners provide interventions to clients in the settings where they typically engage in daily activities (Scott, 2011). A significant portion of a child's life is spent within an educational setting, consequently occupational therapists provide services to children with disabilities, ages 3-21, within their school environment. The 2010 Occupational Therapy Compensation and Workforce Study identifies

schools as the second most prevalent work setting for occupational therapists in the United States (21.6%), behind hospitals (26.2%). Within a school setting, occupational therapists assist students in achieving both academic and non-academic goals, including goals related to social skills, math, literacy, behavior management, recess, self-help skills, and prevocational/vocational participation (AOTA, 2010b). An occupational therapist can assist an individual with ASD through evaluation to determine whether they have accomplished developmentally appropriate skills needed in such areas as grooming, play and leisure skills, and by providing interventions to help an individual respond to sensory information (Scott, 2011). The occupational therapist can also collaborate with the individual and family to identify safe methods of community mobility and to identify, develop, or adapt work and other daily activities that are meaningful to enhance the individual's quality of life (Scott, 2011).

Because this study examines the cultural context of an elementary school and its students with ASD, the findings are pertinent to occupational therapy. In ethnographic research the context is what defines the situation and makes it what it is. Occupational therapists consider a client's context, or interrelated conditions within and surrounding the client that influence performance (AOTA, 2008), and recognize the influence of the environment on a person's ability to perform actions expected for a given role (Griswold, 1994). This information is then used to develop an appropriate intervention plan to meet client outcomes. The information gathered from this research project will be valuable to all professionals working with children

with ASD in public school settings, including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, special education teachers, administrators, regular education teachers, and families of children with ASD. The research will provide professionals with insight into how school culture is influenced by students with ASD and result in school-based therapists who have a greater understanding of their working environments. It is the researcher's goal to provide these therapists with ideas for improving services, in school-based practice settings.

Defining Terms

Definitions for terminology used in this research study that are relevant to the discussion of the educational system, ethnographic research and occupational therapy are as follows in alphabetical order:

Artifacts: a.) something created by humans, usually for a practical purpose, especially an object remaining from a particular period; b.) something characteristic of or resulting from a particular human institution, period, trend, or individual (Merriam-Webster, 2011). What a cultural group makes and uses (Creswell, 1998).

Attitude: a.) a mental position with regard to a fact or state; b.) a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD): a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges (CDC, 2011). The five different types of ASD are: Autistic Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Asperger's

Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Development Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (DSM IV-TR).

Behavior: the way in which something functions or operates. (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Belief: a.) a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing; b.) a tenet or body of tenets held by a group (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Any cognitive content held as true by the client (Moyers & Dale, 2007).

Collaboration: The act of working jointly with others. When applied to school and early intervention childhood settings, describes how professionals and parents work in an active partnership to develop and implement a program of services (Jackson, 2007).

Culture: a cohesive group of people that share patterns of behavior, beliefs, attitudes, language, and social interactions that are consistent and maintained, learned and transferable, and include observable and describable patterns of interaction with the physical, temporal and non-human environments (Morse & Richards, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Early intervening services (EIS): Described in IDEA (2004); professional development or educational and behavioral evaluations, services, and supports to assist students, ages 3-21, before they are identified as needing special education or related services (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008).

Ethnography: A qualitative/naturalistic research methodology designed as a means for exploring cultural groups (cohesive groups of people) and to describe the beliefs, values, behaviors, norms, perspectives, characteristics, and patterns of these groups (Morse & Richards, 2002). Ethnography is always holistic, contextual, reflexive, and presented from the emic perspective. A focused ethnography is used primarily to elicit information on a special topic or shared experience and may be conducted with a sub-cultural group (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE): Mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, a basic and substantive right of children with disabilities; special education and related services that meet the standards of the state education agency; are provided at public expense; include preschool, elementary and high school, and are provided in accordance with an Individualized Education Plan (see below) (Jackson, 2007).

Inclusion: The act or practice of including students with disabilities in regular school classes (Merriam-Webster, 2011). A federal policy that promotes the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education settings (Ochs et al, 2001).

Individualized education plan (IEP): The formal statement of each IDEA eligible student's academic, educational and functional needs, including information about services and supports to be provided to meet the child's needs (Jackson, 2007).

Language: a.) the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community; b.) a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventional signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meaning; c.) the suggestion by objects, actions, or conditions of associated ideas or feelings (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): Mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the *LRE* provides maximum interaction with typically developing children consistent with the needs of the child with a disability (Jackson, 2007).

Mainstreaming: To place a disabled child in regular school classes (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Used interchangeably with *inclusion* (see above).

Mini-ethnography: narrowing the focus of the ethnographic study to relate to a sub-cultural group and involving only one specific segment of the population in a larger culture (Morse & Richards 2002).

Occupation: chunks of daily activity that can be named in the lexicon of the culture (Zemke & Clark, 1996). Goal directed pursuits that typically extend over time, have meaning to the performance, and involve multiple tasks (Christiansen et al., 2005).

Para-professional: Also known as aides, teaching assistants, or paraeducators (Jackson, 2007, p. 118). The individuals who provide instructional and other

services to students and who are supervised by licensed professionals who are responsible for student outcomes (Friend & Cook, 2007, p. 141).

Participant observer: Morse & Richards (2002) describe the researcher's stance in this context as being a student of the cultural group he or she is studying, learning and being taught yet not truly one of the group. For the purposes of this study, the researcher participated casually in small degrees within activities and interactions at Westridge Elementary School and with members in order to gain more in-depth information than direct observation would allow, but did not maintain a distinct role or act in place of a member.

Perception: a.) a result of perceiving (as in observation) or a mental image (as in concept); b.) awareness of the elements of environment through physical sensation and physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience; c.) a quick, acute and intuitive cognition (appreciation), or capacity for comprehension (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Person First Language: is language that subordinates the disability to the individual (Bickford, 2004) and focuses on the person instead of their disability (Lynch, Thuli, & Groombridge, 1994).

Related services: Includes occupational and physical therapists, assistive technology specialists, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and speech-language pathologists (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008).

Response to intervention (RtI): the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions (NASDSE, 2006, p.3).

Ritual: Symbolic actions with spiritual, cultural, or social meaning, contributing to the client's identity and reinforcing the client's values and beliefs. Rituals are highly symbolic, with a strong affective component and representative of a collection of events (AOTA, 2008).

Roles: sets of behaviors expected by society, shaped by culture, and may be further conceptualized and defined by the client (Roley et al., 2008).

Routines: patterns of behavior that are observable, regular, repetitive and that provide structure for daily life. (Roley et al., 2008).

Sub-environment: Combined from the definitions of *sub (prefix)* and *environment*; a secondary, subordinate portion or subdivision of the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Values: Principles, standards or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable by the client who holds them (Moyers & Dale, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background & History

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the United States has been an extensive process. The existence of special education resources, programs and schools has developed almost exclusively within the last 50 years. As reported by the National Council on Disability (2000), little was done to advance the rights of students with disabilities for almost 200 years. Prior to the Education for All Handicap Children Act of 1975, approximately 4.5 million children were denied adequate schooling and only one in five students with a disability were educated (NCD, 2000). This legislation, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), assures individuals with disabilities must have a free and appropriate education (FAPE), regardless of the severity of their disability, and in their least restrictive environment (LRE) (Jackson, 2007). A written document called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), is the "centerpiece of IDEA" (Jackson, 2007), and contains specific information about the child's educational needs, levels of performance, annual goals, short-term objectives, and special education and related services to be provided to the child with a disability (NCD, 2000). This document is reviewed and revised each year during a meeting with school personnel and the child's parents called an Annual Review Conference (ARC).

Along with IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act create the framework for today's education of children with disabilities. These civil rights statutes prohibit discrimination by programs receiving federal funds on the basis of disability, thus enabling children who are unable to qualify for IDEA to receive reasonable accommodations to help them access and participate in learning activities (Jackson, 2007). Expecting children with disabilities to remain dependent throughout their lives was no longer the United States national policy (NCD, 2000).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and strengthened the participation of students with disabilities in state and district wide assessments, focused on preventing learning and behavior disorders, and increased the emphasis on academic results rather than the process used to achieve them (Jackson, 2007).

IDEA defines FAPE as special education and related services that meet the standards of state education agencies and are provided at public expense, which includes preschool through secondary education (Jackson, 2007, p. 3; NCD, 2000). IDEA mandates that students with disabilities are educated in the environment that provides the maximum interaction with non-disabled children consistent with the child's needs. This environment is the LRE and is often referred to as the "integration mandate" (NCD, 2000).

The national focus on education has shifted to closing achievement gaps, emphasizing high quality, scientifically-based instruction and interventions and holding schools accountable for the progress of all students in meeting grade level standards (IDEA Partnership, 2010b). The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs developed a model for Early Intervening Services (EIS) called Response to Intervention (RtI). The focus of RtI is to reach general education students who are having difficulty learning (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008, p. 120). According to the IDEA Partnership (2010), RtI is a method of academic intervention designed to provide early and effective assistance to students by providing high quality instruction, monitoring of student progress, and data-based decision-making. RtI is derived from four core principles: belief that all children can learn, early intervening is essential to student achievement, use of problem-solving guides and practice implementation, and use of a multi-tier model of service delivery (IDEA Partnership, 2010b).

A three-tier model for RtI is used to illustrate a continuum of instruction to ensure that all students learn the expected material (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008, p. 120). The first tier is the core academic and behavioral instruction, in which students are screened to identify those deemed at-risk and all students are provided with universal supports (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008, p. 120; IDEA Partnership, 2010b). The second tier provides targeted interventions and progress monitoring to those students identified as being at-risk. The third tier is an intensive intervention

focusing on individual students (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008, p. 120; IDEA Partnership, 2010b). This school-wide model uses a problem solving team comprised of educators, administrators, parents, behavioral and mental health specialists, and related service specialists, such as occupational therapists (IDEA Partnership, 2010b).

The U.S. Department of Education (2011) states that over 300,000 children with ASD are receiving services under IDEA. ASD was once considered a rare disorder, but now appears to many as an epidemic. Some research estimates there are 20 times as many individuals diagnosed with ASD than there were 20 years ago (Tidmah & Volkmar, 2003). ASD has become a popular topic in today's literature and popular media and there have been many theories proposed attempting to explain the increases within this population. One such theory would suggest that the growing numbers of children diagnosed with ASD is due to a corresponding decrease in other diagnoses, such as mental retardation. A study by Newschaffer, Falb, and Gurney (2005) used national data from the Department of Special Education Programs to examine the classification trends of children with ASD. They found yearly increases in the number of children labeled as having an ASD between 1975 and 1995, while also finding there was no corresponding decrease in the number of children labeled as having mental retardation. This study would suggest that reclassification of children from mental retardation to ASD does not explain the changes in special education trends in the United States (Boyd & Shaw, 2010).

Environmental factors have been blamed for the increases in children identified as having ASD, including the provision of vaccinations. However, overwhelming evidence suggests that vaccinations are not a contributing cause of ASD (Honda, Shimizu & Rutter, 2005; Taylor et al, 1999; Hviid, Stellfeld, Wohlfahrt, & Melbye, 2003). Some research suggests a genetic component; finding if one identical twin has ASD the likelihood of the other twin having ASD is 69-95% (Boyde & Shaw, 2010; Dawson, 2008). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2009), the rate of children with ASD depends on their racial and ethnic background, with the national average of eight year olds with ASD being 1 in 110. The prevalence of non-Hispanic white children was 1 in 101, non-Hispanic black children 1 in 139, and Hispanic children having a 1 in 170 rate of having ASD (NIMH, 2009). ASD is a complex disorder and while we may not understand its cause, Boyd and Shaw (2010) identified factors which account for the increased prevalence of the diagnosis, including the use of better screening tools, increase in public awareness, an emphasis on early identification, and the use of the term Autism Spectrum Disorder. ASD includes five different diagnostic classifications which all manifest a set of characteristics that range in severity of presentation. These characteristics include significant social, communication and behavioral challenges (CDC, 2011). Individuals who display less of these characteristics are described as being on the low end of the spectrum, while individuals with several are described as being high on the spectrum (Boyde & Shaw, 2010).

Characteristics of Prior Research

Although school communities have been studied using ethnographic research, the literature lacks a comprehensive description of the culture of public schools for students with ASD. Prior research has focused on sensori-motor and communication needs, and social skills intervention (Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008; Jasmin et al, 2008; Licciardello et al, 2008). Research supports the regular education classroom as an appropriate placement for many students with ASD (Friedlander, 2008). Research conducted by Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon and Sirota at the University of California Los Angeles used qualitative and ethnographic methodology to study the social realities of high functioning children with ASD in public schools in the United States (2001). This research focused on the perspective of the autistic student and the benefit of their inclusive education to their social, communicative and educational individualized needs. The study also attempts to analyze the interactional dynamics of inclusion, both positive and negative, for the autistic child but fails to acknowledge the institutional impact that mainstreaming students with disabilities has on cultural members.

There is a plethora of information on treatment and teaching strategies for students with ASD, many of which support mainstreaming these students. Strategies such as a daily class schedule, visual aids, embedded choice opportunities, role-play, peer supports and clearly defined spaces for individual and group work (Case-Smith & Arbersman, 2008; Koenig et al, 2009) are considered best practices when teaching students with ASD in an inclusive environment. While many interventions for the

treatment of ASD exist, only some have been shown to be effective through scientific research.

The use of visual supports has been shown to be an effective treatment strategy with early childhood, elementary and middle school aged groups (Hume, 2008). Visual supports are any tool presented visually that supports an individual as he or she moves through the day (Hume, 2008). Visual supports may include pictures, written words, objects within the environment, visual boundaries or arrangement of the environment, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts (Hume, 2008). Effective visual supports in early childhood settings include visual schedules to increase task engagement, visual scripts to encourage social interaction, and picture cues to support play skill development (Krantz & McClannahan, 1998; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Morrison, Sainato, BenChaaban, & Endo, 2002). In elementary and middle school, visual supports such as schedules and picture cues have proven effective in reducing transition time, increasing on-task behavior, and completing self-help in the home (Bryan & Gast, 2000; Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

Structured work systems are an element of structured teaching developed by Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren). Structured teaching is an instructional strategy that emphasizes visual supports and attempts to increase and maximize independent functioning and reduce the frequent need for teacher correction and reprimand

(Schopler, Mesibov, & Hearsey, 1995). The individual work system is defined as a visually organized space where learners independently practice skills that have been previously mastered under the direct supervision of an adult (Hume & Carnahan, 2008). These work systems are an effective component of classroom programming that increase independent performance during academic and play skills (Hume & Odom, 2007; Ozonoff & Cathcart, 1998). In older learners with ASD, work systems have been effective in increasing on-task performance and task completion in after-school activities and job skills (Hume & Odom, 2007; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

The use of social narratives have also been found to be effective in the instruction of individuals with ASD (Collet-Klingenberg, 2008). Social narratives are interventions that describe social situations in detail by highlighting relevant cues and offering examples of appropriate responding (Collet-Klingenberg, 2008). Social narratives help learners with ASD adjust to changes in their routine and adapt their behaviors based on the social and physical cues of a situation, and also teach specific social skills and behaviors (Collet-Klingenberg, 2008). Social narratives are individualized according to each student and typically are short, sometimes including pictures or other visual aides (Collet-Klingenberg, 2008). Social narratives originated in the behavioral literature and have been used to address behavioral difficulties, teach social skills, and promote effective and appropriate communication (Collet-Klingenberg, 2008).

The IDEA Partnership (2010a) discusses the benefit of using positive behavior interventions and supports with students identified with ASD who's behavior impedes the child's learning or that of others. Positive behavioral supports (PBS) have developed over the past two decades in efforts to promote the social-emotional and behavioral health of children in school settings (Jackson, 2007). PBS emerged from applied behavioral analysis (ABA) and is an applied science that uses educational and systems change methods to enhance quality of life and minimize problematic behavior (Carr et al., 2002, p. 4). PBS recognizes four important variables, which include the context the behavior occurs, the function of the behavior, whether the interventions can be justified by the outcomes, and whether the outcomes are acceptable to the individual, family and the community (Haring & De Vault, 1996).

A previous ethnographic analysis of classroom environments (Griswold, 1994) by an occupational therapist looked at the importance of the environment, as it relates to an occupational therapists' ability to assess and adapt it in order to enhance a client's ability to function. The author then used the information to determine the most effective intervention strategies to use in any given classroom environment. Although the implications for occupational therapy practice are beneficial, this research did not attempt to analyze the rituals, customs, norms and language of a school in relationship to students with ASD.

Mullis and Fincher (1996) state that schools are communities with rules, expectations, and customs, all of which reflect schools' individual underlying values.

These values include working diligently, being fair, cooperating, and respecting others. They argue that a positive learning environment is created when these basic values are clearly defined and all members of the community accept them. Therefore, when everyone in the school understands and chooses to support school values and norms, cohesiveness is also enhanced (Mullis & Fincher, 1996). Ritual is a fact of school life and is enacted by teachers in their everyday classroom activities (Maloney, 2000). Rituals influence community spirit to the school by mirroring the community and its values, sustaining its social order and highlighting connections within the community (Mullis & Fincher, 1996). Classroom rituals have the potential to act as a tool through which teachers structure a particular form of practice that carries a rational pedagogical purpose for teachers (Maloney, 2000).

Spizer (2008) used participant observation and ethnographic research to look at young children with ASD and other developmental disorders. This research explored the meaningful occupations of 3 and 4 year olds, but did not explore the additional aspects of their culture such as norms, rituals, language or the environment. Additionally, this study was not conducted with the participation of school-aged children or completed within the culture of a school. Therefore this research study did not add a description of school culture for students with ASD to the literature.

Research conducted on individuals with ASD has primarily focused on the history, prevalence and possible etiology of the disorder. Additionally, the majority of research collected on ASD and school populations has focused on instructional

strategies and treatment options. While there is research available on the culture of school communities, the focus has not been on students with ASD. Griswold (1994) researched the classroom environment and Mullis and Fincher (1996) researched school wide rules, customs and values without looking at how the ASD population is impacted. Additionally, these ethnographic research studies of school communities are fifteen and seventeen years old, and do not reflect the current educational environment set forth by IDEA 2004, NCLB, or the implementation of RtI.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction to the Research Design

This research study was completed using the qualitative research method of ethnography, which is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography is a research approach which tries to discover and describe the point of view of a people or social scene (Kielhofner, 2006). The research question was developed in order to describe the culture of Westridge Elementary School (WRE) in association to providing services to children with ASD and was guided by the definition of culture to include the people and their shared patterns of norms, attitudes, language, and rituals, as well as the interaction of these characteristics within the environmental context. From the beginning of research development, this definition of culture guided the methodology of the study, including the data sources and types, the data collection process including participant interviews and observation, and the data analysis process.

Because this research study focused on the staff members of WRE, it is appropriate to use the term *mini-ethnography* when describing the methodology. Morse & Richards (2002) describe the process of the mini-ethnography, in which the focus of the research is narrowed to a sub-cultural group and involves one specific segment of the population in a larger culture. This study was approved by the Eastern Kentucky University Institutional Review Board on April 27th, 2010.

Data Sources and Data Types

The data sources collected for this study include participant observations, field notes, five one-on-one interviews, photographs, and a collection of artifacts and written information gathered during the researcher's time at Westridge Elementary School.

Participant Selection

Participants for this research study were selected from Westridge Elementary School (WRE) in Frankfort, Kentucky and included teachers, staff and students with ASD. After gaining permission from WRE's school principal to complete this research, the researcher was provided a list of educators with experience teaching students with ASD. This list, along with the researchers previous relationships and knowledge of staff members at WRE, guided the participant selection process. These staff members were recruited via email and asked to participate in this research project. After the researcher had initiated several observations and interviews with WRE staff members and students, additional participants were recruited in person to contribute in this research, based on the recommendations of staff and data collected through observations. For example, after two interviewees reported the library as an integral aspect of their classroom routine, the library media specialist was asked to participate in an interview and observations were collected.

Interview participants for this study were selected purposively using the following criteria: a.) the interview participants needed to have current or previous experience with students with ASD, within the school setting; b.) the participants had the ability to communicate and provide accurate and relevant information to the interviewer, c.) adult staff members of WRE willing to sign the consent form. Participants were excluded if they had no experience with students with ASD or if they were unable or unwilling to provide accurate and relevant information to the researcher.

Participants were selected for observation using the following criteria: a.) a student with an identified ASD, b.) an interview participant and their classroom students c.) the classroom teacher was willing to host the researcher, and d.) the researcher and classroom teacher agreed observations would not be detrimental to the learning of the students in the classroom. Participants were excluded from observation if the classroom teacher was unwilling to host the researcher or if the researcher and classroom teacher determined the observation would be harmful to student achievement.

Criteria for selection was defined after the researcher spent time in the school community, and with people representing school personnel. Five interviews were conducted using special education teachers, para-professionals, regular education teachers and the school library media specialist in order to obtain a sample of the culture of WRE. The observation participants were selected with assistance from school staff in the identification of students with ASD and their

classrooms. The participants' age range was from 8-52. This age range represents both the student cultural members who were observed and the staff members who served as interview participants. Table 1 Participant Demographics lists the participant demographics (pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality).

Prior to participating in the study, the researcher gained consent from Mr. Roush, WRE school Principle, in order to conduct this ethnographic study (see Appendix B). Each of the interview participants met with the researcher prior to the interview and discussed the purpose and intent of the study. Questions and concerns were discussed until each participant felt comfortable with how the data would be used. Two copies of an informed consent documents were signed and the researcher and interview participant each kept one for their records. For the content of the informed consent document, please refer to the Appendix C. Because students were observed, and not photographed or interviewed, they did not sign an informed assent document.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Disability, if any
Julie K.	39	female	1st grade teacher	
Jessica H.	29	female	Library Media	
Brittany B.	27	female	2nd grade teacher	
Amy B.	34	female	low incidence special Education teacher	
Barbara W.	46	female	para-educator	
*R	10	male	4th grade student	ASD
*S	8	male	3rd grade student	ASD/deaf
*C	10	male	4th grade student	ASD

Note. *Students were used for participant observation only.

Data Management and Collection Procedures

Data for this study was guided by the definition of culture and was collected from a variety of sources in order to describe this culture from the perspective of those who are members. This study included participant observations, field notes, interviews, photographs, and a collection of artifacts and written information. The

researcher immersed herself in prolonged observation of the school's day-to-day activities and the day-to-day lives of its members (Creswall, 1998). She also conducted five one-on-one interviews which were completed individually, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. The researcher used an interview guide to conduct individual interviews with participants (See Appendix D). Observations occurred and field notes were taken during and after the school day and across various school settings. Artifacts pertaining to the culture of WRE and its students with ASD were collected, including the taking of original photographs. The gathering of artifacts was guided based upon the researchers knowledge of WRE, the research process and upon the recommendations of interview participants. For example, after interview participant Jessica H. discussed the rules and procedures of Lunch Bunch, the Lunch Bunch Policies and Procedures handout, given to students and families, was collected and filed with WRE artifacts.

Prior to observations completed at WRE, the researcher contacted the participants to select a mutually agreed upon time and date, in order to avoid causing unnecessary stress on the participants. The researcher signed all confidentiality related documents needed by WRE before initiating the study.

The researcher observed the cultural members of WRE and their day-to-day activities. The researcher followed the routines of classroom teachers who agreed to participate in the study, as well as the routines of those students with disabilities who receive services in the low incidence special education classroom. Any documents obtained for research purposes had the names and other identifying

information redacted before leaving the school building. Observations were completed in the late spring and early fall for three to four hours per day, while interviews were collected throughout the research process. See Table 2 Participant Observations for additional information on observations collected at WRE.

Table 2

Participant Observations

Participant	Location	Activities Observed
Julie K.	1st grade classroom	general classroom activities
	Playground	recess
	Cafeteria	lunch
	Hallway	transitions
	Gymnasium	assembly
Jessica H.	Library	book check out, story time, media lesson, Lunch Bunch, general library activities
Brittany B.	2nd grade classroom	general classroom activities
	Playground	recess
	Hallway	transitions
Amy B.	Special education class	individualized instruction, small group activities, structured teaching, free time, lunch
Barbara W.	Special education class	calendar group, reading group, free time, lunch
	1st grade classroom	general classroom activities
	4th grade classroom	general classroom activities
	3rd grade classroom	general classroom activities
*R	4th grade classroom	general classroom activities
	Playground	recess

Table 2 (continued)

Participant	Location	Activities Observed
*S	3rd grade classroom	general classroom activities
	Special Education class	structured teaching, individualized instruction, hearing impaired services
	Library	book check out
	Playground	recess
*C	4th grade classroom	general classroom activities
	Cafeteria	lunch
	Playground	recess
	Library	book check out, media lesson

Interviews were conducted at a time and place mutually agreeable to the participant and researcher where privacy could be maintained. After the consent process was completed and the form signed, the interviewer used a laptop to audio record the data. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes in length, depending on the responses given by the participants. The interview questions (see Appendix E) were specifically related to the culture of WRE and the inclusion of its students with ASD. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the questions asked during each interview were subject to change, but remained within the scope of those questions included in the interview guide. At the conclusion of the interview the researcher asked the interviewee if they consented to the possibility of follow up questions or a follow up interview. The researcher checked the audio file for accuracy and field notes were recorded. Throughout the interview process, the interviewer reviewed her journal

and bracketing notes to look for signs of bias in the interview process. Any signs of bias were reflected upon immediately in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the research. These bracketing notes and reflections were then kept for use during data analysis.

The collected data was managed directly by the researcher, with guidance by the thesis director through email and face-to-face meetings. The data was managed through the use of computer files, using Microsoft Office programs. The researchers computer is password protected in order to ensure the confidentially of the research participants. Bi-weekly data backup was completed in order to ensure files and data were not lost in the case of an emergency. Files developed include transcripts, reflections, coded data, written work and themes. Interviews were recorded using Apple's Garage Band, then converted to mp3 files and transcribed using iTunes and Microsoft Word consecutively. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, in a timely manner after the interview to ensure the accuracy of the content.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher completed the data analysis procedure by first separating the data sources, which were observation, transcript, artifact and photograph. These data sources were then highlighted and coded for common categories, using Microsoft Word. Categories refer to like sets of information found within one data source or type. The researcher used a deductive top-down approach to coding

ethnographic data, discussed by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). This approach uses a predetermined set of developed codes. The researcher used the definition of culture, in order to analyze the cultural members of WRE and their shared themes of norms, attitudes, language, and rituals, as well as the interaction of these characteristics within the environmental context. This process resulted in categories that matched concepts in the definition of culture. The data was then analyzed using an inductive, or bottom-up approach as the level of data analysis increased. The initial categories were refined, combining similar ideas as needed, and evolved into nine categories within the four themes.

The transcripts were analyzed using the cut/paste functions in Microsoft Word, and the researcher utilized the color change feature to visually identify the different categories. When possible, the researcher analyzed the transcripts as they were completed. Highlighted data from transcripts were copied into files designated for categories and codes. Observations and artifacts were coded using the same colors used on the computer, with markers, and organized in a three ring binder with dividers. Photographs were taken, then uploaded to the researchers computer. These images were saved in a file labeled "Westridge Photographs" in Microsoft Word. Once a category was determined for each photograph, they were copied and pasted into the corresponding file. The different data sources were analyzed simultaneously. The categories were cross-referenced to check for data which could be placed into multiple categories. If such data was found, the researcher made note of this on the master interview transcript by using both colors. After the completion

of analysis of all the transcripts, the definition of culture was used to name the themes and tie the categories together.

The use of bracketing was used throughout the research analysis process in order to reflect upon the researchers previous experiences and beliefs about the culture of WRE and its students with ASD. This was done to identify potential biases from the research, therefore strengthening trustworthiness of the data. These reflections, completed after interviews and observations, were coded using the same themes identified using the definition of culture. If a potential bias was noted within the bracketing reflections, it was reanalyzed before being included in the final document.

The use of a journal was also incorporated as a means for organizing the researchers thoughts, and themes identified throughout the research process. The journal was also used to collect field notes. This journal was kept locked in the researcher's home when unused. Field notes were typed and stored in a computer folder labeled "field notes." Upon completion of data analysis, audio files of interviews, photographs, and artifacts, were stored in a locked cabinet. Data will be kept for three years following completion of the study in an area secured by the researcher.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of this study was established through the triangulation of data sources in order to seek the maximum variability of participants and

responses. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple and different data sources and methods in order to provide corroborating evidence and is used to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, throughout the analysis process, the researcher reviewed and reflected upon the contents of the "Bracketing" file in order to guard against the presence of bias in the analysis process. The researcher also periodically referenced the Thesis Guidelines established by the Graduate School throughout the research process in order to ensure that the study was conducted correctly and in accordance with the guidelines accepted by Eastern Kentucky University and its Internal Review Board.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Introduction to Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are presented together in this chapter in order to maintain the richness of the information gathered throughout the research process. Upon reflection, the researcher determined the results and discussion are intertwined and separating them from each other would detract from the essential meaning of answering the research questions.

Application of the Definition of Culture

The researcher used a definition of culture, combined from Merriam-Webster (2011) and Depoy and Gitlin (2005), in order to understand the underlying patterns of behavior, set of values, conventions, social practices, and characteristic features of everyday occupations shared by individuals within a public school. The researcher looked at the norms, rituals and language of Westridge Elementary School (WRE) and how children with ASD were involved. The researcher did this in order to develop a cultural portrait, which will aide in further research development on the practice of mainstreaming students with disabilities, including ASD. After analysis of the data described previously in the *Methods* chapter of this document, themes were determined and organized along with categories and presented in Table 3 Themes and Related Categories. Each theme includes data types such as participant quotes,

photographs, observations and other sources that support the category and were used to form a description of the culture of Westridge Elementary School.

Table 3

Themes and Related Categories.

Physical Environment/Context
- Regional - School - Classroom
Social Environment/Context
- Values and beliefs - Attitudes and Expectations
Shared Communication
- Language - Prevalent Phrases - Modes of Communication
Occupational Engagement
- Shared Activities - Time and Temporal Aspects

The History of Westridge Elementary School

Westridge Elementary School, or "The Ridge" opened its doors in August of 2004 in order to meet the growing population needs of Franklin County Public Schools (FCPS). In an effort to consolidate and upgrade the educational environment for their students, FCPS selected students from Bridgeport, Collins Lane, and the now closed Bald Knob elementary schools to attend Westridge. Because of this, Westridge boasts a diverse student body. At present approximately 400 students

attend this pre-school through fifth grade elementary school. According to the Westridge homepage, WRE faculty includes a principal, counselor, twenty classroom teachers, five special education teachers, a literacy program made up of a reading recovery teacher, reading mastery teacher, and five instruction aides all trained in reading education, enrichment teachers for art, library media, music, and physical education.

Physical Environment/Context

According to the American Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (2008), the terms environment and context are "both used to reflect the importance of considering the wide variety of interrelated conditions both internal and external to the client that influence performance." Within this theme, data collected on the regional, school and classroom environments will be detailed in order for the reader to gain a perspective into what surrounds the cultural members of WRE during everyday life. Physical environment refers to the natural and built nonhuman environment and the objects in them (AOTA, 2008). Observations, interviews, along with the collection and taking of photographs assisted in the description of WRE physical environment.

Regional Environment

Westridge Elementary School is located in the Kentucky state capitol of Frankfort, located in Franklin County. According to the 2010 United States Census, Franklin County has a population of 49,285 and the median household income is

$48,291. Franklin County is considered 73% urban and 27% rural. The population is 87% Caucasian, while 10.3% are African American, and 2.3% are Hispanic. In Franklin County 13.1% of the population lives below the United States poverty level.

In 2008, FCPS served 5,976 children across ten schools, including six elementary, and two middle and high schools. According to the Kentucky District Data Profile for 2007-2008, written by the Kentucky Office for Education and Accountability (2009), 43% of FCPS school students receive free or reduced lunch and 13% of students are recognized as having a disability. The graduation rate for a student living in Franklin County is 82%. Students attending Westridge Elementary had a 96.3% attendance rate during their 2009-2010 school year and a 0% retention rate compared to 4.1% in the district and 2.8% statewide. The average length of teaching experience at Westridge is 10.3 years and 40.7% of teachers have their Rank I or Masters Degree. Six teachers are currently certified by the National Board for Professional Standards.

School Environment

Westridge was built on twenty scenic acres of land in Franklin County and was originally surrounded by farmland. The surrounding land was purchased to be developed into a large subdivision of single-family homes shortly after plans for the construction of WRE were announced. According to WRE staff members, financial difficulties have left the land partially developed, with no homes completed as of March of 2011. Observations conducted at WRE show the campus is easily

accessible by cars and busses using Frankfort's Western Bypass, but the connecting Devil's Hollow road is narrow and curvy which makes accessing the school by foot or bike unsafe. There are designated staff and visitor parking lots, as well as four handicapped assigned parking spaces. The land is open and flat with a variety of human planted trees and plants. There are classroom gardens, as well as a fountain at the entrance of the school welcoming visitors. Located in the back of the school there is a fossil pit, where students engage in experiential learning while hunting for dinosaur bones. To the side of the school, behind the cafeteria, there are several large picnic tables covered by a metal awning for teachers to bring their students to enjoy lunch outside when the weather permits.

Figure 1. Westridge Elementary School

Students enter and exit the school depending on their chosen method of transportation. In the front of the school there is a car rider circle and walkway, which leads to the front doors and the front office where all visitors sign in. In the back of the school there is a bus circle (see Figure 2 Bus Circle) where students arrive and depart school through an additional walkway which leads to the Family Resource Center. Each day two special needs accessible busses bring and take home students identified as having special transportation needs.

Figure 2. Bus Circle

Included on the school property are three playgrounds: one for pre-school, primary, and intermediate students. These playgrounds are handicapped accessible, and two of the three are surrounded by a fence which prevents students from exiting the playground area unaccompanied by staff (see Figure 3 Handicapped Assessable and Fenced Primary Playground). The intermediate playground used by third through fifth grade students is not fenced. Second grade teacher Brittany B. described during an interview how the fences, which were built in 2008, came to be:

> We really needed to fence the playgrounds because of runners, you know? Everyone was getting really nervous about a student wandering out to the road. Can you even imagine? So, Cathryn found an Eagle Scout who needed a community project and the PTO gave us the money for the supplies. The fence turned out really nice and the teachers can sit by the gate to make sure no-one gets in or out.

Inside the playground area there are benches for staff members, swingsets, see-saws, slides, merry-go-rounds, and monkey bars.

Figure 3. Handicapped Assessable and Fenced Primary Playground.

Observations conducted at WRE found that located within the building are multiple sub-environments, including the administrative offices, which house the front desk, principal's office, records room, conference room, counselor's office, the nurse's room, copy machine, staff mailboxes, and bathroom. Both the conference room and principal's office are used for Annual Review Conferences (ARC) to discuss each students Individualized Education Plan. The records room is kept locked at all times and includes multiple file cabinets containing the educational files and records of each student attending WRE. There are three separate file cabinets which hold the due process folders for all students receiving special education services. After the school day has begun, the door into the administrative offices is the only open entrance into the school. Visitors are required to sign in and out, as well as provide a description of where they can be found and why they are in the school building. All visitors wear a Westridge Visitor nametag while on the school campus.

The school cafeteria is located across from the administrative offices and includes the kitchen, lunch line, lunch tables, stage, and employee dinning room. Interviews with staff members found the cafeteria serves breakfast and lunch and is the location for the Westridge afterschool program, the Wolves' Den. Observations in the school's cafeteria depicted students arriving in the cafeteria with their teachers and those students who purchase a school lunch walk directly to the lunch line where they select a tray, chose their meal, and provide a student identification number which is linked to each student's lunch account. Teachers may choose to eat their lunches in the employee dining room or with their students. The lunchroom is supervised daily by two or three parent volunteers and the school's custodial manager. Inside the teachers' dining room are the only vending machines on the school campus.

Connecting the cafeteria to the school gymnasium is the stage. According to observation and staff interviews, the stage is used for school assemblies, award ceremonies, fifth grade graduation, and school plays. The stage is also the location of a large platform swing used to provide sensory input for students with disabilities. The gymnasium is where students wait in the morning before going to their classrooms. Inside the gym are four large contractible bleachers, which can seat the entire school for large events. During a typical school day these bleachers are contracted in order to allow additional space for physical education.

Across from the gymnasium is the main foyer, which includes large display cases containing student work and trophies. Attached to the foyer is the school's

Family Resource Center and music education classroom. The Family Resource Center is open during school hours and serves children from birth through twelve years of age. The purpose of the Family Resource Center, according to a pamphlet provided to Westridge families, is "to promote local identification, coordination, and utilization of community resources to help break down barriers to learning which in turn should enhance students' ability to succeed in school." The Family Resource Center is funded through a grant administered by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health & Family Services and state education funds through the Kentucky Department of Education. To qualify for the Family Resource Center, WRE needed to have at least 20% of its students receiving free and reduced school meals. According to their pamphlet, the Family Resource Center addresses after school child care, parent and child education, family literacy, health services, or referrals to health services for the families of Westridge Elementary School.

At the end of the main foyer, is the school's library media center (see Figure 4 Mystery in the Library). The library includes a large selection of books and print media divided by reading level and genre and incorporates the use of the Dewey Decimal System. Observations conducted in the school library found the librarian's check out desk, computer, a kiva for story telling, several large tables and chairs, a Promethean board, nine student computer workstations, a clicker system, a Jeopardy Game system and other technology available to checkout by teachers and staff. The library also has bookshelves housing hundreds of books and magazines. Attached to the library is the school's computer lab, which is described in the 2009-

2010 Westridge Elementary School Report Card as a "state of the art computer lab with mounted in-focus machine and SMART board." Teachers and students have access to computer software programs that assess and develop math and reading skills and have Internet capabilities.

Figure 4. Mystery in the Library

Hanging from the ceiling are a variety of posters addressing student learning outcomes and information on literature (see Figure 5). According to school librarian Jessica H., depending on the time of year, the library is decorated with seasonal decorations on the walls, windows, bookshelves, and hanging from the ceiling. Tables are covered with books aligned with grade level curriculum and core content. The library is designed for student use and functions on a flexible schedule.

According to interview results from school librarian Jessica H., in addition to book checkout and media access, the library is used for a variety of school programs, including the Library Lunch Bunch, Battle of the Books practice and competition,

book fairs, the Mock Newberry Club and the Student Technology Leadership Program. The library is also used for staff development and faculty meetings.

Figure 5. Library Decorations, Computers, SMART Board and Books

Within Westridge Elementary School, there are two hallways which branch away from the main foyer. Turning right, the east or primary hallway includes one pre-school, three kindergarten, three first grade, three second grade, one special needs resource classroom, and one art education classroom (see Figure 6 East or Primary Hallway). Turning left, the west or intermediate hallway includes an entrance to the administrative office, four special needs resource classrooms, three third grade, three fourth grade, and two fifth grade classrooms. This hallway also includes the literacy department classrooms (see Figure 7 West or Intermediate Hallway). In both the east and west hallways you will find student work on the walls, water fountains, a staff bathroom, custodial closet, exits to the student playgrounds, and student restrooms (see Figure 8 Student Restrooms).

Figure 6. East or Primary Hallway.

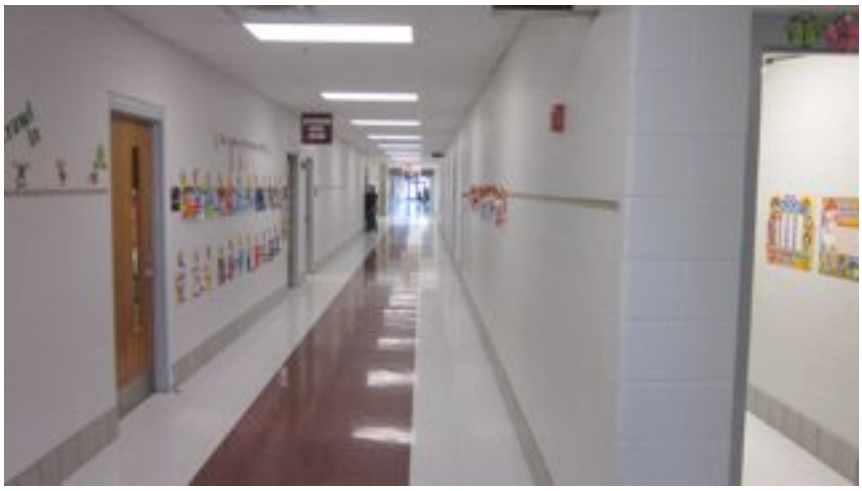

Figure 7. West or Intermediate Hallway.

Figure 8. Student Restrooms.

Classroom Environment

For the purposes of this study, the researcher completed observations in three different distinct classroom environments and interviewed the corresponding classroom teacher. Each of the three classrooms had similar layouts, dimensions and objects including chairs, desks, bulletin boards, dry erase boards, student computers, student cubbies (see Figure 9 Example of Student Cubbies) for backpacks and coats, a teacher's desk and computer, bookshelves, and a sink. The walls were painted white and the floors are white tile. The florescent lighting, which illuminates the hallways, cafeteria, gymnasium and library, continues into each of the classrooms. The single window located in each classroom provides natural light. Each doorway into a Westridge classroom is wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Each classroom is equipped with an intercom system, television, DVD player, telephone, and fire alarm.

Figure 9. Example of Student Cubbies

Classroom A is a first grade classroom taught by Julie K. Julie teaches a class of 23 first graders, including two students with IEP. One of these students is recognized as having an ASD. According to Julie, in the past five years she has taught four students with ASD. Her classroom is decorated with examples of student work on the ceiling, walls, and across the dry erase board. Observations and photographs show one-third of the dry erase board is clear for writing; the remainder displays an alphabet wall, word wall, calendar, clock, student work group assignments, and behavior management strategy visuals (see Figure 10 Dry Erase Board with Visual Schedule in Classroom A). Also displayed are posters to assist students with writing and reasoning prompts. Scattered across the room are shelves stacked with tubs and containers accommodating manipulatives and other teaching materials. On the back of each student's chair, there is a seat pocket to hold his or her papers and folders. The room includes six large tables with student nametags taped to the top and a bucket for crayons, pencils, glue and scissors. On the floor is a large area rug

with individual colored squares designating each student's space (see Figure 11 Carpet and Shelves in Classroom A). Unique to her classroom is the daily schedule photographs created in collaboration with a special education teacher, and used as a visual strategy for a prior student with ASD (see Figure 10 Dry Erase Board with Visual Schedule in Classroom A). As Julie K. stated during her interview:

> When I first started using the picture schedule with S, I noticed that all the kids really got into it. They still remind me when I forget to change it in the morning. The love looking at the pictures, especially the pictures of their enrichment (art, music, gym) teachers.

Figure 10. Dry Erase Board with Visual Schedule in Classroom A.

Figure 11. Carpet and Shelves in Classroom A.

Classroom B is a second grade classroom taught by Brittany B., with 24 students and no reported students with IEPs this year. She reported during her interview, that she has had approximately 10 students with IEPs in the past five years, including three students with an ASD. Each student in Classroom B has his or her own desk and chair. Like Classroom A, these desks also have student nametags tapped to the top. The classroom is divided into several learning areas, including a listening center, a computer center, a silent reading area, and a small group work area. The walls in this classroom also display student work and posters with writing and reasoning prompts. There is a fishing line strung across the ceiling with student work attached and dangling with clothespins. The dry erase board in Classroom B also has a calendar, student behavior management visuals, and a chart designating the learning center for each student that week. Located inside the door of Classroom B are paper footprints taped to the floor and created as a visual strategy for a prior student with ASD (see Figure 12 Visual Strategy Used to Cue Students with

Disabilities). After the student had displayed difficulty with the task of lining up to leave the classroom, the footprints were made to cue the student with the correct location. Here is Brittany B's rationale, expressed during her interview, for keeping the visual strategy in her classroom when she does not have a student with ASD this school year:

> …you know, all the kids benefited from the footprints. I'll keep them until they start to peel off, then I'll probably make some more! I try and remember all the stuff we learned about teaching kids with disabilities in school, and the stuff (the special education teacher) showed me about how to set up your classroom and teach kids with ASD.

Figure 12. Visual Strategy Used to Cue Students with Disabilities.

Classroom C is a low incidence special education classroom, where Amy B. teaches nine students with moderate to severe disabilities, including one student who is autistic and deaf. According to Amy B. each of the students in this classroom have an IEP. Unlike the other classrooms in Westridge Elementary School, this resource classroom also includes its own handicapped accessible bathroom with a

walk in shower, toilet, sink, and changing station. Because of the spatial demands required to provide access to each area of the classroom to two students in wheelchairs, the classroom includes two kidney tables and chairs in lieu of individual desks. Also unique to this classroom are the washer and dryer and the kitchen used to teach students functional life skills. The kitchen includes a microwave, toaster oven, pantry, sink, and refrigerator. The classroom has overhead florescent lighting, but the instructor has brought in a variety of incandescent bulb lamps from home in order to provide a more calming environment for her students with sensory sensitivities. The classroom is divided into distinct learning areas, including areas for functional math, functional literacy, free time, and a structured learning center utilizing principles of the TEACCH method for instructing students with ASD. The bulletin board in Amy B.'s classroom is sparsely decorated, and there is no student work hanging on the walls or ceiling. The student cubbies and bookshelves are covered with a large black curtain during the school day to limit visual stimuli. Located within the classroom is additional technology not found within the other classroom environments, including various augmentative communication devices (see Figure 13), Intellitools software and keyboards (see Figure 14), picture symbols (see Figure 15), and switches.

Figure 13. Augmentative Communication Device.

Figure 14. Classroom Computers with Intelitools Keyboards.

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Figure 15. Picture Symbol Communication.

Social Environment

According to the American Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (2008), the *Social Environment* is "constructed by the presence, relationships, and expectations of persons, groups, and organizations with whom the client has contact." In this theme, the researcher relates to the reader the shared values, beliefs and attitudes expected of the cultural members of Westridge Elementary School, which are influential in establishing their norms, role expectations and social routines.

Shared Values and Beliefs

Beliefs are any cognitive content held true by an individual or social group, while values are described as the principles, standards, or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable (Moyers & Dale, 2007). According to the Westridge 2009-

2010 Commonwealth of Kentucky School Report Card, the mission of Westridge Elementary School is:

> …to ensure that 100% of our students are actively engaged in learning 100% of the time. We pride ourselves on being a community of self motivated, ambitious, life long learners. We feel that a partnership between a dedicated professional staff, supportive families and responsible students is essential in achieving our mission.

This document also states that the school ensures educational equity between its students through the creation of an educational atmosphere that "recognizes every student, parent, and staff member as an individual." It continues to describe the school's commitment to diversity and parent involvement stating, "We celebrate the diversity of the community and encourage parents of our all our students to become active participants in their child's education."

The importance of parental involvement at Westridge continues to be expressed by staff members during interviews and throughout the school environment. According to WRE staff, the parents of Westridge students completed 897 volunteer hours during the 2009-2010 school year and participated in a variety of school programs, such as the book fair, cafeteria monitoring, chaperoning class fieldtrips, school plays, one-on-one reading with students and assisting with extra curricular activities. While completing fieldwork at Westridge Elementary School, the researcher observed several examples of parental involvement. When signing in at the front desk, a parent was behind the counter assisting the office staff with clerical tasks. While observing first and second grade lunch routines, two school mothers were noticed to be assisting the classroom teachers get students to and

from the cafeteria. These parents also assisted with students in the lunch line, correcting and monitoring behavior, and with clean up and preparation for the next classes of students. While interviewing the school librarian, several parents were observed to be assisting with book checkout and return. At dismissal, parents were observed assisting with the car and bus circles.

Of the 400 students who attend Westridge, 295 participated in at least one teacher conference (KSTS, 2009). Second grade teacher Brittany B. discussed the importance of parental involvement and how she organizes a parent teacher conference during her interview:

> I try and get all my parents involved in one way or another with the class. It is really important they understand what their child's strengths and weaknesses are… (How I set up the meeting) depends on the student and how I've contacted them in the past. Some I'm able to contact through email, and tell them I'd like to show them some things, and typically by that time they have an idea of whether it's good or not so good. Others I've contacted by phone, notes, report cards or just a handwritten or typed note. We will get a date set up typically after school we will meet, I'll pull books they are reading, and I'll compare to what they are doing on grade level, some are above some below. Some's right on. Then we'll look at their writing, if there are issues at math, we'll look at math problems. If we are having problems with behavior, we'll discuss what's going on. There is a parent teacher conference sheet, that I fill out which documents what I've said, what we've agreed to, where we are going on from here. If there are major issues. If it is someone who I've met with to discuss only good things, then I don't need to have recommendations.

The participation of parents of students with disabilities in school involvement is varied. According to Brittany B., "…the parents are very involved. We talk on a daily basis." Explaining her thoughts on why she believes certain parents of

students with disabilities do not participate in parent-teacher conferences, Julie K. explains:

> They typically discuss any questions or concerns with the special ed teacher. We also get the chance to discuss progress every year at the IEP meeting. I think because some of the kids aren't on grade level, I'm never quite sure what to talk to them about. Several of the kids are in here for more social learning, you know?

Cultural members discussed their belief in the importance of collaboration between staff members, and between the school and families in order to support student achievement and the schools learning expectations. Collaboration is the act of working jointly with others (Jackson, 2007). According to the American Occupational Therapy Association, collaboration requires a set of behaviors, beliefs and attitudes, and values that support the collective efforts of a group (1999). These include conflict resolution, effective communication, equity and reciprocal exchange of ideas, parity, performance, and shared accountability. Cultural members were observed to discuss individual students with their team members in order to make learning accommodations for the students with disabilities. For example, while participating in collaborative teaching in her first grade classroom, Julie K. and a special education instructor discussed how to adapt a writing prompt assignment for a student with a learning disability. The special education teacher offered to adapt the materials and Julie K. offered to sit with the student and provide additional support as needed. The two teachers worked together in order positively influence the student's outcome.

Other forms of collaboration were reported by the staff at WRE. Teachers reported having weekly meetings and corresponding via email in order to meet the individual needs of their students. Special education teacher Amy B. discusses how and why she collaborates with classroom teachers:

> I rely a lot on the aides in order to know what is going on in the general education classes. I also meet with the teachers at least once a week, to get lesson plans and see how the kids are doing when I'm not there. We email too. I can't be with all the kids all the time, so I have to rely on the aides mostly. Sometimes, I'll just get stopped in the hall and asked a quick question. Well, I shouldn't say quick. They are almost never quick! But anyways, I try and keep up with what the class is doing so I can modify work if it's needed so their regular classroom can be a good learning environment too.

Collaboration is not limited to the classroom. Jessica H. spoke about the importance of collaboration in reference to the services provided by the library:

> Collaboration is key to making the library work. I need to know what they are learning about in class and which kids need more support. I can pull those kids in order to find books on an appropriate level, if I know what to look for. On the flip side, if there are kids who are excelling, I need to know who they are too. This way I can develop a more challenging experience for them in the library, or allow them to check out more books. They can usually only check out three at a time, but for more advanced students. I'll allow them five to six books at a time.

Cultural members place a high importance on the safety of the students at Westridge Elementary School. The building was designed with safety in mind. The double set of entrance doors are locked after students arrive in the mornings, thus requiring everyone to enter through the front office. All outside doors are kept

locked at all times. The school has emergency procedures established to contain any threat that may occur. Drills for natural events such as tornado's and earthquakes are practiced periodically throughout the school year. There are maps posted in each classroom detailing how teachers should evacuate the school in case of an emergency. Westridge staff participates in yearly staff meetings to discuss the procedure for the various safety drills periodically assessed throughout the school year. In the event of an intruder, Westridge staff will announce an unsuspecting code phrase over the intercom, which alerts staff to lock down their classrooms, black out the windows on the interior doors, and place a piece of paper in their outside window with the number of people in each room. The school also prepares for fires or intruders with school wide drills and practices. Special education teacher Amy B. explains how she prepares for these drills:

> Mr. Rousch usually sends me an email a couple days before the fire drill so I can make sure I have all the aides available with the kids. Several of our kids need a lot of help getting out of the school when the alarm is going off, and the lights are flashing. They really don't like it. We have to put our hands over their ears and walk them quickly out of the building. Sometimes, we just pick them up because they are refusing to move. I know it isn't the best way to prepare for an actual fire, but we had a couple of episodes in the past when we didn't know about them, or I forgot to tell everyone.

All parents receive a copy of the district discipline code, and there were no reported incidents of weapon, drug or assault violations resulting in suspensions or expulsions in the 2009-2010 school year. As discussed previously, parents and staff

members collaborated together in order to provide a safe playground environment for the students at Westridge.

The para-professionals at Westridge Elementary also play an important role in the safety of students with disabilities with communication, social, behavioral and academic deficits. A para-professional, or classroom assistant, accompanies several of the students with disabilities at Westridge throughout their daily schedule. Classroom teacher Brittany B. explained her experiences with having the extra support of a para-professional in her classroom while instructing students with disabilities:

> I've had someone come in and help me keep control. Typically, the special ed aides, and they would come and walk along to help with behavior, then special ed teachers have also come along to help.

Classroom teacher Julie K. discussed her experience with having a para-professional accompany her to recess with a student with ASD, "The kids are great with R at recess. If he starts to get in trouble, they just run and get Ms. Susie (special ed aide)."

Throughout observations at Westridge, students with disabilities, including ASD, were not observed to leave the special education classroom without the accompaniment of a supervisory adult. These extra adults assisted the student with a disability in the cafeteria, library, during gym, special events, and in their regular education classroom. While observations in the special education classroom typically included the teacher, several students and at least one para-professional, the researcher did observe several occurrences during the daily routine when the

para-professional was on their scheduled break or completing a task outside the classroom, leaving the special education teacher alone with multiple students with physical, language and cognitive needs.

Attitudes and Expectations of Cultural Members

This section will discuss the shared attitudes and expectations of the cultural members of Westridge Elementary School. A shared attitude or expectation of a cultural member could also be called a *norm.* One such shared expectation is the understanding and participation in school and classroom rules. Throughout each of the different physical environments of the school there are posters and reminders to students of their expected behavior. When participating staff members of WRE were asked to name the school wide rules, they each responded with similar answers, but no consistent set of rules was identified. First grade teacher Julie K. gave this explanation, "I know when we started Westridge, we came up with school-wide rules. I don't know what-ever happened to those." The general school wide rules identified by staff members included walking, not running in the halls, maintaining an appropriate voice level, keeping hands and feet to yourself, raising your hand if you need assistance, and being a good citizen to those around you.

Throughout observations, the researcher noticed additional school rules used and reinforced by cultural members. When walking in the hallway students should not talk or allow a long gaps in between line members. Students should not wear shoes with wheels, such as Heelys, to school at any time. Students should not

touch student work on display in the hallway. Students are required to clean up their lunch area prior to leaving the cafeteria. Students are expected to go directly to their destination if they are not with their class. They should not linger in the halls for any reason.

Staff members are quick to reinforce positive behavior, as well as correct negative behaviors within all contexts of the school. While observing a para-professional walk a class of Kindergartners to the lunchroom, the school librarian Jessica H. was observed correcting the line formation and offering positive words of reinforcement when the line was corrected.

In order to reinforce these school-wide rules, the staff members at WRE have developed a set of behavior reinforcement programs. The Caught Being Good program was developed by the Westridge Parent Teacher Organization and it provides staff members with ordinary raffle tickets each month to distribute to students who are observed to be behaving appropriately and/or exceptionally. At the end of the month, there is a raffle and one winner receives a prize. Second grade teacher Brittany B. describes her opinion on the Caught Being Good program:

> If it were more consistent I think it would be (effective). I know for myself its one of those things you don't always have on hand to give out. If it was something I had on me, then it would be more successful. But, other teachers are more consistent than some.

The Westridge Family Resource Center also has a behavior incentive program for students, called Westridge Bucks. The Westridge Bucks program

provides each regular classroom teacher with copies of colored paper designed to resemble currency. The Bucks have the school mascot, the Timberwolf, in the center. Students have the opportunity to earn two Bucks each day, which can be cashed in periodically throughout the year for prizes at the Bucks Store. It is up to the individual teacher to determine how the Bucks are distributed and if Bucks can be taken away for negative behavior. There was uniformity between primary teachers (Kindergarten through second grade) to give one Buck to students for attendance, and the other returning homework or having their agenda book signed. Primary teaches also agreed to not take away Bucks for inappropriate behavior. Intermediate teachers (third through fifth grade) had no uniformity on how Bucks were distributed. Second grade teacher Brittany B. describes the attitude of Westridge Bucks program with her students, "The kids really enjoy getting their bucks, and cashing them in. They get really excited to go shopping."

When Amy B. the low incidence special education teacher was asked about the Westridge Bucks program she noted that only regular education teachers are provided Bucks. Special education and enrichment (art, music, physical education) teachers do not participate in this program due to the fact that their students have opportunities to earn Bucks in their regular education classroom. Amy B. acknowledged her opinion on the success of the Westridge Buck program with her students with disabilities:

> I am not personally a fan of the Bucks Store. Most of my students don't understand the concept, and they (Bucks) are meaningless to them… Going to the Bucks Store is also a huge pain. If they (student) don't understand the

> concept of 1:1 correspondence, then they don't understand if they don't have enough money to buy the toy they want. It can turn into a situation, and then I have to go down there and deal with it. My students typically do much better with immediate reinforcement.

She continued to describe how her students often miss the Bucks Store, because they were not in their general education classroom at their schedule time to cash in their Bucks stating:

> By the end of the year, most of my students have a ton of them (Bucks) anyways! They miss the Bucks Store with their class, and then the next visit they have twice as many as their peers. They've come back with some really neat stuff! But they don't really understand why they earned them.

In addition to the previously mentioned school-wide behavior incentive programs, Westridge awards one primary and one intermediate classroom with several awards at each months student assembly. The winning classroom receives a pennant to hang on the outside of their classroom door for the following month. The Cleanest Classroom award is given by the janitorial staff to the classrooms with the cleanest floors. The Best at Lunch award is determined by the cafeteria staff and awarded to the classrooms that demonstrated the best behavior in the lunchroom and cleaned up after themselves. The Best Enrichment award is determined by the art, music and physical education teachers and provided to the classrooms with the best participation and behavior in class that month. The school librarian, Jessica H., describes how the students respond to these classroom awards, "They are a great source of pride for the students. When the winning class is announced the class erupts into cheers and sometimes they do a Timberwolf Howl."

During the same monthly award ceremony, each classroom teacher awards a Student of the Month. This student is announced and receives a ribbon from the school principle, Mr. Rousch. The winning student's parents are notified and given the opportunity to attend the awards ceremony.

Each individual classroom at WRE has their own set of classroom rules in addition to the school wide rules previously mentioned. Throughout participation within the WRE culture, the researcher obtained a variety of classroom rules used by its teachers. Table 4 (Classroom Rules) details the classroom rules along with their corresponding classroom teacher.

Table 4

Classroom Rules

Teacher/Grade Level	Classroom Rules
Julie K./1st grade	"I do the 4 "B's": Be a good listener. Be kind to everyone. Be safe. Be the best student you can be."
Brittany B./2nd grade	"Give me 5. Eyes on speaker, lips closed, ears listening, sit up straight, hands and feet quiet."
Barbara W./ paraprofessional	"Good listening, good looking, quiet voice and nice hands."
Amy B./ Special Education	"Our classroom rules are listen and watch, be nice to our friends, keep your hands and feet to yourself, raise your hands, follow directions, stay quiet, always do your best, walk. "
Jessica H./ Librarian	"Raise your hand, keep your voice off, pay attention…no running in the library, the normal school rules."

The teachers at Westridge Elementary School use a variety of behavior management techniques to reinforce behavior in their classrooms. First grade teacher Julie K. uses a marble jar in which she adds or takes away marbles depending on the students' behavior as a class. When the jar is full of marbles, the class gets a pizza or ice cream party. Second grade teacher Brittany B. uses a prize box on her desk and periodically awards a prize to students who display

appropriate classroom behavior. Special education teacher Amy B., uses immediate reinforcers such as small edibles (candy & chips) to reinforce attention and motivation. Her classroom also has a time out spot used when students break the rules. She is quick to point out that she does not use the time out spot with all of her students, only the ones that understand the concept. Her para-professional, Barbara W., described an additional motivator used in the resource classroom:

> The kids generally have built in break time in their schedules. If they do a good job and get their reading, math, and writing finished, they earn things like time on the computer, making a snack, watching a short video, and playing on the carpet. If they are not able to get their work completed, then they use their break time to get it finished. This is particularly motivating for a few of our kids.

Cultural members at Westridge Elementary School discussed their attitudes about their success of mainstreaming students with disabilities during interviews and overheard during observations. Their attitudes were comparable and generally positive about the students with disabilities attending WRE. First grade teacher Julie K. described her belief in the school's perspective on including students with disabilities, "We give them the same opportunities, if not more than any other school." Second grade teacher Brittany B. shared her thoughts, "We go all out and do our best to include those students." School librarian Jessica H. shared her mixed opinion on the success of mainstreaming students with ASD in all contexts of school culture, "We aren't perfect. I'll be honest and say ASD students are not included in everything. But we try really hard to include them as much as possible."

Cultural members defended their attitudes and provided their insight into why students with disabilities, including ASD, may not be mainstreamed into each context of school culture. Special Education teacher Amy B. believes the negative attitudes about the success of mainstreaming at WRE are due to a lack of understanding and fear. She said, "Teachers are scared, they don't know what to do or how to handle a child with ASD." School librarian Jessica H. states, "I have no training." She continued, stating "The biggest issue is understanding by the staff, especially those who do extracurricular activities."

While cultural members may have mixed beliefs and attitudes on the success of mainstreaming students with disabilities within school culture, they agree that the sentiment of including students with disabilities is positive. Para-professional Barbara W. shared her thoughts on the issue:

> The environment of this school toward people with disabilities is exceptional. They are the most loving and caring, I have worked at five different schools in this county, and I wouldn't hesitate to tell anyone to come to WRE. We have a few children who are going out of district, because their families are so pleased with the program and what they have been able to accomplish at WRE.

Cultural members at Westridge were observed to smile, laugh and enjoy students with disabilities, including ASD, within all aspects of the school environment. Cultural members discussed what could be described as a special relationship which develops between teachers and students with disabilities. Para-professional Barbra W. describes her delight in working with children with ASD:

> It's challenging; I'll say that. I've never met an autistic child, or adult for that matter, that was the same as the last one. It's such a broad spectrum. It's challenging, but it's so rewarding. I've found that they are very intelligent….It is one of my favorite areas to work in, because they are very bright and I find that they develop an attachment to a few people. And if you've gotten lucky enough to be one of them, you get to see what makes that little mind and heart go. You do – but they don't show that to everyone. So I enjoy doing that, I feel like it's really rewarding. It gets me choked up. It's very rewarding to be a part of their lives like that. Give them something they can work toward. Sometimes I feel like I should give my check back! I'm having way too much fun here!

First grade teacher Julie K. shared her thoughts on developing a special relationship with children with disabilities, "It's challenging in a lot of ways, but it is so rewarding. Every time they choose you, you know, it's a great feeling to be the one. "

Shared Communication

Shared communication encompasses the categories of "language," "modes of communication" and "prevalent phrases," which are shared between cultural members at Westridge Elementary School.

Language

The primary language spoken at Westridge is English and there is no English as a second language (ESL) classroom required at this time. Since the opening of WRE in 2004 there has been an established history of using American Sign Language in the school. For the first three years of the school's existence, there was a Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom, where several students received instruction

from a full time Deaf Education teacher. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing instructor is currently shared between several schools, but provides instruction several times each week for a deaf and autistic student. This student also has a full time interpreter, who assists him throughout his school day. The student uses sign language to communicate and the staff members at WRE have incorporated it into their shared language.

Sign language is used within Amy B.'s special education resource classroom in order to assist in the communication needs of her students with language deficits. The signs most commonly observed at WRE are walk, sit, eat, more, want, read, and bathroom. These signs were used with and without accompanied verbal communication. Classroom teachers, without current students with severe language deficits or hearing impairments, were observed to be using signs to communicate with their students. When asked why she was using sign language with her students, first grade teacher Julie K. explained that it was an effective way to communicate with her class without using her voice. After school, there is a Sign Language Club in which the Hearing Impaired teacher instructs staff, students and family members on the use of American Sign Language.

Modes of Communication

The modes of communication used at WRE include verbal, non-verbal, written, and pictorial. Cultural members communicate orally throughout the school day. Telephones are included in every classroom in the school and are used to

communicate between classrooms, outside the school, and with the administration office. The intercom system is used to announce the start and end of the school day, special events, and the daily announcements. The daily announcements are presented by students from a different classroom each week.

Cultural members used variances in their speech, such as volume, pitch, speed, tone, enunciation, pauses and emphasis, in order to communicate with each other. For example, special education teacher Amy B. was observed to speak to her students with significant disabilities with a slow speed, low pitch, and a calm yet firm tone. Teachers Julie K. and Brittany B. were observed to enunciate and provide emphasis during instructional activities. While reading to a third grade class in the library, Jessica H. used pauses and volume to reinforce the mood of the story. Students were observed to speak to each other with loud, hurried and excited voices during lunch and recess.

Cultural members were observed to use forms of non-verbal communication such as gesture, touch, body language, eye contact and facial expressions to relay information. The use of body language, facial expression and eye contact were observed to be used by staff members to express disappointment or concern with behavior. Jessica H. referred to this as her “Mean Mom Face” and shared that it was often more effective than speaking. Cultural members were observed to laugh, smile, and affectionately touch each other when expressing enjoyment or delight. The giving and receiving of hugs was observed between teaches and students throughout the school day.

Teachers communicate with students in a variety of ways including using common gestures. Members of WRE were observed to use the gesture "Give Me 5," where the teacher or staff member holds up their arm with all five fingers extended, and places their index finger over their mouth. The "Give Me 5" gesture is introduced to students during the beginning of their education at WRE and incorporated throughout their education. Observed in the primary hallway of WRE is a gesture called "Bubbles and Bunny Tales." Staff members use this gesture to cue students to remain quiet in the halls, while also keeping their hands to themselves. The students form a bubble with their mouths, which signals them to remain quiet, and fold both hands behind their back, creating a "Bunny Tail."

Cultural members of Westridge Elementary School also use alternative forms of communication such as communication devices and picture symbols. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2011), Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is used to compensate for a severe expressive communication disorders (i.e., the severe impairments in speech-language, reading and writing). The components of AAC are symbols, aids, techniques, and/or strategies. These can include American Sign Language and non-verbal communication strategies such as gestures and body language as discussed previously. Students with disabilities at Westridge were observed using a variety of devices and aids to express their wants and needs. Augmentative devices were used primarily in the special education classroom and included a Step-by-Step (Ablenet) switch used to record pages in a book, a Go Talk+ used to answer comprehension

questions during instructional time, and a series of single button switches positioned around the classroom with messages such as, “I need to go to the bathroom” and “I need help.”

The use of picture symbols, created using Mayor-Johnson Boardmaker, is evident throughout the school environment. Laminated picture symbols were observed outside doors to cue students to the cafeteria, library, office, music and art. There are pictures of stop signs throughout the school, cueing students not to walk through certain doors or leave classrooms unattended. Communication notebooks are used with several students, utilizing multiple laminated picture symbols which are organized in the book using Velcro. Students were observed to create sentences expressing their wants and needs by finding the correct picture and placing it on the front of their book. These communication books were observed to be carried by the student throughout their school day and across school settings. While learning in the general education classroom, typical students were observed to be curious about the communication books, but did not use them to interact with their peers with disabilities. The students inside Amy B.’s special education classroom also used individual picture schedules, which are placed on the classroom walls and used to communicate to students their daily schedule.

Cultural members of Westridge Elementary School were observed to use written communication for a variety of purposes. Posters around the school environment provide students with learning and testing strategies and provide visitors with information concerning Westridge policy and procedures. Teachers

communicate with families through the use of agenda books. These books are sent home with students and are checked for parental signatures each morning. Teachers can leave comments about a students progress, including praise or concerns. Parents can communicate with teachers about significant events which are occurring at home and may impact the child's school day. Staff members reported flyers are sent home in the agenda books for school fundraisers, special events, and monthly lunch menus.

Each classroom teacher is required to send home a weekly newsletter (see Appendix F) to inform parents about the weekly curriculum, assignments, enrichment schedule, student of the week, and upcoming events. Special education teacher Amy B. sends home a daily communication sheet in which the para-professional write important components of the student's day including what they did, what they ate, their behavior and overall attitude for the day, and learning goals and objectives. The sheet also has a spot for parents to write information about what happened at home or over the weekend in order to inform school staff. Para-professional Barbara W. shared why the communication sheets are used with students with significant disabilities:

> The communication sheets we send home help everyone. A lot of our students are non-verbal or have speech needs so their parents can't just ask them what they did at school. You know, if their kid is upset when they get home, mom and dad might not know why. Maybe they didn't eat a good lunch so they are starving when they get home. Or we can brag on them for doing a great job that day, and mom can brag too… We read the sheets every morning as the kids arrive at breakfast. We want to know if they didn't sleep good, or if they are grumpy. My favorite note said something like "H is having

> a bad morning because she wanted to bring her rooster to school and I wouldn't let her." Yeah, she has a rooster. Its name is Pen.

Written communication is used to officially notify parents about student progress. According to staff member Brittany B., school report cards and progress reports are each sent home three times a year from the student's general education teacher. Special education teachers are required to send home evaluations of each student's progress on their IEP goals and objectives. Second grade teacher Brittany B. discussed how she prepared report cards for her students with disabilities in the past:

> For one student I didn't really have to fill out report cards any differently, because he was in my class full time and an aide came to him when he needed extra support. Typically areas he struggled in, they came in to help. But I never really had to fill out the report card differently for him. The one last year, we only sent home the reports from the special education teacher. I didn't have to fill out a typical report card because he wasn't in here a whole lot. It was more social than academic.

Special education teacher Amy B. explained that she shares student progress with parents by copying pages of the student's IEP and writing "met" or "unmet" next to each goal and objective. She continued by stating that a more in-depth analysis of student performance is provided to parents at the Annual Review Conference (ARC). Parents receive notice before the student's ARC in the form of a letter, copies of which are sent home with the student and mailed to the student's home. ARC notices are also sent to each member of the student's IEP team. These

team members include the special and general education teachers and can include related service providers including occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language therapists.

Staff members use electronic written communication, or email, in order to plan instructional activities, schedule events, discuss student modifications, and for personal reasons. The school communicates with families through the school's website. The website has both general school information and individual teacher pages to upload information pertaining to their class. The website includes information such as the announcement of special events, award winners, the school lunch menu, and a calendar of events. The individual teacher pages include class documents, examples of student work, pictures, a class wish list, assignments, the weekly newsletter, and links to resources. When visiting these web pages, it was noted that many of them are not currently being used by staff members and had not been updated since 2009.

Throughout her time at Westridge, the researcher observed writing instruction in two primary classrooms and the special education classrooms. The language used to describe the handwriting process varied from teacher to teacher and at times the terms varied within the lesson itself. Table 5 Handwriting Language Used by WRE Educators lists the various terms used during handwriting instruction.

Table 5

Handwriting Language Used by WRE Educators

big	capital	tall	upper-case
lower-case	short	little	tail
C	O	circle	stick
line	swoop	curve	dash
Start at the top.	Start at the sky.	Start at the sun.	

Prevalent Phrases

Cultural members were observed to use common or prevalent phrases when discussing students with ASD. The term "obsessed" was used to describe the interests of students with ASD. School librarian Jessica H. described a fourth grade student with ASD and his interest books about zoology and animals, "He becomes *obsessed* with those topics so we've been trying to find new ones to get him to read more fiction." Second grade teacher Brittany B. shared a story about the same student whom she taught two years previously, "He is really into animals, *obsessed* really. He gave all his peers animal names. I'm still a koala." Para-professional Barbara W. discussed a student with ASD's interest in circles, "Oh my gosh. He's *obsessed* with circles. Once he see's one, he has to go touch it." Special education teacher Amy B. discussed the same students behavior, "It's hard you know, getting him to stop. He get's *obsessed* with whatever he is doing and doesn't want to stop."

Educators at Westridge Elementary School were observed to use a set of additional terms, structure and routine, when describing their instructional methods in conjunction with teaching students with ASD. When describing how she prepares for the first few days of school, Brittany B. indicated that, "The first week of school is routine, routine, routine. You need to establish structure before academics." She went on to describe that she prepares for students with ASD by keeping her schedule, "Very routine, and very regimented. Structure and routine are important to their education." School librarian Jessica H. describes her library environment, "I try and keep my library very organized. The kids know what to expect each time they arrive. Very structured." She continued to describe why this is important to the education of students with ASD, "Especially the autism kids because they like the consistency and the routine." Special education teacher Amy B. indicated, "I just make sure to have lots of structure in my classroom. The structure and the daily routines help a lot."

Occupational Engagement

Occupational Engagement describes what the cultural members do while at Westridge Elementary School. The categories include "time and temporal aspects" and "shared activities."

Time and Temporal Aspects

According to staff members, WRE operates on a 10-month schedule (August through June), with students attending 177 school days Monday through Friday.

Students do not attend school on holidays such as Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, and Memorial Day. Students are also released from school for Election Day, and for fall, winter and spring breaks. Students were observed to arrive at WRE at 7:30 a.m. and begin dismissal at 2:40 p.m.

Each teacher determines their individual classroom schedule around pre-established events such as lunch and enrichment (art, music, gym). Second grade teacher Brittany B. briefly runs through her daily schedule:

> The kids typically start to arrive from breakfast around 7:30, and they start to put away their things. I check folders and agenda books at this time, and then we start the day with calendar. From there we typically begin math, and some math centers, then have a bathroom break. Sometimes if we don't finish we are still in math afterwards, then 9:20-9:30 we do snack and then 9:30 to 10:20 we do reading, then 10:20 they go to enrichment until 11. Then at 11:10 we do phonics dance, then 11:35 we go to lunch. 11:35-12, then we come back from lunch at 12 and we take a bathroom break for about 10 min. Then we go straight into writing, and we do that until 1:00. Then 1-1:30 is silent reading. 1:30-1:50 is recess, and 1:50 to 2:30 is theme, then 2:30 to 2:40 is dismissal.

School librarian Jessica H. described how the library operates on a flexible schedule which changes from day to day:

> Once school starts my schedule is different every single day. I have a flexible schedule, and the only thing that stays consistent is I have kindergarten and preschool on a regular basis. On Mondays I have preschool at the same time. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I have kindergarten at the same time. Other than that it changes.

The lunch and enrichment schedules are pre-determined by the school's Site Based Decision Council prior to the start of school year and remain consistent throughout the year. For first through fifth grade, the enrichment schedule rotates through each class every three days. For example, Monday – Art, Tuesday – Gym, Wednesday – Music, Thursday – Art, etc. The exception is Kindergarten, in which the 50-minute class time is divided between two classes and rotates daily. For example, Monday – Art/Gym, Tuesday – Gym/Music, Wednesday – Music/Art, etc. These classes are kept track of by the classroom teacher and communicated to families and parents on the school's website and in the teacher's weekly newsletters.

Staff members at Westridge Elementary School discussed the influence the time of year has on the patterns of activities and behaviors of cultural members. Julie K. described her experience with the beginning of the school year:

> The kids are so excited to be back to school and see their friends. The weather is still nice, so we can use the playground for recess. It's really lovely, probably my favorite time of the school year. The kids are still getting to know you, and they really are sweet.

Julie K. went on to share how students react to the first snow of the year, "I love that first snow. It's almost like the kids can sense it's coming! When they see it out the window they just go nuts!" Cultural members described the behavior of students as "restless" and "cooped-up" during winter months, when outdoor recess is not an option. Para-professional Barbara W. described the impact of staying indoors during the colder months has on the students with disabilities at WRE:

> We do not enjoy indoor recess. Everyone starts to feel like a caged animal. But what are you going to do? If you took the students outside, eventually they would start to complain it was too cold, also there is always someone without a good coat or hat. But the Family Resource Center is really good about keeping that sort of stuff on hand for students to borrow, or they can keep them.

Special education teacher Amy B. described the impact the summer heat had on student participation during end of school year special events. She described the previous years field day:

> It was a lot of fun, but our students didn't stay for the entire thing. It was just too hot. A lot of our kids have medical needs that make staying outside all day long dangerous. We took breaks going inside, and relaxing. Barbara even brought her ice-cream maker, and the kids took turns cranking the handle.

Public schools in Kentucky participate in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS, testing each year. During this two-week period, the school's routine schedule is modified to accommodate the needs of students taking the test. First grade teacher Julie K. described how this time of year impacts her students,

> Well we don't take CATS in first grade, but we do take the GRADE for a couple of days to assess literacy and math achievements. But the kids do all right. Their lunch is earlier than usual, so they may not eat enough, and then they get hungry later in the day. I try and provide a snack. We have to stay away from the intermediate hallways because kids are testing, so we might take an extra recess, or watch a movie. We do do school work, but it can also be kind of an off kilter week.

Special education teacher Amy B. described how CATS testing impacts her students with special needs:

> Honestly, I mean, it's hard. Our kids don't take the CATS test, so we end up staying in the resource room most of the day. But it's so off routine… They still might go to their classes to watch a celebratory movie or party. Some of the teachers are great about sending students to come and get them when the testing is over.

Students with significant disabilities at WRE were not reported to be included with their peers during lunchtime. Para-professional Barbara W. shared one reason why students with special needs eat lunch in the resource classroom:

> Well, this year I pretty much go and get the lunches. They do occasionally go in. One child is in a wheel chair, and does not verbalize. They have difficulty understanding her. The other girl goes through the line very well, makes all her choices known. She just generally stays in the room for the convenience of the adults at this time. They still have difficulty carrying their trays, utensils, milk. Our cafeteria doesn't use trays any longer. They use Styrofoam plates. That causes some difficulty with the weight of the milk carton on it. Especially if they have balance issues. So for a matter of convenience and clean up time, we eat in the room and get it for them.

Shared Activities

Cultural members at WRE share activities outside their typical day-to-day schedule. These shared activities can be thought of as *rituals* and/or *occupations*. A significant ritual in the culture of WRE is the participation in class fieldtrips. Each grade level at WRE is provided with transportation "allowance" to cover the cost of transporting students too and from the location of their fieldtrip. Grade level

teachers work together to determine the location of the fieldtrip, which must connect to state core content. Any additional costs associated with the fieldtrip such as admission fees, lunch money, or additional transportation costs are the responsibility of the student's family.

Cultural members identified several consistent field trip locations which students participate in each year. For example, the Kindergarten classes take a trip to the pumpkin patch each fall and the Louisville Zoo each spring. The first and second grade classrooms take trips to the Salato Wildlife Education Center and Jacobson Park each spring. The third grade takes their students to see a Christmas play each December. The fourth grade takes their students to the Cincinnati Aquarium, and fifth grade takes their students on an over night graduation trip at the end of each year. Depending on the level of funds raised by grade levels, they may take additional fieldtrips throughout the year.

Students with disabilities are included with their class on annual fieldtrips, across grade levels, and staff members reported the trips are enjoyed by the students. Barbara W. shared a humorous story about a previous fieldtrip:

> Last year I went on a field trip with a very social young lady. She loves the bus! It's always a big deal for her. We stopped at a light, and she began waving at a car next to us. I looked over, and asked her if she knew those people, and she said, "Duh, Barbara… it's Jesus." In our classroom, you've got to love all those moments.

Cultural members at WRE reported participating in special events throughout the school year. These events are sponsored by different grade levels, clubs, parent groups, and the library. According to Jessica H., the library has a Book Fair two or three times a year in order to promote literacy and raise funds to purchase materials for the school. The library also sponsors a school Lock In for fourth and fifth graders. Students who meet the established code of conduct are invited to spend the night in the library, watch movies, eat, and play games with staff members.

Westridge Elementary School puts on a school musical each spring, with collaboration between the school librarian, Jessica H., and the school's music education teacher. Westridge volunteers are also heavily involved in the collaborative effort to make the play a success. Jessica H. describes the commitment involved from students who audition to be in the play, noting that a student with ASD is auditioning for a role in this year's production of *The Jungle Book*:

> The play takes place here. They will have practice once a week until spring break, starting after Christmas. We will have practice every Tuesday from 3-5. Once spring break has past we will have 2 practices a week from 2-5 and then the week of the performance we will have practice every day sometimes until 6 or 7 because of the tech aspect. The parts range from being a rock in the background to having upwards of 150 lines to memorize, singing and dancing. There is a lot of chorography and singing involved in this musical. So if they are going to take a role with singing and dancing they will have to have the ability to learn music and make their movements in such a way to conform with the others. However there are roles that would accommodate a child who maybe couldn't learn the dance movements or couldn't memorize lines. We do have enough roles to go around. They could be a tree, rock,

> animal, etc… we can accommodate a lot of different kids with this one, where as last year they all had to be able to do certain things.

The school participates in Picture Day two times a year, which is a ritual shared by many schools. On Picture Day students arrive at school as usual, dressed in their best clothes. In the general education classrooms, students are provided the opportunity to straighten their hair and clothes prior to lining up to take pictures. In the special education classroom, staff members were observed reading notes from parents instructing how they would like their child's hair styled and requesting staff members wipe their child's face prior to having the photograph taken. The special education staff was also observed to have difficulty with the schedule, in one case missing a student's class photo. This photo was retaken at the end of the day.

The pictures were observed to be taken in the school gymnasium and classes waited in the bleachers before sitting for their individual photographs. The photographer took one or two photographs of each student, after directing them to assume a particular pose. A class photograph was taken with all students and their teacher. The students with disabilities were observed to sit for considerable more time and often the photographer took five times as many photographs before an acceptable one was captured. Special education staff assisted positioning the students in the appropriate pose and, in one instance, a student with ASD was allowed to assume an alternative pose.

The attitude about Picture Day differs between the special education and regular education staff members. Para-professional Barbara W. shared why this

school ritual causes stress, “Ugh. Picture day is so stressful. You know, that’s a lot of pressure. We want our kids to look their best. Sometimes even their parents cannot get a good picture of them.” Special education teacher Amy B. continued, “They have no idea what is going on. We try to explain it to them, but it only happens once a year. It’s just really hard on everyone.” Second grade teacher Brittany B. described her less stressful experience with Picture Day, “The kids give me their picture money, we line up… you know, they sit down and take a picture. Then we take the class photo. Then we go back to class.”

According to staff, additional school events are held yearly during after school hours, and are organized by school staff members. Each fall the school has a Fall Festival fundraiser where families bid on silent and live auctions, raffles, participate in games, and face painting. Each year, the school principle sits in a pie-throwing booth, which was reported as being enjoyed by all cultural members. In the spring a similar fundraiser called the Spring Fling is held at WRE. Every Halloween students are invited to come and Trick or Treat in the school. Students dress up and walk classroom-to-classroom collecting candy from staff members also dressed in costumes. Amy B. reports each December there is Breakfast with Santa in the library. Cultural members and their families can come and enjoy juice and donuts while having their photograph taken with Santa Clause. Students with disabilities were reported to participate in many of the extra events held at WRE.

Westridge has several school clubs, including Newberry and Caldecott Book Clubs, Battle of the Books Team, Future Problem Solvers, Academic Team, and the Technology Club. It is interesting to note that each of these clubs is sponsored by

school librarian Jessica H. She explained the selection process for students participating in the school book clubs:

> The Caldecott committee was selected by the teachers, they took their highest readers. The high kids don't get a lot of extra time, a lot of their needs met in the classroom. So they asked me to take a group of high readers and give them something special to do because they are finishing their class work, the work for the week, and need something else to do. So I took on the group because of teacher recommendations. My Newberry group is actually working with other groups at Elkhorn and Hearn Elementary we are doing a district wide Newberry club. And we are working with the Public Library and those kids were chosen based on their language arts scores in GT. They all scored above a certain level, and also on their IOWA test. They had to score above a 96.

Also occurring in the school library is the Lunch Bunch program. In the Library Lunch Bunch Policy and Procedure handout (See Appendix G), the program is described as "an incentive for students with good behavior and to promote reading," and continues:

> Library Lunch Bunch is a reading group activity which allows the students to eat their lunch in the library while listening to an age and interest appropriate novel. Students may bring lunches from home or purchase a tray lunch from the lunchroom. I will provide LUNCH BUNCH passes to those students who are participating, and will have informed lunchroom personnel.

The Lunch Bunch is a behavior-earned activity and is not offered to students who misbehave in class. The librarian allows classroom teachers to determine which students have earned the right to participate based on their requirements in class. The students are expected to arrive at the library (after purchasing a tray lunch if applicable) at the beginning of the lunchtime specified for their grade level and

transition back to their general education classroom at the end of their scheduled lunchtime. Jessica H. said students with disabilities were described as not included in Lunch Bunch due to a missed opportunity, stating:

> I'll be honest; I have not had kids with disabilities ever sign up. Now some of the kids are not in the regular classroom for the announcement. They are not there at the right time, and they don't eat lunch with them. So some kids don't get the opportunity.

Overall, cultural members of WRE are involved in a variety of activities and occupations, many of which include students with disabilities including ASD. New activities are added each year for cultural members to participate in. These activities aim to expand the breadth of knowledge and opportunities for the students of WRE.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

How the Study Answered the Research Question

The research question was, "What is the culture for students with ASD at Westridge Elementary School?" Additional sub-questions included determining the emphasis placed on students with ASD, and determining the language, rituals, norms and occupations shared by cultural members. The results addressed these questions by providing the reader a cultural portrait of WRE. Cultural members include Westridge staff, students and families. Each theme, described previously, provided the reader with a rich description of the culture and its members, including what they do, how they communicate, and their physical, social and temporal environments. The cultural members, with and without disabilities, share common experiences that help them form a cohesive group. They share activities, values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations.

Defining the Culture of Westridge Elementary School

The definition of culture that guided this study states that a cultural group is a cohesive group of people that share patterns of behavior, beliefs, attitudes, language, and social interactions that are consistent and maintained, learned and transferable, and include observable and describable patterns of interaction with the physical, temporal and non-human environments (Morse & Richards, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The themes and categories discovered during the

research process are directly related to the components of the definition. These components were dissected and are supported by the data collected.

A cohesive group. Westridge Elementary School is a cohesive group, which is established throughout the results and represented in the shared the history of WRE and its shared beliefs, values, attitudes and the expectations of cultural members.

Shared behaviors. This characteristic was most clearly supported in the theme Occupational Engagement, which describes the cultural member's participation in shared activities and the behaviors manifested. Behavior was influenced by the physical, social and temporal environments shared by cultural members. An example of this can be seen in the description of Julie K.'s first grade classroom's reaction to the first snowfall of the year. Jessica H. described the enthusiastic student response to winning the Cleanest Classroom award.

Shared beliefs and attitudes. Westridge is a culture which holds many beliefs and attitudes. The research indicates a strongly held value for collaboration between staff members in order to provide exemplary education to all students. Cultural members also share a strong belief in the importance of parental involvement at WRE. Parents are involved as volunteers and chaperones and are believed to play an important role in the education of the child. Cultural members also share the desire to create a safe and stable learning environment for the students at WRE. This is evident in the description of the physical environment and in the description of the school and classroom rules and the corresponding behavior

incentive plans. Cultural members were observed to share a pleasant attitude about their participation with each other throughout the research process.

Shared language. This component of culture is supported in the theme Shared Communication. Cultural members share patterns of language including phrases and unique terms, such as its established nickname "The Ridge," and the "Timberwolf Howl." These terms are learned through participation and interaction of cultural members over time. Most of the communication used at WRE directly pertained to the education of the students. The shared use of American Sign Language was significant, as ASL was used in environments with and without deaf students. Common gestures, such as "Give Me 5," are used by cultural members throughout the physical environment and understood by cultural members. Written language is used to communicate with cultural members both inside and outside the physical environment. Cultural members use the school website, newsletters and report cards to communicate with families on the activities, behaviors and education of their students.

Shared patterns of social interactions. The members of WRE share common language, occupations, behaviors, attitudes and expectations, which influence the shared social interactions of its culture. The regional environment shared by cultural members also impacts their social interactions. The school is easy to find and is hospitable to visitors and newcomers. This makes entering the school's shared culture simple to do.

While cultural members share many areas of social interaction, it is important to note the social interactions in which students with disabilities are not included. Students with disabilities are left out of shared occupations such as Lunch Bunch, extracurricular activities, and eating lunch in the cafeteria. This could be due to the shared perception that students with disabilities cannot be included independently or without special education staff present. WRE teachers mentioned the expectation of additional adult assistance when interacting with students with disabilities. They also expressed the belief that they are unprepared to support students with significant disabilities on their own.

Interaction with physical, temporal and non-human environments. The physical, temporal and non-human environments are interrelated and were observed within the description of the physical context of the region, school and classrooms. It is also seen in the description of Occupational Engagement where objects, schedules and the weather influenced the activities and behaviors of cultural members. Picture schedules assisted students with temporal aspects of their school day and were found within the classroom environment. Special education staff members positioned students to eat their lunch in the resource room, due to the difficulty surrounding scheduling and the student's struggle with navigating through the lunch line with a Styrofoam tray.

The interaction between these environments is also seen in the dedication of staff members to provide a safe setting for students. For example, the scheduling of

safety drills, and the fence surrounding the playground are both designed to keep students safe.

Consistent and maintained. This component of the definition is supported through the description of the history, temporal contexts and shared occupations of WRE. Westridge has been educating students 177 days per year for seven years. Cultural members maintain a consistent relationship five days a week for seven hours a day. Students have the opportunity to start their education in the school's pre-school classroom and continue until their fifth grade graduation.

Learned and transferable. Cultural members at WRE learn shared languages, occupations, beliefs, values and behaviors through interaction with each other. This is then shared with visitors or new cultural members. This is evident in the description of school and classroom rules, behavior incentives, gestures, and shared use of prevalent phrases.

Additional considerations. The researcher was disappointed that she was unable to obtain the participation from the school's related service professionals (occupational, physical and speech therapy). Due to the transient nature of school-based practice, an agreeable time and date were not feasible.

Multiple Perspectives

Upon completion of describing the culture for students with ASD at WRE, the author identified mission opportunities for occupational therapy which are

discussed within the subheadings of *The Power of Words,* and *Meaningful Implementation of Research.*

The Power of Words

Educational communities are comprised of many different professions, each guided by distinctive theories and frameworks specific to their discipline (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). These professions and frameworks each include professional jargon. Using jargon-free language can assist occupational therapists in explaining how they can assist students learn and participate in school activities. Therapists and educators who speak the same language are able to focus their expertise to promote student progress in acquiring school curriculum (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). Occupational therapists should be willing to learn new skills and information in order to understand how educational personnel operate to help students learn. This includes understanding current trends and buzzwords, such as RtI, and how they impact the daily routines of the educational team (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008).

The language used to describe students with ASD by providers of special education and related service can impact the attitudes and perceptions of individuals unfamiliar with this population. Language with negative connotations can add to the fears and prejudices of others, unintentionally contributing to the stigma associated with ASD. In Judy Endow's video *The Power of Words: How We Talk About People with ASD Matters* (2009), she showcases the difference between how the world views a person with ASD and how individuals with ASD feel about the words used to describe their existence. She begins her video with a powerful statement, "149 talk about the 1 with autism. They are the 1. We take a break. They

go off task. We have hobbies. They self stim. We change our minds. They have short attention spans." This video highlights the contrast in how words used to describe the majority are positive, while the words used to describe the minority (in this case individuals with ASD) are negative. In the powerful poem by Mayer Shevin (1987), *The Language of Us/Them*, he writes "We likes things. They fixate on objects", "We persevere. They perseverate" and "We insist. They tantrum." Occupational therapists can use the power of their words to either empower or demean individuals with ASD. For example, instead of stating that a child with ASD is "obsessed with circles," it could be said the child is interested in circles. Occupational therapists can model this language in their day-to-day communication with teachers and students.

Individuals with ASD deserve to be promoted to the general public with respect and dignity, and the language professionals' use hold great power. Occupational therapist can model their respect and dignity for individuals with disabilities, including ASD, through the consistent use of Person First Language. Person First Language is language that subordinates the disability to the individual (Bickford, 2004) and focuses on the person instead of their disability (Lynch, Thuli, & Groombridge, 1994). The use of Person First Language can change stereotypes and reduce bias against those with disabilities by distinguishing the individual by personal attributes other than their disability. It is also an objective way of acknowledging, communicating and reporting on disabilities. It eliminates generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability. The words occupational therapists choose to use when describing

individuals with ASD can either subtly or overtly indicate their thoughts and opinions about this population.

Meaningful Implementation of Research Through Collaboration

Occupational therapists have expert knowledge of conditions impacting the occupational performance of children and can implement effective strategies to increase the involvement of students with disabilities within their school environment (AOTA, 1999). Through collaboration with school-based personnel, occupational therapists can ensure that students engage in educationally relevant occupations as part of their typical school routine within a variety of sub-environments such as the classroom, cafeteria, gymnasium and library (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). School-based collaboration is an interactive team process that focuses student, family, education and related services partners on enhancing the academic achievement and functional performance of all students in the school (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008).

Teachers at WRE reported feelings of insecurity about teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. Staff members acknowledged a lack of training and understanding as the responsible factor. Occupational therapists can reassure school personnel through the collaboration and sharing of meaningful implementation of the research supporting strategies for teaching students with ASD in their classrooms. Occupational therapists could offer professional development opportunities to staff members sharing evidence-based supports for teaching students with ASD in the general education classroom.

One method in which occupational therapists can collaborate with school personnel is through the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. RtI is a systematic process that closely monitors how students respond to different types of services and instruction (Jackson, 2007). RtI has recently emerged as a frontrunner in the national effort to provide immediate intervention for any child having difficulty learning or behaving in school (Jackson, 2007). This is applied through various levels of support, ranging from practical modifications to intense intervention (Jackson, 2007).

Using the three-tier model of RtI, occupational therapists could influence the core learning of the student population, through the introduction of a single handwriting curriculum to be used school-wide. Writing difficulties have been documented in children with and without disabilities (Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Persky, Daane, & Yin, 2003). Referrals for occupational therapy services from teachers for handwriting problems are among the most prevalent in public schools (Reisman, 1991). Occupational therapists possess the knowledge to assist in the refining of handwriting skills (Judkins, Dague, & Cope, 2009), although many of the students referred for handwriting problems do not qualify for occupational therapy services in schools under IDEA of 2004. The use of a single handwriting curriculum, could be used under RtI, and eliminate the potentially confusing use of multiple terms describing the handwriting process, as depicted in Table 5, through the use of consistent language and materials.

An additional solution to improving handwriting consistency and intervention across the school setting is through the provision of handwriting

intervention in-services. Occupational therapists could educated school personnel on handwriting intervention and concepts including body mechanics, sensory based approaches for improving attention span, pencil grips, and lined papers (Judkins, Dague, & Cope, 2009).

Also utilizing the RtI model, Occupational therapists could influence the core behavioral instruction of students with the establishment of a consistent set of school rules and routines. Consistency assists students, including students with ASD, on the expectations of behavior throughout their school environment. The IDEA Partnership (2010a) supports the use of a consistent set of rules and routines, and recommends they be presented in the communication method appropriate to the individual child. This includes written words, pictures, photographs or icons. Providing this structure increases independence, decreases anxiety and aids in transition of all students (IDEA Partnership, 2010a).

Implications for Occupational Therapy

Because school-based occupational therapy is the second largest area of practice in the profession (AOTA, 2010a), the researcher believes there are several relevant implications to occupational therapy. This study offers insight into occupational therapy practice through the description of cultural elements of a school. Occupational therapists typically provide services and supports within many classrooms and schools, and therefore understanding the cultural expectations of each school or classroom is important (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). Occupational therapists understand the nuances and details of activities and the contexts they are involved in, and could use this knowledge in a variety of ways to encourage the

mainstreaming of students with ASD. A therapist could use the elements of culture described in this study to design individualized programs for students and activities which would enhance the generalization of skills developed in the classroom.

This study has presented a description of a cultural group without representation of the occupational therapist. Westridge Elementary School has a licensed occupational therapist who travels between two elementary schools and one high school. Because the therapist is generally unavailable for the day to day activities of WRE, this study has potential to assist the therapist with understanding how students with ASD are involved within the school culture. The occupational therapist may use the description of the culture of WRE in order to improve the services provided to WRE students and staff.

The description of the physical environment and the objects within, including the classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, cafeteria and assistive technology provide opportunities for the therapist to make beneficial adjustments. Inclusive participation requires adapting and matching the needs, interests, and abilities of the children and teachers with the environmental and activity qualities that optimize engagement (Ideishi et al., 2006, p. 3). According to Hanft and Shepherd (2008), teachers will arrange their classrooms according to their own preferences for promoting social interaction, movement patters, and learning. An occupational therapist can assist in educating the teacher that how the space is arranged may affect a child's ability to perform school tasks and participate in social activities. For example, the occupational therapist could support the learning and attention of students with ASD by encouraging staff members to decrease the amount of visual

stimuli found within the school and classroom environment. The tactile, kinesthetic, auditory, visual, proprioceptive, or temperature characterizes of the environment may affect student learning (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). Overly stimulating decorations within the physical environment of a school may distract the attention of a student with ASD who is over-responsive to sensory input. The description of visual supports such as the footprints and visual schedules, used by staff members, may assist the therapist in the development of similar supports for students with and without ASD.

The description of the social environment, along with the explanation of the shared values and beliefs of cultural members could assist the therapist in the development of projects utilizing parental involvement, collaboration, and safety. For example, understanding the school's outstanding parental support, the therapist could initiate an afterschool program targeted at students with handwriting difficulty using parent volunteers. Utilizing the information detailed on WRE's lack of unified school rules, the therapist could assist in the development of a standard set of expectations which would be beneficial for all student behavior. Because staff members at WRE expressed mixed feelings on their success at mainstreaming and educating students with ASD in the classroom, the therapist could provide additional trainings to staff members on evidenced based supports such as the use of visual supports (Hume, 2008), structured work systems (Schopler, Mesibov, & Hearsey, 1995), and social narratives (Schopler, Mesibov, & Hearsey, 1995).

The influence of time and temporal aspects on the school community could also assist the occupational therapist with services provided to cultural members.

Educational settings are different from other occupational therapy practice settings, and recommendations made by therapists need to fit into the school and classroom routines (Hanft & Shepherd, 2008). The weather and the time of day were shown to influence student participation at WRE. The therapist could introduce a variety of physical activities for students during the cold winter months, when utilizing the playground for outdoor recess is not an option. Alternatively, the occupational therapist could provide soothing, restful activities for students to partake in after exhausting activities such as field day.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Education

This study provides occupational therapy students and educators with an in-depth look into the culture of a public school. Students can use this research to start formulating ideas about the realities of school-based practice, which can then be linked to learning opportunities in the classroom and while on fieldwork. The field of occupational therapy is evolving and returning to its holistic and client centered roots. School-based practice supports holistic practice, emphasizing a student's individual learning and social needs. This study provides insight into areas of school-based practice which future occupational therapy students could benefit from. It is recommended that academic occupational therapy programs continue to instruct students on school-based practice and offer opportunities for students to engage within school communities.

This study also establishes the use of a wide variety of augmentative and assistive technologies within school culture. Due to many school districts'

relinquishment of assistive technology assessment and evaluation to occupational therapy staff members, the researcher suggests occupational therapy students have continued and thorough access to engage with these devices. Occupational therapy students and academics interested in school-based practice would benefit from familiarizing themselves with American Sign Language, which is used extensively with students with communication and cognitive disabilities. As seen at WRE, Sign Language, or the approximation of signs, is used as a method of communication by students receiving occupational therapy services.

Due to our research driven society, there is a need for increased research to defend the profession of occupational therapy. This study suggests several options for future research, which could be conducted by an occupational therapy student under the direction of qualified academic faculty and occupational therapy practitioners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional qualitative research to explore school cultures would improve the understanding of professionals working within a school setting. The researcher believes additional exploration into the rituals shared by school cultures, such as Picture Day and field trips, would strengthen the understanding of cultural member's attitudes and behaviors on the inclusion of students with disabilities. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of the cultural members not researched in this study (students with and without disabilities, families and volunteers) could offer more insight into the inclusion and involvement of students with disabilities

within school culture. The investigation into the attitudes and beliefs of cultural members on collaboration could also form the basis for a future study. Finally, ethnographic studies of other schools could increase the understanding of this practice area and identify similarities and differences between cultural groups. Participation and leadership in the research of ASD should be a priority for occupational therapists, in order to continue the great strides in developing effective interventions for autism.

Limitations and Issues of Trustworthiness

As with the nature of narrative inquiries, this study does not lend itself well to reproduction and cannot be generalized. However, the study does provide significant data about the culture of WRE, which could provide the catalyst for additional research studies. The data collected was primarily from primary classrooms and teachers. Intermediate classrooms and teachers may have been underrepresented leading to false assumptions about behavior patterns. Additionally, the research did not look at the perspectives of students, families or volunteers, meaning these cultural members were not represented.

While the author made her best effort to avoid biases and assumptions about the culture of Westridge Elementary School, it is likely that unconscious biases stemming from prior experience as a cultural member, as well as prior assumptions of qualitative terms such as “culture” and “ritual” may have subtly influenced data collection, analysis and the documentation of results.

Conclusions

This ethnographic study of Westridge Elementary School and its students with disabilities has offered a detailed description of WRE's cultural characteristics and how these elements interact to create a cultural group. The students are the focal point of all activities at WRE, while the staff, volunteers and parents are the key to maintaining their shared purpose and attitudes. Understanding the culture of Westridge Elementary School for students with ASD will benefit occupational therapists, educators and other professionals. While this research was conducted in order to add to the breadth of research on school culture and ASD, the individuals who may benefit most are the cultural members of WRE. By providing the WRE with a copy of this study, the researcher hopes cultural members will recognize their strengths and weaknesses and use the information to build upon the excellence of the school. The researcher hopes that readers will understand the story of WRE and can identify and utilize the information provided in the manner they choose.

The process of conducting this qualitative research study offered the author insight into the research process and what it means to be a qualitative researcher. While at times the process seemed impossible to complete, the author has walked away with an invaluable learning experience and a greater understanding of cultural groups which she intends to implement into her practice as an occupational therapist. Westridge Elementary School is a warm, welcoming and special place for children with and without disabilities to learn and grow up. The researcher would like to offer sincere gratitude to the individuals at "The Ridge" for their participation and openness during this journey. Can I get a "Timberwolf Howl"? Hoooowwlll!

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APPENDIX A:

Assumptions & Biases of the Researcher

Entry 1: June 23rd, 2010

I have been involved with WRE in one way or another for almost 6 years now. First as a student teacher, then as its low incidence special education teacher for 3 years, and now as a researcher! WRE is only 7 years old, so you could say we've had a significant relationship! When deciding on my thesis population, WRE was the natural fit. I am still good friends with many of the staff members there, providing me with easy access. But because of the relationships I have with WRE staff members and the school community in general, I realize I need to get some of my feelings down on paper in order to acknowledge my biases. So here they are….

I guess my first instinct is to assume that the students with disabilities at WRE are included within the school culture. I know I worked so damn hard at getting those kids included with their peers and with the school in general – and I acknowledge the fact that I will be upset if I learn things have changed. I only left WRE to pursue graduate school because I understood that Amy would do an excellent job with my babies (babies… I guess there is another bias). I love those kids. I am excited to see them again, and can't help but wonder if they will remember me. It's been a few years now… I realize I have been out of the loop for awhile, and things most likely have changed.

A second bias I foresee is that inclusion is appropriate in general. I am a huge proponent of inclusion of students with disabilities. It was practically beaten into me at UK. I know I made my para's lives miserable sometimes asking them to go

above and beyond their job description and their salary. Therefore, I need to acknowledge that my opinion on inclusion could be different from those at WRE. I think that is one of the good things about this type of research study. The definition of culture will help me narrow down what to investigate, giving me a clear look at all the parts of school culture that I may have overlooked in the past.

I've already noticed some bias during the IRB process. When developing my interview questions, I used a ton of previous knowledge to lead the questions. This is bad… I know it. But it's almost impossible to separate out. This could also a benefit, as I will have an easier time finding the data, but I have already gone back to the literature to find additional questions to ask members at WRE that didn't involve my prior experiences. But I have this experience; I know the jargon, I am familiar with the environment and objects, and how the structure of the school works. But I think I've probably forgotten a lot too. I assume things have changed, policies, classrooms, I know the students have changed…

I started sending out emails to my former colleagues this week. Everyone I asked is willing to help! I am really focusing on reminding myself that I am a clean slate. Act like I don't know anything about WRE. When I encounter relevant research information, I will ask myself what my think about that and try and push those assumptions away. I am really excited to get this project started! To get my research out there… it feels amazing to have that opportunity. I will be a sponge. I will soak up the information at WRE.

APPENDIX B:

Consent Form from Principle Greg Roush

WESTRIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
200 PEBBLEBROOK WAY
FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY 40601
502.875.8420

Letter of Support for Off-Campus Research

April 14, 2010

Institutional Review Board:

As an authorized representative of Westridge Elementary School I grant approval for Lisa McCarthy, OTS to conduct research involving human subjects at my organization. I understand that the purpose of this research is to understand the culture of Westridge Elementary School, and its approach to the increasing numbers of mainstreamed students with special needs; in particular students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I understand that Ms. McCarthy is conducting this research in order to develop a cultural portrait, which will aide in further research development on the practice of mainstreaming of students with disabilities, including ASD.

I grant permission for this project to involve staff members (teachers, paraprofessionals, related service personnel, administrators) and I have determined these individuals to be appropriate subjects for this research. I understand that they will be asked to provide interviews, both individual and in groups, assist in the researchers observations, and contribute relevant school artifacts (pictures, documents, etc…)

To support this research, I agree to arrange access for Ms. McCarthy to the participants, and provide time for my staff to participate in her research study.

Sincerely,

Greg Roush

Greg Roush
Principal
Westridge Elementary School

The mission of Westridge Elementary is to enable students to become productive, responsible and successful citizens through partnership with our families and the larger community.

APPENDIX C:

Informed Consent Document

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Culture of a Public School's Approach to Children with ASD: An Ethnographical Study

Why am I being asked to participate in this research?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the culture of Westridge Elementary School, and its students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a cultural member and you have experience with students with ASD. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about seven people to do so.

Who is doing the study?

The person in charge of this study is Lisa McCarthy, an Occupational Therapy graduate student at Eastern Kentucky University. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Peggy Wittman, OTR.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to understand the culture of Westridge Elementary School, and its approach to the increasing numbers of mainstreamed students with special needs: in particular its students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The researcher will be looking at the characteristic everyday occupations, social practices, language, and norms shared within the school, and how students with ASD are involved. The goal of this study is to develop a cultural portrait of your school, which will aide in further research development on the practice of mainstreaming students with disabilities, including ASD.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted at Westridge Elementary School, through multiple visits in the late spring, summer and early fall of 2010.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to sit with a researcher and complete an interview approximately 30-45 minutes in length. The length of the interview can be shorter or longer dependent upon your responses. The interview may be audio taped. There will be questions about your involvement within the culture of WRE, and your experience with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. You may be asked to provide a follow up interview, if the researcher determines it would be beneficial to do so. The researcher may also ask you to answer follow up questions via email or the phone.

Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?

If you are uninterested or unwilling to discuss your cultural participation at WRE, you should not take part in this study. If you are under the age of 18, you should not take part in this study.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

Do I have to take part in this study?
If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

What will it cost me to participate?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information I give?
Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from the information you give, and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court, or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child. Also, we may be required to show information that identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as Eastern Kentucky University.

Can my taking part in the study end early?
If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

What if I have questions?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Lisa McCarthy at #502.386.0080. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the

staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

What else do I need to know?

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and agree to participate in this research project.

_____ _____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

_____

Printed name of person taking part in the study

_____

Name of person providing information to subject

APPENDIX D:

Interview Guide/Questions

Interview Questions:

The Culture of a Public School's Approach to Children with ASD: An Ethnographical Study.

Interviewer: Lisa M. McCarthy, OTS

Interviewee: _____

Title: _____ # of students (if applicable): _____

Date: _____ # of IEP's (if applicable): _____

# of students with ASD: _____

1.) To start off, can you walk me through a typical day at school? Start with when you arrive at school and continue through the day until you leave for home.
2.) How would you describe WRE's rules and routines?
    a. Are there school wide behavior programs? Describe.
    b. Are there school wide routines? Describe.
    c. How would you describe students with ASD involvement in these?
3.) How would you describe your classroom rules and routines?
    a. How would you describe the involvement of students with ASD within these?
4.) Tell me about a recent or memorable school event (fieldtrip, assembly, guest speaker), the best you can remember.
    a. What makes the event memorable?
    b. Where there students with disabilities present at the event? Please describe why or why not.
5.) I'd like to hear about report cards. I asked you to bring a copy of your report card. Describe for me how you would fill out this report card for a student.
    a. Would you fill out this report card any differently for a child with ASD? If so, please explain how.
    b. Do you have an alternative report card/assessment used for students with disabilities? If so, please explain why.
6.) Describe for me through your classroom lunch routine? Starting with when you line up for lunch, ending with when you are back in the classroom.
7.) I'd like to hear about the Pledge of Allegiance. Describe for me this routine.
    a. Which students participate?
    b. What are your expectations?
8.) If you hold parent/teacher conferences, please walk me through a typical one starting with when you send invitations, to when you sit down with the parents.

a. Describe a memorable or recent conference you had with a family of a child with a disability (preferable ASD.)

9.) Does your school have any specific annual programs such as a Christmas Pageant, or a talent show? If so, please describe your experience and the way you feel about it.
   a. Describe any involvement in these by students with ASD.

10.) I want to learn about the first days of school. Are there any Back to School rituals at WRE? Describe them please.
   a. Describe your classrooms learning routine for the beginning of the school year.
   b. Describe any involvement in this by students with disabilities (ASD).
   c. Do you have a Parent Teacher Night before the first day of school? Please describe it for me.

11.) I want to learn about the last days of school. What end of the year routines/rituals are experienced at WRE? (field-day, picnic, assembly)
   a. How do you feel students with ASD are involved in these activities?
   b. How do you think students with ASD feel about these?

12.) If you were telling a friend with a child with ASD about WRE, how would you describe the school and its environment to them?

13.) How would you describe the way you feel about teaching students with ASD in your classroom?

14.) How do you think a first year teacher would feel about teaching students with ASD in their classroom at WRE?

15.) What else would you like to share with me about your school, classroom and students with ASD?

APPENDIX E:

Weekly Newsletter

Important Dates

- **August 17**- We are starting a fundraiser early in the year! It is the Bumblebee fundraiser and your child should have brought home a packet of info today. Any questions please let me know.
- **September 7th-** NO SCHOOL- LABOR DAY
- **September 10th-** Wulfe Brothers Performance 1:00. This is also high attendance day. BE in school this day and help Westridge be the best! Be here at 7:45 everyday- If you arrive later than 7:45, your child will be counted tardy.

Classroom Wish List

1. Healthy Snacks for the class to share. I am going to try to have a working snack (snack while they are writing or doing silent reading). If you would like to send in something that we can share, it would be appreciated. Thanks!

Five Tips for Parents of Reluctant Readers:

1. Make reading relaxing and low-key for a short part of the day.
2. Read aloud some funny or interesting parts of your favorite book.
3. Draw your child in with a riddle book for kids, a passage from Sports Illustrated, or a newspaper story.
4. If your kid likes a movie, see if it's based on a book, then bring home the book.
5. For kids who have lost the motivation to read, use material that's intensely interesting to them. Your child may almost have to disassociate what he's doing at school with the act of reading something for fun.

There is no substitute for books in the life of a child. *(1952)*
~ Mary Ellen Chase ~

Reminders:

- Please check your child's take-home folder every day.
- Have your child write his/her name on all homework assignments.
- Homework is due the next day. If a homework assignment is not turned in, your child is expected to complete it before recess.

First Grade Informational Parent Meeting (I sent home a note about this last week. Here's another reminder in case you didn't get it.)

I am having a first grade parent informational meeting in my classroom on Tuesday, August 25 from 5:30-6:00. This will be a very informal meeting to discuss first grade expectations and first grade exit criteria. This will also be a time for me to attempt to answer any questions you may have. If you are not able to attend this meeting, feel free to call me or send me an e-mail.

Learning Centers Will Begin This Week:

Learning Centers will begin this week. When your child is at Reading Center, he/she will bring home an orange folder with a book in for your child to practice for the week. The book is to come back to school in your child's backpack every day. Your child will get a new book every day.

A weekly reading slip will also be sent home this week. I would like your child to read or be read to a minimum of 10 minutes every day. If your child returns the reading slip, he/she will be able to pick a prize from our prize basket.

APPENDIX F:

Library Lunch Bunch Policies and Procedures

Library Lunch Bunch Policies and Procedures

WHO: Each month I will select a specific group of students who will be allowed to participate in a Library Lunch Bunch reading group. I will begin with the 5th grade and work down so as to allow the younger students more time to become comfortable with school and classroom routines. This is a behavior-earned activity and will not be offered to students who misbehave in class. I will allow teachers to determine which students have earned the right to participate based on their requirements in class. The same students will participate each day once the final sign-up sheet has been submitted.

WHAT: Library Lunch Bunch is a reading group activity which allows the students to eat their lunch in the library while listening to an age and interest appropriate novel. Students may bring lunches from home or purchase a tray lunch from the lunchroom. I will provide LUNCH BUNCH passes to those students who are participating, and will have informed lunchroom personnel.

WHEN: I will give each teacher a calendar of Lunch Bunch reading days prior to the start date of a Lunch Bunch for his or her specific grade level. The calendars are subject to change based on the amount of time required to complete the novel. This should not interfere with teaching plans since the activity takes place during lunch. The students are expected to come straight to the library (after purchasing a tray lunch if applicable) at the beginning of the lunch time specified for his or her grade level. For example, 5th grade students would come at 11:45 and leave at 12:20 to accommodate all three 5th grade classes. This means that the Lunch Bunch students will be allowed 5 to 10 extra minutes to allow them the time to transition from lunchroom to library and back.

WHERE: The library reading area.

WHY: As an incentive for students with good behavior and to promote reading

RULES:

- Students participating in Lunch Bunch are required to attend each day unless absent or otherwise permitted by myself or the homeroom teacher. Students who choose to eat elsewhere without permission will face consequences decided upon by myself and the homeroom teacher.
- Students participating in Lunch Bunch will be removed from the program if they move their clips to purple or red.
- Students participating in Lunch Bunch will be removed from the program if they are sent to the office for behavior problems.
- Students in Lunch Bunch cannot miss more than four homework assignments. Once they have missed their fifth homework assignment, they will be removed from the program in order to focus on their class assignments.
- All classroom rules apply during Lunch Bunch.