UNDERSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN OPEN-SPACE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT KMS:

A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, narrative case study captures the voices of students who share their perspectives about their learning and social experiences in an open-space learning environment provided by their independent, middle school. A review of the literature relays the history of open classrooms in the United States and shares characteristics that define 21st century learning spaces. The author also shares a journey of personal learning to prepare for an open-space learning environment. Student survey responses and a focus group discussion provide the data that were analyzed for major themes, including power of the group, movement, assists communication, concentration, and yearning for the past. This study seeks to record the preparation work done by the school for the new space and has the potential to inform the school of important next steps to make improvements, as implied in the student data, to areas of need. Additionally, other educators interested in alternative learning spaces may find value in this process. Students generally share positive experiences, although auditory and visual distractions are most frequently mentioned. However, the data also shows the students’ ability to adjust to an open-space learning environment. Students’ experiences also highlight adolescent characteristics that imply that an open-space learning environment supports middle school best practice, as well as the 21st century skills of communication and collaboration. Finally, students seem to pay close attention to the needs of their peers in an open-space learning environment, and appreciate the collaborative work that is done by their teachers. The author shares a visual tool for use by other educators for thinking through learning spaces and provides personal insight on the mindset necessary to plan for appropriate learning environments for the future.
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CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

The Kamehameha Schools are an independent school system made up of K-12 campuses on O‘ahu, Maui, and Hawai‘i Island. Kamehameha Middle School (KMS) on the Kapālama campus is made up of approximately 640 seventh and eighth grade students who are evenly split between the two grade levels. Additionally, the school also has the ability to accommodate up to 100 boarder students who come from the neighbor islands. The school’s admissions policy gives preference to native Hawaiian applicants, therefore serving an indigenous student population. Although all students are of Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian ancestry, the mix of other ethnic backgrounds represented in the student population reflects the ethnic diversity of the Hawaiian Islands.

The Kamehameha School for Boys was started in 1887 at Ka‘iwi‘ula, a land area below the current location of the school and seven years later, the School for Girls was opened. In 1931, the current site on the 600-acre hillside of the Kapālama campus was opened and in 1965, the secondary school became co-educational. The school was founded through the will of Ke Ali‘i Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the great-granddaughter of Kamehameha the Great, the warrior king responsible for uniting the Hawaiian Islands. Kamehameha’s vast land holdings throughout the island chain, passed down after his death to other ali‘i, or Hawaiian royalty, was eventually given to Pauahi, who upon her death, willed her entire estate to the establishment of a school dedicated to the education of Hawaiian children. As stated in the school’s mission, Pauahi’s desire was “to create educational opportunities in perpetuity to
improve the capability and well-being of people of Hawaiian ancestry” (Kamehameha Schools, 2000).

After having worked for six years as a school counselor in the Hawai‘i Department of Education (DOE) at two different schools, my start at the Kamehameha Schools came in 2001 when I was hired as a grade level counselor. It seems that my experience in the DOE prepared me perfectly for my new position at Kamehameha Schools. My first position at a Hawaiian language immersion school provided me a great foundation in Hawaiian language and culture within an educational setting. My second position at a middle school provided me valuable experience that introduced me to the world of adolescents within an educational setting, a place that also confirmed my professional commitment to middle level education.

School Background

The intermediate school, affectionately known as the 7/8 Unit, was made up of grades seven and eight, and the counseling department was given approval to increase its personnel from three to five people. Initially just two grade level counselors and an administrative assistant, the increase allowed the addition of a grade level counselor and an outreach counselor. The school had also made an official name change to Kamehameha Middle School, marking its official commitment to the middle school concept. After five years, I became the lead counselor of the counseling and guidance department, consequently placing me onto the middle school administrative team working closely with the principal, vice principal, curriculum and teaming coordinator, and student activities coordinator.
The organization of the school historically had followed a grades 7-12 secondary program, with a K-6 feeder program. This setup allowed for high influence of the various content areas offered in the grades 9-12 high school program upon the grades 7-8 intermediate program. In the mid-1990s, KMS started to incorporate elements of the middle school concept into their program, and in 2001 made the official break away from the high school and became Kamehameha Middle School, complete with its own administration. The middle school concept pays close attention to the developmental needs of the adolescent.

The former National Middle School Association or NMSA (2010) promotes developmental responsiveness as one of the essential attributes of a successful middle school. Additionally, the newly named Association for Middle Level Education, or AMLE, further promotes 16 characteristics of a successful middle school, including a shared vision developed by all stakeholders and ongoing professional development reflective of best educational practices (see Appendix A). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1990) proposed a school that “focuses squarely on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents. It creates a community of adults and young people embedded in networks of support and responsibility that enhance the commitment of students learning” (p. 10). The popular middle school practices of teaming, advisory, and interdisciplinary units helped to develop KMS into a true middle school and, in 2007, the school took its first leap of faith into the 21st century by offering a one-to-one laptop program. The decision to provide every student with a laptop and incorporate technology into the classroom surely prompted the purposeful development of a different kind of
learning environment. Consequently, the move also turned out to be a somewhat natural motivator for the school to take further steps into the future.

**Current Issue and Parameters of this Study**

In the 2012-13 school year, the school opened a brand new, innovative school facility that features an *open-space learning environment* where there are no walls or doors to separate the traditional *cells and bells* layout of most schools. The *cells and bells* model, also referred to as the Ford Model, represents the factory design that expects all students to learn in the same way and within the same timeframe. The design also facilitates the control of the students by the school most notably regulated by the bell that determines when movement happens (Nair et al., 2009). The current set up in our new facility places an entire grade level on the same floor, made up of three teams of approximately 108-110 students each, even though the floor is designed to accommodate four teams of equal count. Each team space is equal in size and makeup, and the floor is divided into four quadrants, one per team. The design charrette process for the new middle school facility started in the 2007-08 school year, assembling the various stakeholders of the middle school community. Working out of portable facilities in the two years prior to the move into the new facility, the faculty and staff worked diligently to plan for the provision of the best learning environment to take our native Hawaiian students into the future. Driven by our commitment to middle school concept and promising practices, the school is also guided by the foundations provided by the promotion of 21st century skills, standards-based learning and Kula Hawai‘i (indigenous/cultural knowledge), and a shared vision for learning.
In the preparation years for the construction of the new facility, the process of *appreciative inquiry* allowed the school to move forward with the creation of a shared vision. Appreciative inquiry has become the favored task of progressive organizations that want to move away from the traditional problem-solving process to one that focuses on the strengths of the organization. The hope is that becoming familiar with the positives of an organization will allow those in the organization to then propagate the positives throughout the organization even more. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) defined appreciative inquiry as “a narrative-based process of positive change. It is a cycle of activity that starts by engaging all members of an organization or community in a broad set of interviews and deep dialogue about strengths, resources, and capabilities” (p. 15). The process allowed the school to create a shared vision (See Appendix B) that provides for the nurturing of the student voice, and emphasizes this unique time of development for our students and the impact that we as a school program have upon them. When given the opportunity to have a voice, students are then empowered to affect their own education, and be provided with an outlet and audience for their voices to be heard. The difficulty for educators, though, is not allowing a student to have a voice but rather listening to what is being said (Ripp, 2013). It is important to note here that there are two considerations to be made regarding the impact on the provision of student voice. The first is adolescence. Students at this age lack the confidence to speak up, and as they trek into the adult world, they frequently find it difficult to be able to get their voice heard. The second is culture. The traditional Hawaiian way of learning takes place by doing, leaving little room for discussion. The value in learning was in observing, listening, reflecting, and doing. The idea of questioning “is
thought of as something a person would consider almost as the last expression of learning” (Chun, 2006).

Therefore, to further promote a learning environment that values native Hawaiian adolescents, my research focused on the perspective of students and sought to capture their voice pertaining to their experiences in the new open-space learning environment. With this foundation, my research attempted to answer the following:

1) What are the students’ perspectives about the new open-space learning environment as a place of learning?

2) What are the students’ perspectives about the new open-space learning environment and its effect on social behavior?

My research goals sought to document the work that we have done to prepare for and effectively utilize the open-space learning environment; to provide administrators and teachers with a better understanding of what is happening and what adjustments may be needed for improvements; and to provide documentation for other schools who are exploring alternative learning environments.

My theoretical framework was based upon Jan Ghel’s public space theory (2011) which highlighted the human/social aspects of living and working environments. Ghel critiques modern architecture which he believes focuses on people as producers. Further, human nature and motivation is often neglected in modern architecture. Motivation, rather, is affected by social experience and feeling safe in a place. Modern architecture also neglects the multi-functional public space at which three main features exist:

a) the *marketplace*, where transaction of ideas or performance happens
b) the thoroughfare, which provides access to different semi-private rooms or facilities

c) and the meeting place, which encourages conversation.

David Thornburg (2014) and his primordial learning metaphors also discusses important spaces for learning to occur such as the watering hole where people can learn from each other, and the cave used for solitude and reflection. The campfire is an informational area for more direct instruction. Our open-space learning environment allows the flexibility for teachers to create multiple learning environments throughout the day that address and provide for these types of multi-functional spaces. As such, students have the opportunity to work as an individual, in small working groups, or as a large group in which both formal and informal learning can take place.

My Professional Transition

At the beginning of this study, I made the transition from being the lead counselor to becoming the vice principal of the school. After just a semester in the new facility, the former vice principal of 30 years decided to retire, and I was immediately named the acting vice principal at the beginning of the new semester. After going through the normal recruiting and interviewing process with the Human Resources department, I was selected as the permanent vice principal for our middle school. The acquisition of the new leadership position provided me the motivation to explore what was happening in the new facility from a broad perspective rather than the single perspective of the counseling and guidance department. More importantly though, this would also potentially change the dynamic of the relationships between me and my students.
As a grade level counselor, one of my biggest roles was to be a student advocate. Students perceived the act of speaking with the counselor as somewhat “normal,” or as much as an adolescent will tolerate as normal. As the vice principal, however, they perceived my main role as the disciplinarian, one whom students came to see when they were in trouble or had to deal with a serious matter. At this point, there was some concern on my part as far as how comfortable students would be if asked to participate in research that the new vice principal was conducting. After all, I had only previously worked closely with one-third of the student population because the students were assigned by last name to one of three grade level counselors. Still, I had to remain confident that I could build upon the already positive relationships I had with my alpha students, as well as create new relationships with the other two-thirds of our student population. In my mind, a vice principal also works as a student advocate and this was the stance to which I would remain true.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PERSONAL INFLUENCES

Historical Background of Open-Space Learning Environments

The concept of the open-space learning environment is not new. More simply known as the open classroom, it found its roots first in the British public elementary schools and then made its way to the United States in the late 1960s (Cuban, 2004). Its other names, such as informal education and open education, surely resonated with both the political and social revolutions that were taking place in the U.S. at the time. However, the national and international challenges that the U.S. faced in the 1970s eased the shift of American classrooms back to the more traditional types of schools and schooling previously utilized.

Rothenburg (1989) recounts the same historical pathway, as described above, of the open classroom in America. His work also attempts to clear up Americans' misunderstanding of the open classroom and explores the failure of open classrooms in the 1960s. Among the various American interpretations and implementations of open classrooms, one example of misinterpretation was that of the term unstructured learning which was meant to describe the physical space rather than the educational activities. A big roadblock to open classrooms’ success, he states, is the lack of adequate preparation for both teachers and students to effectively utilize this type of educational environment. Consequently, the unsuccessful transition of education to the open classroom provided the American public a reason to distrust the new learning environment.
Rothenburg promotes the underlying premise of the open classroom: the learning of basic skills, promotion of independence and creativity, and working collaboratively with others. He emphasizes the need for students to be better trained on how to work effectively, as well as how to use the freedom that an open classroom provides for them. Most importantly, he points out that an educational program that utilizes open classrooms needs to be flexible and should start with the needs of its students. He suggests for such learning environments the need for careful arrangement of the setting, the use of appropriate activities, and the establishment of clear guidelines. In other words, the program needs to find the best organization of time, material, and space that fits the program.

**21st Century Schools**

Fast forward to modern times where we are once again motivated by the British. Their current *Building Schools of the Future initiative* brings the same ideas that the original open classrooms promoted: a focus on students and the belief in learning by doing. Pearlman (2010) posits that there has been little innovation in American schools and sees this as a disservice to the significant changes that have happened to which American schools should pay attention. These include the general change in our students, as well as the proliferation of technology in our society. He further suggests that American classrooms should be more student-centered (as opposed to teacher-centered), and should promote more collaborative learning. Finally, he says that the form of the classroom learning environment should promote 21st century skills and follow the new functions of engagement, problem solving, and communication. Nair, Fielding, and Lackney (2009), famed for their design work of twenty-first century schools, provide a common language for
the design process for new schools. The team provides 28 patterns (p. 23) on which schools can build their design for their new school facility. These patterns provide a great starting point for schools that can help them think through not only space, but more importantly, function of their future school facility.

In 2014, Thornburg updated his primordial learning metaphors and its application to modern classrooms, and states that “physical environments that impede learning hurt teachers as well as students.” He suggests that inquiry-driven, project-based learning is the way of the future so as to keep our modern students engaged in their learning. The campfire, then, presents the teacher with the challenge of figuring out how to balance the presentation of material and the use of other activities that allow students to learn on their own – thus allowing the student to discover things on her own. The watering hole proposes multiple venues for social interaction. Thornburg notes the importance of setting up spaces for the purposeful intent of promoting discussion between students to enhance ideas on what they are learning. Today, student use of communicative technology is evidence of the need for dialogue with their peers and plays an important role in students’ learning. Converse of the watering hole, the cave provides places for reflection on what has been taught, inevitably contributing to their thinking and learning of the material. Thornburg also adds on a fourth metaphor, that of life. It is in life that we are able to apply the things learned in the other three areas. This metaphor requires the spaces that allow the freedom to explore and experiment.

The open-space provides a unique physical environment in which traditional teaching and learning need to adapt in order for the space to be utilized to its full potential. Thornburg suggests a more constructionist space, one that allows the
student the freedom to explore and experiment. He also discusses the idea of the use of technology in modern learning spaces and the opportunity that students have to explore unanswered questions instead of questions that come with your typical lesson plan with set answers created by the teacher. As such, Thornburg believes that inquiry-driven, project-based learning is key.

MacPhee (2013), of Northern Arizona University, discusses the change of learning spaces at the university level and distinguishes three important elements to consider in learning space design: informal spaces, formal spaces and attributes of learning spaces. *Informal learning spaces* are those that fall outside of traditional learning spaces and today are being incorporated into school design more and more because of its importance to the informal learning that these spaces can provide for students. *Formal learning spaces* not only mean incorporating technology into the space, but in fact, because of its ever-changing nature, is understood that accommodations will need to be made for the advances in technology. What is left, then, is what MacPhee describes as another kind of transformation. He states, “Traditional teaching methods give way to more group work, student-led presentations, and more frequent interaction among students with the instructor” (Formal Spaces section, para. 1). One important aspect of a modern formal learning space is the flexible space which provides the “ability to easily and quickly reconfigure the physical space for a variety of active learning activities” (Flexible Spaces section, para. 1). Finally, he shares that important *attributes of learning spaces* include furniture, lighting, acoustics, classroom movement pattern, storage, and technology.
My Personal Journey to an Open-Space Learning Environment

While still the lead counselor, I was tasked with co-leading a transition team. Convened in the spring prior to the move into the portable facilities, the purpose of the transition team was to manage the double move from old facility to portable facilities, and then the move from the portable facilities to the new facility. This appointment provided me a great lesson in school leadership that continues to serve me well in my position as vice principal. Along with taking care of the many concerns that came with the multiple moves, the transition team primarily spent time re-establishing the elements of our middle school program as well as creating a bell schedule that would support the re-established program. One of our biggest accomplishments was procuring the services of Nancy Doda, internationally reknowned guru of middle-level education. We were fortunate to bring her in and host her on our campus as she assisted the transition team with the initial work to create the new bell schedule. Additionally, she was able to provide our faculty with a workshop on differentiation. When asked what type of training they thought was necessary to prepare them for the new school facility, our faculty selected differentiation. We continued in the following months with several teleconferences via Skype as we moved closer to a new bell schedule. We created various options for a new schedule and eventually reduced it to two options which we then presented to the rest of the faculty for their selection.

One of the main motivations for our progress as a school community was the work that we did with Insight Consulting and Training, a private consulting company that aims to “transform organizations to achieve peak performance” (About us section, para. 1). Initially, the consultant was brought on board to assist in
creating an effective working culture for faculty and staff, and part of that work included the appreciative inquiry process that was utilized to help us develop our school vision. However, when the possibility for the new school facility became reality, the consultant played a key role in many of the activities to help us prepare, including assisting the transition team with the work required to complete the tasks assigned to the group.

My personal preparation was prompted by a now piqued interest in innovative, 21st century learning environments. I read books such as Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (2006) to help me understand the growing importance of creativity; *Switch: How to Change When Change is Hard* (Heath and Heath, 2010) to help me better understand the effects of how people think and how people feel upon dealing with change; and *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World* by Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2010) to keep me updated on what is going to be important for schools of the future. I attended regularly the annual conference put on by AMLE where I was able to visit middle schools around the country and network with other middle school educators to find out what they might be doing to provide a different kind of school and education to their students. A one-time attendance at the annual International Society for Technology in Schools (ISTE) conference exposed me to the increasing impact of technology on education. All of these activities and experiences contributed to my learning and sufficiently equipped me with the motivation to lead the work of the transition team.
The team also began to explore the idea of open-learning spaces and sought to find examples of schools currently using this type of learning environment. In the first year, there were numerous online searches as well as visits to local schools that came close to open-learning spaces: Kapolei High School, which utilizes grade-level buildings and have spaces separated by five-foot walls in some areas; and Mid-Pacific Institute, which has a Technology and Science building that is an open-space equipped with enclosed rooms with full or partial glass walls and/or windows.

The best example, however, was Verrado High School in Phoenix, Arizona. Verrado was designed by the architect/consultant who assisted our school in the initial design process and, in fact, was featured in the first images presented to us when we were introduced to the open-space learning environment. In the year prior to the move into our new facility, our leadership team, along with other key players within our school program, visited Verrado High School and spent three days doing observations during school hours, and then interviewed school personnel within and outside of school hours. At the end of each day, we debriefed as a group and checked our daily experiences against the plans made for our work there prior to our trip. In review of the final day individual reflections, I found that the visual really helped our teacher attendees gain a real sense of the open-space concept. Some major differences between Verrado and our school was that it was a high school (no teaming), had three-walled classrooms that opened up to a shared corridor, and did not have a one-to-one laptop program.

The trip was worth far more than what any conference could have provided us. As one attendee mentioned, "At conferences the menu of sessions is based on what is available. Here, we found what was meaningful to us and were able to
internalize and apply it to ourselves, KMS, and to all the work we are doing to prepare for the building.” Given the differences between schools, our teachers generally observed traditional teaching methods that included good classroom management, getting to know your students well, and setting expectations and agreements that all members follow. They also recognized the need for our faculty to be flexible, expect challenges, challenge themselves, be respectful in collaboration, and generally remain positive. For students, they gathered that we needed to prepare them well for the space, that it would take time to adapt, that they needed to be engaged by their work, and that expectations should be set clearly from the beginning and followed. The most valuable lesson, though, was that it wasn’t so much the building that would make the biggest impact, but more so, the people within the building who focused on setting a specific culture and lived the values set forth. Needless to say, the visit gave us a lot to think about as far as our next steps for moving into our new facility.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study focused on the perspective of students and sought to capture their voice pertaining to their experiences in a new school facility, particularly a new open-space learning environment in which they attended their core courses. More specifically, my study investigated the effect of an open-space learning environment on students’ learning and social behavior. My research attempts to answer the following questions:

1) What are the students’ perspectives about the new open-space learning environment as a place of learning?

2) What are the students’ perspectives about the new open-space learning environment and its effect on social behavior?

Because one of my research goals was to provide administration and teachers with a better understanding of what is happening and what adjustments might need to be made for improvements in the open-space learning environment, the students’ perspectives helped to provide answers to the question, “What can be learned from the students to influence future decision making?”

My research design followed that of a narrative case study. The case study focuses on small groups or individuals within a group and documents that group’s or individual’s experience in a specific setting (Lodico et al, 2006). The use of narrative, particularly in educational research, can inform and instruct, as well as provide a way of knowing, and organizing and communicating experience (McEwan and Egan, 1995). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further supported the use of narrative inquiry in educational study stating that, “people by nature lead storied
lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p.2).

I was also inspired to move in the direction of the use of case studies and narratives when a visiting professor, Warren Nishimoto, came to speak to our class about the use of oral history in qualitative research. Up to that point, I was not sure how I would be designing my research and further inquiry with Nishimoto provided me with a valuable resource called, *How to Do Oral History* (Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Sciences, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2011). Oral history is typically used to preserve the personal or human side of history, and I felt that this corresponded greatly with the study that I was pursuing, particularly to honor and capture the voice of my students via the narratives that they would provide. In essence, just as our faculty and staff utilized appreciative inquiry to develop our school philosophy, it followed my utilization of appreciative inquiry with the students to further nurture their voice. Afterall, it was really those positive aspects and perspectives that would be important for influencing future decision making, even in the case of making improvements to those perspectives that didn’t come out as positive. More true to appreciative inquiry, I would be studying the strengths, resources, and capabilities of the open-space learning environment.

My original plan was to collect the perspectives of the students who experienced the open-space learning environment in the inaugural year of the new facility. I felt that these students, both 7th and 8th graders, could provide the best account of the experience in the new facility and open-space learning environment as its initial users. However, because the Internal Review Board (IRB) process and approval (see Appendix C) took a month longer than I expected, a good chunk of my
timeline was taken and I decided to work with only the students currently at my
school (second-year users for the eighth grade and first-year users for the seventh
grade). This also provided for the convenience of working with students that I saw
on a daily basis.

A mixed-methods approach was utilized to gather data and this included a
survey and interview via focus group. As a primary tool of the case study, the use of
a small focus group was planned for the purpose of following up on the students’
accounts of their experiences and attitudes as gathered through the survey.
However, in order to provide an informed guide for my focus group, I also decided
on the use of a survey (see Appendix D) that would ask students about their
experience in the open-space learning environment. The informed guide (see
Appendix E) not only helped to organize and move the focus group discussion along,
but also allowed for natural conversation in which other issues or topics may
surface.

The survey was created in Survey Monkey, an internet-based data collection
tool, and featured eight open-ended questions pertaining to the open-space learning
environment to which students could reply within a comment box. The open
comment box had no limit on the number of characters to use, thus allowing
students to relay as much of their experiences, thoughts, and feelings as they saw fit
to respond to the questions. The questions could be completed within 10-15
minutes if given purposeful thought, however, personal motivation could have
extended the amount of time it took to complete the survey. This further allowed the
students to relay their personal experiences in and perspectives of the open-space
learning environment. The opening questions asked for demographic information,
and the actual open-space questions inquired about likes, suggestions for improvements, effects on learning, relationships with peers, and their behavior. The final questions asked about creative use of the space, their take on their opportunities to share their voice, and a general question that provided for any other comments that students wanted to make about the open-space learning environment. These questions were designed based on careful consideration of the types of data that I wanted to gather that would help answer my research questions and goals, the students' developmental level, as well as my years of experience in this particular school setting with this population of students who are typically selected to attend this school.

The participating students needed to complete the survey as soon as possible by answering the questions to the best of their ability. Upon completion, a click of the Done button sent their responses electronically. Once sent, the students' responses were automatically captured by Survey Monkey, and I then retrieved the data for analysis.

**Recruiting Student Participants**

My recruitment poster (see Appendix F) was a chart-sized, adhesive post-it poster paper on which the student advertisement created for this project was mounted. The majority of the advertisement was actually the informational Participation in a Research Study (see Appendix G) created for the IRB application with the intent to inform students of my research and hopefully stimulate student interest to participate. With colored markers, I wrote above and below the informational form. Above was written, “E kōkua mai or,” a loose translation of the
Hawaiian language, a call or request for help or assistance. Below I wrote, “Contact Mr. Atabay if you are interested.”

For approximately three weeks, the posters were left exposed on the open-space grade level floors, however, there was no response from the students. After discussions with my advisor and principal, I realized that I had to find another way to recruit participants. In order to avoid feelings of intimidation or uncomfortableness on my students’ part, I worked it out with my principal to have her send an informational email (see Appendix H) to all of our middle school parents which basically encouraged participation in my research. Attached to the email was the same Participation in a Research Study form that I put on my poster. Parents were instructed to contact me directly and on the first day that the email was sent, 17 parents contacted me primarily through email to inform me of their interest and support in having their child participate in my research. Over the next two to three weeks, more contacts from parents came in, again primarily through email. The direct contact to me from parents now allowed me the opportunity to send them the Parent Consent (see Appendix I), Child Assent (see Appendix J), as well as the Participation in a Research Project forms. It was then left to the parent to work with their child on filling out the forms and return it to me. In the next three weeks, forms trickled in slowly.

Although I had a good number of responses from parents, the additional step of filling out the forms and returning it to me proved to be a challenge, probably not so much for the adults but more so for my students. I partly attribute this to adolescent characteristics (indifference, rebelliousness), similar to the lack of responses to the poster on the wall that wasn’t quite enough to motivate them to
contact me for participation. Also, part of the problem was that my recruitment period coincided with our winter break. The posters went up just before our two-week winter break and remained up when we returned. It took me a little while to come up with a contingency plan and at this point, I only had ten participants who actually completed my online survey. I attempted once again to contact through email (see Appendix K) the same parents who had previously responded with interest but who hadn’t yet returned the signed forms.

This last attempt through email was exactly the kind of reminder that parents needed to know that it was not too late to get the forms in and have their child participate in my study. I soon received numerous apologies for the tardiness, along with the signed consent forms. This final attempt to recruit participants increased the number of completed online surveys from ten to 23. A nice surprise was receiving responses from parents of students whom I knew had siblings in the ninth grade that were part of the class that initially occupied the open-space learning environment. This provided me the opportunity to extend the invitation to these students, via their parents, although no ninth graders ended up completing the survey.

Making available the possibility for all students in the two grade levels to participate in completing the survey greatly increased the potential for a large number of responses. However, qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Although I was hopeful that a large amount of students would respond, I somehow knew that I would not receive the large numbers that I anticipated. Purposeful sampling, though, provided me the benefits of the information-rich responses from which I could find recurring issues,
or themes, of central importance. Furthermore, this maximum variation in sample (heterogeneity) would allow for the recognition of common patterns that help to bring forth “core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 235).

My data set was made up of the responses from 23 students to my online survey and notes (see Appendix L) from one focus group of three students held after initial review of the survey responses. I employed an overall inductive and comparative analysis strategy first within the survey responses alone, then together with the data from the focus group. Generally, qualitative research utilizes the constant comparative method which “involves systematic examining and refining variations in emergent and grounded concepts” (Patton, 2002, p. 239). Merriam (Merriam, 2009) said that it “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 30).

The analysis of the survey data provided me with the necessary information to create the interview guide for my focus group. After closing the survey to the students, I reviewed the student responses by individual question. This is not to say that I didn’t peek at student responses while the survey was still open for invitees to complete. Previewing responses helped me see whether students were understanding the questions or not, and generally, they were. For each individual question, first cycle, initial coding took place as I looked at the various responses as well as their frequency. The top two or three responses were noted as the most frequent responses for each question. For instance, concepts such as class size and flexibility came up in the initial coding. Next, all responses were compared and grouped by the tentative themes. For example, an initial code such as class size now
fell under the tentative theme of flexible grouping. In addition to grouping and also to accommodate my research questions, the many responses were further differentiated between learning and social behavior. Second cycle, pattern coding was then completed, taking into account the emergent themes of all responses in light of the initial tentative themes. Therefore, the example class size made its transition to flexible grouping and ended up as the major theme Power of the Group.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the students’ names were not required to complete the survey. Although the consent and assent forms contained student names, individual students were not connected to their responses as written in this report. Consent and assent forms from the beginning were kept confidential and accessible only to me as the primary investigator and my university advisor. All identifiable records, basically the consent and assent forms, were destroyed at the conclusion of my study. The electronic survey results as well as any notes taken in conjunction with the analysis of the data collected were kept. However, all identifiers that link any data to individual students have been removed. The focus group itself served to validate any of the data that was gathered in the survey. It was also an opportunity for me to delve more deeply into any recurring themes that came out in the survey. Additionally, it was an opportunity to further capture the student voice as they shared additional experiences in the focus group that may not have necessarily been shared in the survey. The findings of this study are specific to my school, hence, the case study. Therefore, generalizability is not possible in the statistical sense. What this study provided, though, is the journey of one school’s attempt to try something new and innovative – a task undertaken much like many schools today.
Finally, it is important to point out that inherent to qualitative study, the investigator, rather than separate from, plays a role in the environment of the study. Additionally, as an employee of the school, and more so, as an educational leader of the school, the success of our program, particularly the open-space learning environment, would be in my best interest. In these last two years in the new facility, I have spent hours explaining to people, particularly parents of incoming students, the rationale and benefits of an open-space learning environment and this surely played into my perspective as I pursued this research. However, I must clarify that what kept me motivated to pursue this study was the fact that skepticism existed about the effectiveness of the open-space learning environment at the levels of not only parents, but teachers, as well. To an extent, students were also skeptical but I venture to believe that students are influenced by the beliefs of their parents and teachers. As such, I believe that students are far more flexible than the adults when considering a learning space. Although some have grasped the potential of an open-space learning environment, most teachers are still functioning in our facility as if there are walls, and many do their best to create those walls with the furniture that is available. My goal therefore, was not to prove people wrong but rather to make sure that what we are doing is what is best for our students.

The literature review showed that open classrooms historically have not been successfully implemented in the United States. When used, the concept of open classrooms was often quickly abandoned. Aside from time, educational technology continues to have the greatest impact on today's classrooms and schools. Additionally, today we understand far more than what was previously known about teaching and learning. One of the most important pieces to remember is that not all
students learn in the same way. My belief is that educational technology makes any space a learning space, and in a school where every child is provided with a laptop, the possibilities for spaces to learn are endless. It is my belief that an open-space learning environment is exactly the kind of learning space that is necessary to accommodate today's students.

I close this section with a brief discussion regarding my relationship with my students. As previously mentioned, I obtained the position of vice principal just as I was planning out this study. The pool of possible student participants were split between seventh graders who knew me only as the vice principal as opposed to eighth graders who experienced my transition from grade-level counselor to vice principal. Here, the title itself can be intimidating, especially when trying to recruit students. However, in my daily work I believe in keeping students responsible for their actions. With this belief, I regularly offer students the opportunity to come up with their own solutions when there is an issue. In this way, they are more apt to accept responsibility as they have had a direct say in it. In this spirit, I believe that the intimidation of my title is reduced, and I hope that students identify me as a caring school leader who values their voice.
CHAPTER 4. DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Pursuing Approval of My Research

Of course, my research design was dependent upon approval of my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. What I expected to be a month-long wait ended up being a frustrating two-month process of adjustments and revisions to my application. The challenges that came with approval of my application were related to two key elements. The first had to do with the participation of human subjects, particularly minor subjects. The second had to do with my professional position in my school set against the role of me as the principal investigator.

Research becomes a lot more challenging when working with human subjects, particularly minor human subjects and the main concern is the potential for harm that could be done to them. In the case of my study, I was not doing anything that would provide a physical risk to the students, nor would they be required to participate in any type of assessment (as in the administration of a test). At most, there was the possibility for an individual child to feel stress because of his or her individual feelings, experiences, or perceptions, or possibly, the feeling of uncomfortableness when responding to some of the topics included in the survey. In all of the forms that were provided to students and their parents, I pointed out the possible risks mentioned above as well as clear direction that students at any point could stop participation for whatever reason. Confidentiality and anonymity is another concern, however, this was also explained in the forms provided to students and their parents.
My role as the principal investigator seemed to be the biggest point of contention as the Board specifically questioned my access to student and parent email addresses. Without prior consent, my access to parent email might possibly be viewed as a breach of confidentiality. However, the fact that Kamehameha Schools are private, independent schools, the rules for this type of issue are different from what they would be if working in a public institution. Although my research was previously approved by school authorities, the concern for this point was shared, and I obtained confirmation that the school was okay with this.

**Description and Analysis of Survey Responses**

Table 1 shows the responses that were most frequent for each individual question. Although tentative themes made themselves apparent, there were many other types of responses for each question and those are described below. There were 23 survey respondents total and all responded to Questions 1 – 6. For Question 7, one student chose not to respond and for Question 8, two students chose not to respond. There were 16 eighth grade respondents and seven seventh grade respondents, although only six respondents reported being on a seventh grade team with 17 respondents reporting eighth grade team membership. Seven of the respondents were male and 16 respondents were female. There were 20 day student respondents in comparison to just three boarder respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Likes</td>
<td>Varied grouping of teams</td>
<td>Flexible space, easy movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Suggestions for improvement</td>
<td>Visual and auditory distractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Effect on learning</td>
<td>The need to focus</td>
<td>Distracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Effect of social (relationships)</td>
<td>Closer</td>
<td>Know others better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Effect on behavior</td>
<td>Distracted/ing</td>
<td>Keen learner, better listener/observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Noisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Creative use of space</td>
<td>Group flexibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effective use of space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Student voice</td>
<td>Share voice with all at one time</td>
<td>Question misunderstood or translated as literal voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Additional comments</td>
<td>Distracting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=23
Question 1 inquired about what the students liked about the open-space learning environment. One common factor that the students noted was the flexible use of the space. As such, movement and transition seemed to be an important feature as students shared sentiments such as, “I like the convenience it is to get to one class to another,” and “I can move flexibly between classes,” and finally, “We can walk through our team space faster than going outside the door, then down the hall, then into the room.”

Subsequently, the space also allows for the flexibility in group size depending on the activity. One student summed up his thoughts succinctly when he stated, “We sometimes have classes with only 20 students, and other times we can have classes of 60 students. This provides a different environment and vibe for our learning experience.” Still, another student stated, “I enjoy how flexible and easy it is for the entire team to be together or for the team to be split up into four different classes.”

A couple of the other likes mentioned included being with their peers and the recognition of the ability for all to collaborate with each other. Regarding their peers, students said things such as, “I like being open with everyone else,” “…allows me to be able to see more of my friends that I don’t usually get the privilege to see, since we were separated by cohorts,” and “I feel like I can be able to bond with my team mates more.”

For collaboration, students explained, “I like that you can communicate with others easier,” and “You can ask other teachers for assistance.” Generally, all students had something positive to say about the open-learning space, although the
question sort of forced them to produce a *like*. The most negative comments shared were, “(To) Focus (is) challenging,” and that it’s “hard to learn.” Consequently, the majority of responses provided had to do with the open-space’s effects on learning rather than the social which seems to point to the idea that students first identify the open-space as a learning space, more so than a social space.

Rather than asking what they didn’t like about the open-space learning environment, Question 2 took on a more positive spin and asked students for suggestions for improving the space. The most prominent answer related to the distractions in the space, both auditory and visual. To this point, students said things like, “Maintain a quiet environment to keep students not distracted.” Students clearly saw other students as distractions as they said, “Sometimes, other classes get noisy, so you can’t focus,” as well as “...(it’s) easy to get distracted from people walking around through the halls.” Interestingly, though, students also recognized how they themselves could be distracting to others by stating, “We sometimes distract the other classes because they either hear or see us.” Students also made specific suggestions for actions that would help improve the space. Five students recommended the provision of more “blinders” or physical blockades to eliminate visual distractions, whereas other students suggested both moveable and permanent walls. Although posed in the positive, this question was the first to invite any negative responses. The most frequent responses for this question related to the noise and distractability of the open-space and the recommended improvements mostly had to do with this aspect, as well. Also, there was an almost equal amount of responses that had to do with both learning and social, a good indicator that
perhaps students do see the value of the open-space learning environment for both learning and social purposes.

In Question 3, I attempted to discover the students’ perception of the impact of the open-space learning environment on their learning. Directly related to their claims of distractability within the space, students generally noted their need to focus. One student shared, “I need to focus at all times only on one voice and listen carefully,” while another stated, “It teaches me to focus harder on my work in class, and it helps me to know what’s going on around me.” These type of lessons, though, are recognized as exactly that, as students stated things like, “It has taught me how to focus more and try to block out things I do not need to focus on outside of the classroom,” and “I feel like the open environment has taught me how to focus and learn without getting distracted by the things that are happening around us.”

Some students perceived the open-space as a positive contributor to their learning as they said things like, “It helped me think more open-minded,” and “It has helped me to finish my work faster and with greater quality so that I won’t have any homework for that class that day but I will still get a good grade on it.” One student clearly articulated the benefits when she stated, “I learned to work well under some noise and that a modern learning space is a good way to communicate with other classes when appropriate.” Another said, “It encouraged me to learn because I love it! It is different than all the other classes on the island. That’s what make(s) it unique. It affected the way I learn and it helped me to learn better.” Still, there were others who stated the negative benefits like, “Sometimes I get distracted by other students,” and “I get distracted during tests with other people walking by or a class next door.” As such, it is safe to say that there is an impact of the open-space on
student learning, although how that plays out varies amongst students. At the most basic level, it comes down between positive or negative effects. More importantly, and in line with adolescent development, it is the interplay between the positive and negative effects that pose a challenge to students.

Question 4 asked students about the effect of the open-space learning environment on their social life, or relationships with their peers. Many students mentioned “getting closer” (beyond the physical) to their peers by being able to interact more frequently and more easily. One student shared, “I get to learn with more people and make new friends in the classroom.” Another said, “I feel closer to my friends in the other teams more than how it would be if the open-space learning environment wasn’t there...it makes me feel better that they aren’t in my class because at least I know they are there.” Other students mentioned, “Slowly we develop an ‘ohana (family)-like relationship with my peers...the open-space allows us to bond more from a distance.” Some students take advantage of the passing time to build relationships, or just “catch up” with friends and others feel that there is no time wasted as “we can meet up inside instead of try to find each other outside.” A good number of students report that there has been no effect of the space on their relationship with their peers, with one student claiming, “The open learning environment affects my grades and not my relationship with others.” With this last statement, it is obvious that there are some students who come to school focused entirely on their schoolwork. The bigger notion, though, is that perhaps students don’t see the need to differentiate between learning and social life as it is accepted, especially after experiencing the open-space learning environment, that the two go hand-in-hand.
In Question 5, students were asked about ways that the open-space learning environment has affected their classroom behavior. Most frequently students reverted to reporting on the distracting nature of the space, again both visual and auditory. Students are distracted by different “squirrels” and name other students walking past a space and noise from another class as examples. Even with the many distractions, one student explained, “It makes me distracted from the class I’m in because of people walking by. However, if it was closed I would be more bored.” Students also admitted to being distractions to their friends in the same way. The noise caused them to “concentrate even harder,” “ask them (teachers) to speak louder,” and “be more aware of my actions during class.” One student shared her coping behavior and stated, “I’ve kind of have (had) to not look all around.” The space has provided them the skills to “participate more in class,” “to be alert to what’s going on only in the classroom you are in,” “to pay more attention to the important things,” and “become quieter.” Somewhat negative behavior is also displayed when students “talk to other students from across the room.” One student admitted that “I do have the tendency to leave a class and enter a new one (to a place not-so far away. Like one class over.)...I’m still an okay distance away.” Yet another relayed that, “It makes it a little harder for the teacher to see you sometimes and some kids take advantage of that, but I’m still the same.” Once again, the interplay between the effect of the open-space on learning and the social are apparent. It is important to recognize that these adolescent students are recognizing the need to regulate their own behavior more than someone else’s. The admission of playful behavior was to be expected, although I expected more. I would assume,
perhaps, because of the formality of the survey, that most students were reluctant to relay their normal behavior.

Question 6 inquired about the creative ways that the open-space learning environment has been used. Students saw the flexibility of the space to create different meeting areas and groupings of students as the most creative use displayed. As one student stated, it is “one of the major benefits of this open-space learning environment.” Students shared this thought in many different ways, and one summarized by noting, “Teachers switch spaces to make sure that they can fit all the students and make sure it is the best place for the activity. Also, the teachers are able to merge classes.” Students also noted their appreciation for the simultaneous use of all spaces, at times, for different functions. “Teachers use all of the different spaces on the floor and some teachers let us use different spaces to study,” said one student. Another shared that because of this multi-use of space, “(We) don’t feel so crammed in one space. We can feel open and be welcome with everyone.” Activities mentioned that occur in the space include lecturing to big groups, watching a video, decorating for the holidays, whole team activities (like birthday advisories and team meetings), displaying and distributing food, combining subject areas, taking a test, and assembling a whole group (team or grade-level). Another benefit was noted when one student expressed, “The teachers can consult with other teachers easier, and the students can ask the teachers for help easily.” One student mentioned, “In our math class we have put the rolling boards all around the classroom to block out most of the noise and to write math problems on them.” Considering that this is their first experience in an open-space learning environment for most, if not all of our students, I found it refreshing that
students recognized some of the benefits that we as educators see in the open-space. This recognition confirms for me that an open-space learning environment is appropriate in a school setting since the primary users recognize it themselves.

What stuck out most for me, though, was the fact that within the entire survey, this was the only time that any mention was made regarding the promotion of Hawaiian culture. This is a point that the school should look into more closely, especially since it is built into our foundational beliefs as a school. On the other hand, like the open-space learning environment, students may just accept Hawaiian culture as a regular part of our school program and don’t really see the need to make such claims. In this way, students may not be recognizing the many venues of honoring our culture within the school day. Finally, there is the possibility that promotion of Hawaiian culture is not happening the way we as school leadership envision. This dilemma is one that has arisen throughout our organization so it would not be a surprise that the struggle trickles down to the level of our students.

To explore how the open-space learning environment provides opportunities for our students to share their voice, Question 7 attempted to see how our school’s vision of nurturing student voice plays out in the space. Most obvious to the students was the literal translation of the phrase and many shared their thoughts on this. One student said, “(It) has allowed me to share my voice to many people at one time and allows my voice to be heard to everyone.” Another student shared, “It’s a little bit easier to get my voice across to a larger amount of people. Just (with) the exception of speaking louder of course!” The open-space knows no boundaries as far as noise is concerned and this was obvious when students shared, “You can hear usually everyone’s voice,” and “We sometimes need to read in front of a big class,
and other classes can hear you too.” A good number of students either thought there was no opportunity to share their voice or completely did not understand the question. Still, other students seemed to understand the question clearly as one said, “Since student voice doesn’t always mean your literal voice it also helps when I walk by other classes in between periods. I can see what the teacher has on their board or what the students are learning, which sometimes gets me intrigued.” Another student was accurate when he said, “The environment has allowed me to speak about what I feel. I hope it will maybe rub off on other students.” This idea of a student’s words and thoughts having effect on another student was mentioned frequently as when one student said, “I think that it has provided this (voice) because you will see other students around you share their opinions and it makes you feel more comfortable.” Finally, one student seemed to share the limitation of the rules in the space when she said, “Well we can’t really share our voice because we will get in trouble.” A second student recognized that the open-space may not be for everyone when he stated, “Sometimes this isn’t a good thing because I know a lot of people who are shy and who are afraid to share their thoughts because they are afraid that people will judge them or not like their idea.” It would be very easy for me to write these responses off as an error in questioning since one student put it plainly and said, “I don’t understand the question.” However, it was more telling when one student answered, “I am not sure what our vision does that relates to the open-space learning environment.” Again, as part of our school vision, it begs the question of whether this is a vision for just the educators, or is it for our students, as well? Regardless, a school vision is something to constantly reflect upon, especially in times of great change.
The final question asked students to share anything else that they thought would be helpful to me and my study. The dominant response identified by students was the distracting nature of the space. A student mentioned, “I like the open environment for certain activities but I feel that it can sometimes be distracting when we have an open space and many things going on in the other spaces which can be distracting.” Another student said, “It is really distracting because you can see across the halls at the other classrooms.” A third student stated, “I see that students tend to look at the other classes to see what they are doing. It affects their learning.”

Convenience and movement in the space was a second point made by students. One student said, “I never really thought of making a school like this, but I actually really love it because of how convenient it is to get from class to class.” Another student shared, “I like how easy it is getting from class to class and I hope that teachers continue to spread the classes out along the floor because it does help it become much quieter.” Finally, a third student expressed it this way: “I prefer the open space because I like the look, the feel, the openness. I like how I can get to classes fast.”

A third point made by students had to do with the “smartness” of the open-space. One student said, “Overall, I think that I have performed much better in this type of environment.” Another stated, “I really enjoy this open-space environment and I couldn’t imagine our school without it. I love it so much and I hope that the rest of the buildings on campus can one day change to an open-space learning environment too.” Finally, a third student shared, “I think you should know that the
open-space learning environment is very smart and clever and it helps us learn much easier."

One student spoke about the adjustment that a new student has to make in the space and shared, “The open-space learning environment took a lot of adjustment for me, but I think this year I’m used to it and it is a lot better and easier to deal with. Last year I had trouble focusing sometimes but I think it got easier to focus throughout the school year.” A second student expressed her dislike of the open-learning environment and stated, “I feel that many other students like myself would benefit from a more closed environment for a learning space. Kids who have a hard time focusing with a regular classroom will just have an even harder time focusing now.” However, she closed by saying, “Overall, I don’t think that it’s a horrible idea, I just don’t care for it too much.”

**Major Themes from the Survey Data**

When viewed as a whole, the data received from the survey responses presented specific themes and Table 2 assists in providing another perspective of that data. The second and third columns represent my research questions through which I wanted to find out about students’ perspectives regarding the open-space learning environment and the effect it had on both students’ learning and behavior. The first column presents the major themes that came out of the survey questions after final analysis of all responses. The capitalized word in parentheses helped to distinguish all the responses in the “other” category. Additionally, the dimension of adolescence surely plays into the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of my students and their responses, and I have connected the themes to adolescent developmental
characteristics. I also made note of descriptor (D) responses that students shared which are separate, but related to the major themes.
### Table 2

**Student Survey Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power of the group (GROUP)</td>
<td>Differentiation, flexibility, numerous activities</td>
<td>Ability to interact with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration (FOCUS)</td>
<td>Focus on task, focus on speaker</td>
<td>Block out distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement (MOVE)</td>
<td>Between/within space</td>
<td>Ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearn for the past (PAST)</td>
<td>Need more privacy</td>
<td>Need more privacy, adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists communication (COMM)</td>
<td>Hear others’ views, student collaboration, presentations</td>
<td>Teacher accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Content (COMM)</td>
<td>Awareness of others’ actions, scary (GROUP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t care for it, no voice provision, no effect (PAST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Utilization of all spaces (GROUP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assists to manage groups: quieter, run away, talk more, take advantage, stifles (GROUP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more charging stations (GROUP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assists teachers’ collaboration (COMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More open-minded (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Considerate to others (GROUP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better performance (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practice cultural protocol (GROUP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More motivated (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Homey” (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart way (set up) (MOVE/COMM)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** (D)= descriptor
POWER OF THE GROUP

Students appreciated being in constant contact with their peers. As this is consistent with adolescent social development, the importance of supportive relationships becomes paramount to the adolescent’s success in school. The active learning that can happen in the open-space is also beneficial to this development. As such, the open-space allows for easy collaboration between students and their peers, as well as adults. This theme also spoke of the flexibility of group size, the varied types of learning activities that occur, and the opportunities the open-space provides for meeting students’ individual learning needs.

I have connected the majority of other responses to this theme because they relate to issues that are present because of the large group of students who regularly share the same open-space learning environment. The group, therefore, brought up concerns of being aware of others’ actions, being considerate of others, being afraid of opening up one’s self, and having to share resources that there just might not be enough of, such as electrical outlets. The group also facilitates taking risks such as talking or motioning to other students who may be walking by while class is going on, or taking liberties with behavior because of the large number of students and ease of anonymity. Adolescent moral and ethical development is shaped by the values that peers have, and having the ability to watch it regularly in action can be highly beneficial for the adolescent. There is also a certain control that the group has in keeping order in the open-space and allows for the safety in “performing” as a group, such as in doing cultural protocol. Emotional and psychological development relies not only on peer relationships but, more
importantly, an environment that is free from harsh criticism, humiliation, and sarcasm.

CONCENTRATION

This theme truly spoke to the many reports of noise in the open-space that proved to be the most frequent response from the majority of students who completed the survey. More than noise, though, there was also mention of visual distractions and for any adolescent, both auditory and visual distractions can be extremely difficult to ignore. Rather than viewing this theme as a negative, namely noise I have intentionally placed a positive element to it because I believe the students tolerate it more than they hate it. As some students shared, they would rather deal with it than not deal with it.

Intellectually, adolescents are very curious and any type of distraction can easily grab their interest, regardless of where they are located and what’s going on. The fact that students’ feelings were mixed toward this theme makes perfect sense as adolescents are still developing their moral and ethical lens. On the social aspect, these distractions are almost welcomed. However, on the moral and ethical aspects, this provides quite a quandary for students. Whereas some students accepted it as a challenge and saw it as motivation to focus more intently as well as creatively come up with ways to block out the distractions, others saw it as a hindrance, mostly to their concentration, but more importantly to their learning.

MOVEMENT

Because of their accelerated physical development, adolescents need to move during their school day. This theme had to do with the flexibility of space within the open-space and the ease of movement within the space seemed to be a popular
aspect of the learning environment. One student mentioned the open-space arrangement as being a “smart way” to do school. The limited movement within the space was a welcomed element and many saw it as contributing to the opportunities to be with their friends as well as collaborate with their peers and adults, all positive contributions to their social development. Within the physical space, safety, as well as opportunities for collaborative learning, all contribute to adolescents’ social development. When a sound physical space is provided for learning, an adolescents’ emotional and psychological development is also fostered.

YEARNING FOR THE PAST

This theme represented the inexperience of students in an open-space learning environment, and with this unfamiliarity came feelings of wanting what is familiar to them as far as a learning environment is concerned. Intellectually, adolescents are highly driven by their prior experiences and knowledge. The negatives mentioned included the need for more privacy as well as the need for students to make adjustments to get used to the open-space learning environment. The privacy issue, just as when students are at home, is a common issue for adolescents who can be very self-conscious and are perhaps low in self-esteem. In a space that does not intentionally provide for much privacy, adolescents may feel highly intimidated by the open-space. The good thing is that a good majority of students mentioned the quick adjustment that was necessary to get used to the open-space. Therefore, it is possible to become comfortable in the open-space, although the time that it takes for that transition will vary between students.
ASSISTS COMMUNICATION

This theme pertained to the opportunities that the open-space learning environment provided for easier access to teachers and the benefits of sharing a learning space with peers. As mentioned earlier, a student shared how he thought the open-space was a “smart way” to do school. Additionally, students shared how they thought that the open-space also assists teacher collaboration, most evident in the instructional combination of two or more subject areas. Intellectually, adolescents are not big fans of conventional academic subjects so the combining of subjects appears much more interesting to them. The opportunity to view adults collaborating with each other also feeds adolescents’ intellectual development since they are then required to be able to do the same with their peers when working on different activities and projects. Again, it cannot be emphasized enough that the need for positive social development in a safe learning space is exactly what the open-space seems to provide for most students. Add to this the provision of adults with whom they can identify, as well as be accepted, and the open-space is then supporting emotional and psychological development.

Focus Group

Of the 23 survey respondents, I decided to randomly select 15 students to receive an email invitation (see Appendix M) to the focus group. I wanted to have a focus group of no more than five students and reducing the number of invitations would help achieve this. I simply wrote each of the 23 names on small pieces of paper, threw them into a bowl, and drew out 15 names. These 15 students received the email invitation with a pizza lunch as incentive and only three responded positively for interest in participation. The focus group was held on-campus during
the students’ lunch hour, and I employed the assistance of one of my program cohort colleagues to facilitate the group. She utilized the interview guide that I created while I took notes on large pieces of chart paper that were affixed to the wall. The main purpose of the focus group was to delve a little deeper into the themes that were generated by the survey data. Although the students’ lunch period is an hour, I also had to allow for passing time which for some adolescents means something completely different from an adult’s thinking. The time surely went by a lot quicker than I thought, and I wish that I could have extended the time or perhaps set a second meeting before the end of the school year. However, neither happened and I was left with one meeting’s worth of follow-up data from the single focus group.

The three students were an eighth grade male, an eighth grade female, and a seventh grade female from our boarding community who came into the discussion a little later than the other two students. The eighth graders were experiencing their second consecutive year in the open spaces and now had the experience of two different floors and grade levels in the open-space. The seventh grader, of course, was speaking to her first year in the open-space. Additionally, the eighth grade male came to us from a small independent school that utilized mixed-grade groupings from grades one to five with a maximum of 15 students per grouping. He mentioned that he had come from a Montessori preschool, as well. The eighth grade female came to us from a mobile charter school located in downtown Honolulu that utilized the community as its classroom. It seems that student groupings at her school typically combined two or three grade levels mainly for organizational purposes. The lone seventh grader came from a public middle school (grades 6-8) on one of
our neighbor islands. Her school is only one of three public middle schools on the island and also the newest.

**Description and Analysis of Focus-Group Data**

When asked about those times when the open-space learning environment worked for them, the students’ responses conveniently corresponded with my themes. They spoke of the flexibility of the space to accommodate groups of differing numbers that make certain activities possible, such as watching movies as a whole-team grouping. They mentioned their appreciation for the ability to see their peers and to know what those peers are doing in their classes. Lastly, they noted the ability for easier interaction with their peers. One of the students shared the ability to escape that had to do with both the individual anonymity that a large group can provide, as well as the ease of movement that an open-space allows. I believe what is implied here, however, is that the possibility or the idea of escaping is far more intriguing to them than the number of times the behavior actually happens. Also regarding movement, all the students agreed that the flexibility of the space was a positive element and that they appreciated how the space is not necessarily used in the same way all the time. A single mention of communication was made when one student discussed the white board as being an important means of communication. Finally, the idea of the past was touched upon when all students mentioned their appreciation of the other traditional spaces that are available in our facility, mainly encore (non-core) classes.

The focus group was also asked for some examples of when they were bored, or not, in the open-space. They said that sometimes there is too much study time (which makes things boring). This is understandable as we have a bell schedule that
builds in a study period where time fluctuates in the day, depending on the schedule (typically one of eight) that we are following. Additionally, we have a whole-school study period at the end of the instructional day. When the team’s study period falls directly before the end-of-day study period, it can be a very long period of study for the student. One would think that more study time would be a good thing, however, for an adolescent almost two consecutive hours of study time can be a bit much. A second example of boredom was provided when a student shared that she did not like when the core time bled into the study time. In other words, teachers extended their core instruction into some of the following study time. The students mentioned some things that point to differences between grade levels as well as differences between grade teams. For example, it was shared that the seventh grade uses passes to go to the bathroom during instructional time. It was also noted that one eighth grade team chooses to hold their study period in the dining hall rather than remaining in the team space.

When the open-space worked, the students provided specific examples of classroom activities/projects, the most popular being when they had a choice in what they could do. Other examples shared were of the novel, interesting types that would fascinate an adolescent’s developing mind. As previously stated in many areas, the flexibility of the space as well as the opportunity to be amongst their peers was an attractive feature that made the open-space exciting. In general, the students felt that the open-space does contribute to the way they think and mentioned a particular benefit of having a variety of teachers from whom they could learn.
The idea of adjustment, or getting used to the open-space learning environment was interesting to me. The fact that students even made mention of this in the survey is encouraging as it serves as evidence that even when not familiar with such a learning environment, it is possible for students to adjust. When questioned about adjustment, the focus group mentioned that it is easy for those students who may already have experience in such a learning environment. Even noise was mentioned, once again, but this time the focus group confirmed, “After two weeks, you get used to it.” The students shared that organization and set procedures surely help, and one student praised her team for having set functional areas in their team space.

Related to adjustment, the focus group also was eager to share their thoughts on the closed person, one who was more of a traditional learner (in a traditional learning environment). As one student stated, you “have to learn to work with others; it’s a part of life.” Another student quickly chimed in and said, “(There are) areas provided for them too,” and that he/she “has a choice to utilize it when necessary.” To provide assistance to the closed student, all the students mentioned once again the auditory and visual distractions and cautioned that the students simply “ignore it,” and that you “can’t avoid it, it’s the only walkway” (referring to when students pass by). They also warned, “When presenting, (it’s) not only for class – all can see; as a learner you may be more nervous, and if you mess up, all can hear.” Generally, the students were in agreement that there is “lots of group stuff” and adjustment on the student’s part is “affected by where you come from (the kind of school).” To provide some consolation, they shared that the science classroom have walls and there are certain projects where you “can work on your own if you need.”
To learn more about their learning, I took the route of asking the focus group about their teachers. The most common factor seemed to be that the students really pay attention to their teachers and this allows them to make easy comparison between the adults that they witness everyday, all day. More specifically, they discussed those teachers who are strict, those who depend on a program, and those who go by the book. These comparisons provide the students with important knowledge about what they can or cannot do regarding their schoolwork. Students also like when some teachers of differing disciplines combine their subjects. Students enthusiastically shared about being tricked into learning (teacher making it fun and exciting) and having to deal with video notes (evidence of the flipped-classroom).

Although not realizing the full significance of what they were sharing, the students spoke about teachers paying attention to students’ needs and abilities and allowing students to work at their own pace. They noticed the benefit of being grouped by reading levels and said that this was “motivating” and showed that “popularity (is) not a real issue.” They also spoke about math class being split up “for the students’ benefit.” It was very telling that the students surmise, because it is “more closed-in,” that the science lab (wet-lab) hinders collaboration (of science teachers with other teachers). Finally, similar to survey responses, students like the flexibility of the space, the ability to work with all peers on their team instead of a limited number, and the considerate behavior that teachers have with each other.
Conclusion

My research questions wanted to find out about the effects of an open-space learning environment on the dimensions of learning and social experiences of adolescents. In total, 23 students shared openly about those experiences and helped me to achieve my goal of capturing their voices via survey responses and the use of a focus group. Although the most frequent topic brought up by the students was noise, I found that for the most part, students are flexible and willing to adapt to the open-space learning environment. Realizing that this is not a learning space for everyone, the open-space learning environment certainly provides a unique learning space that offers students experience in an alternative learning environment.

Analyzing the data through the lens of adolescent characteristics was very helpful. From this perspective, the major themes made themselves more apparent. More importantly, the complimentary relationship to adolescent characteristics further supports the appropriateness of this type of learning environment for our students. Therefore, the five major themes found were Power of the Group, Concentration, Movement, Yearning for the Past, and Assists Communication. With this foundation, I created the guiding questions to direct the conversation in my focus group, and I was able to obtain greater detail about the students’ experiences as previously shared in the survey responses. The focus group data provided me information on what works in the open-space, what makes students bored, what it takes to adjust to the open-space, and concerns for those who may not be able to adjust. Finally, I was able to find out more about students’ learning and their perspectives on their teachers.
The survey data also highlighted some interesting issues that will require some follow up by the school. Firstly, two very important findings were exposed through the data: 1) evidence that 21st century skills are promoted in the open-space, specifically communication and collaboration skills, and 2) evidence that students recognized the good work that their teachers are doing, including the collaborative work that they are doing together. It will be important that these positive responses are shared with the teachers. Teachers should also be informed that students recognize the differences in practice between teachers, as well as grade level teams. Secondly, there is some very important work that the school will need to do to evaluate the aspects of student voice and the promotion of Hawaiian culture, both of which play so heavily into the beliefs of the school. There was a lack of data evidencing these two aspects and perhaps a more specific inquiry regarding them will be useful to determine the kind of work and the extent of work necessary to gain a better understanding of its place in the school. Moving forward, what is most important is that these captured voices and perspectives be utilized to assist our school in addressing those areas that may need improvement.
CHAPTER 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF MY RESEARCH

Contributing to My Professional Learning

This research has contributed greatly to many aspects of my professional learning. Firstly, my commitment to middle level education has been re-energized. I hope that I haven’t mislead anyone with my writing about adolescence because I know at times my words may have been interpreted as condescending or sarcastic to this very special group of people. In this document, I have worked hard to accurately reflect the thoughts and behaviors of adolescents at KMS. I thoroughly enjoy being a part of their world on a daily basis and I truly appreciate the respect they give me when letting me into their world. I know that I need not remind the reader that the whole purpose of my research was based on seeking out and providing an outlet for student voice, a sentiment that we as a school program take very seriously.

Though I do have some experience with both elementary and high school students, my work with them did not bring me the same fulfillment provided by my work with adolescents. For this research I had to return to the basics, beyond just our middle school vision. Returning to the guiding documents for middle level education, namely This We Believe (National Middle School Association, 2010) and Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1990), I was reminded about the purpose, beliefs, and practices of a middle school. The resources provided by the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) allowed me to revisit those very important characteristics of adolescents (Caskey and Anfara, 2007) as well as those characteristics necessary for an effective middle school. More importantly, to bring our school into the 21st century and beyond, it was
important for me to go back and check our new school facility against the needs of adolescent learners.

Secondly, as an educator, and more so as an educational leader who transitioned to this position in the middle of this study, my previous commitment to lifelong learning takes on a whole new meaning. As a school leader, the responsibility of carrying out our school mission and vision lays heavily in my daily work. Although those goals may be clearly spelled out, our school leadership and faculty have the ability to interpret and transfer those goals as we see fit for our level of students. With the first “leap of faith” taken when we started our one-to-one laptop program, we have just completed two years in our new school facility and the open-space learning environment.

In my personal view, we are already ahead of the game – with the win being on the scoreboard for the students coming through our program. I have already begun to extend my learning as part of the inaugural cohort of this doctoral program. The program’s goal is not only to grow educational leaders, but more importantly, to improve the educational conditions in our state for the children of our state. The university program has also put me in touch with some of the most important people in our state who work in education. I say this because more than people who hold a title, my cohort colleagues are movers and shakers in their positions. This program, therefore, has helped me to further appreciate all of the roles that contribute to the success of a school program.

Because of technology and the Internet, the somewhat isolated location of our island-state is no longer a reason for being disconnected to other educators in our country, and the world for that matter. Today, technology and social media
make connecting with educators around the world an essential part of my network of learning.

Finally, this research has provided me with a brand new set of eyes with which to look at learning environments. And even beyond the topic of learning spaces, I have acquired a great new perspective on living spaces. In the summer of 2010, two years before the opening of our new school facility, I was inspired while attending Heidi Hayes-Jacobs’ Curriculum Mapping Institute in Saratoga Springs, New York. I attended a session put on by Streetfilms, an organization that produces educational videos that show how smart transportation design and policy can result in better places to live, work, and play. For schools, this meant not only interacting with their community but also utilizing technology to capture and document the learning. The DVD shared about ten different programs that combined education, physical space, and technology – all in the name of building a healthier (physically and psychologically), connected community. One of the projects shared how a previously, less-desirable, almost seedy portion of a street in town, when given a makeover complete with paint, plants, and seating areas, soon became a highly desirable area for people to congregate and be social with each other in the middle of the day.

I immediately utilized this inspirational idea when I returned to school that year. We were to be housed temporarily in portable classrooms. I met with the student council who was tasked with beautifying our new portable classroom village. After viewing the DVD, the students were motivated and soon put into action their ideas, the best of which were a series of palms in nice planters that were strategically placed around the village that brought a homey feel to the area. To
water the plants, the students placed large bins under the air conditioning units of each portable into which the drain tubes emptied. This was exactly the kind of creativity that we had hoped to tap in our students.

More recently, I attended the Learning Environments for Tomorrow Institute (LEfT) at Harvard University. The institute brought together the efforts of their Graduate School of Design along with the Graduate School of Education. When the institute first started, the intent was to bring together the working energy of educators and designers (architects, engineers, interior designers, etc.) to design schools of the future. I was surprised to learn that these two groups did not typically get together when designing schools. Instead, the designers planned and built the school that followed a basic, traditional design, and only after the completion of construction did the educators come in to see how they could fit their educational program in to the predetermined spaces of the new facility. The institute proved to be quite inspirational and hands-on. Although attendees participated in a variety of breakout-session type options, the real work happened in between. Groups were assigned randomly, however, the organizers made sure that there was an equal balance between educators and designers. The group work provided an eye opening experience as the disconnect between the two groups became more obvious. It was also easy to see the different perspectives amongst team members who came from the same side. The range went from people who are stuck on one kind of thinking pertaining to learning environments, to others who are ready to work cooperatively with people from their school community, and then there are those who are completely open-minded. Due to my experience of having opened an innovative learning facility, my contributions to the group were well received and, I think,
contributed greatly to helping others see possibilities not previously considered. In total, four of our middle school administrators have attended the institute and our collective learning will be helpful to our campus community as our elementary and high schools journey through their master planning for innovative, 21st century learning spaces.

Contributing to The Learning of Others at Work

One of the reasons for conducting this study was to document the hard work that we all did to prepare for our new facility. From the time that we opened the doors to the new facility two years ago, our efforts have not abated. The open-space learning environment has certainly presented us with many challenges for which our previous preparation as educators could not possibly have prepared us. The work has proved challenging, but it is for a worthwhile end. The survey helped our students to become aware of how teachers collaborate with each other; realize that what their teachers do is for the students’ benefit; and appreciate the hard work that goes into making their learning more exciting. An example of all three of these aspects is the combining of subjects that students noted since adolescents are “less interested in conventional academic subjects” (Caskey and Anfara, 2007). It will be important that teachers understand the findings of my study so that they can make note of and celebrate what is working, but also plan for improving that which may not be working (according to the students). My task as a school leader is to continue my support for the development of our learning organization and to make sure that all of the lessons that we have learned in our transition to our new school facility will contribute to informed decision-making.
The work that we had to do to get to where we are currently was uphill and followed an uneven path. There were many obstacles to overcome, many conversations to be held, and many shifts in thinking that had to occur before our move. The work is still unfinished and much remains to be done. More importantly, our progress has not been the work of any one person but rather a collective effort that did not always come easily. Teamwork was essential and no one group was more important than another. We learned that there is no simple formula of preparing for an open-space learning environment – it is a process that requires everyone’s input and efforts, or in the words of the saying, “it takes a village."

Setting out the story of our transformation has been no easy task. I know I have not captured everything that it took to get to where we are today. What is important to understand, though, is that there is a level of complexity at every school/community that makes it unique and to successfully create something new takes a lot of effort and hard work that inevitably requires change. The most that I can do at this point is to support the educators who work at my school and always honor and appreciate the great work that they do. They have taken on a great challenge to provide an innovative, 21st century education to our native Hawaiian students. They are educator superstars who have at least learned to roll with the tides of change that have unceasingly come upon their shore of what they understand to be education. For this, they have my endless support and respect.

**Contributing to the Wider Body of Knowledge**

As stated previously, through this study I have humbly presented the story of my school and the voices, or perspectives, of my students. Considering that this was the main goal of my study, I cannot neglect the other goals, one of which was to
provide documentation to other schools that are exploring alternative learning environments. In the past two school years after moving into our new facility, we've had a good number of visitors—other educators who had a variety of reasons for coming to visit us. At times, the visits had to do with our open-space, at other times it had a more cultural twist and focused on the native population that we serve. We have hosted educators from around the world including Dutch Guyana, Brazil, Indonesia, two groups from China, and three groups from New Zealand. We also received groups that represented two native-American tribes, the Muckleshoots and the Tlingits. And finally, we’ve had visits from other local independent schools including Mid-Pacific Institute, ‘Iolani School, Punahou School, Maryknoll School, and representatives from the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. One of our favorite visitors, though, came from our friends at Verrado High School. It is my hope that through their visits, these schools came to better understand that there are options to traditional learning spaces, and in these spaces it is possible to integrate traditional cultural practices and 21st century skills.

As a result of my research, I have developed a graphic representation that connects the findings of my study. I present it below as a guide to those who may wish to travel a similar path. Though specific to my school, the diagram provides a useful starting point for school faculty who seek to think about questions of design and the impact of their own learning spaces. Each section provides a tool that any school could use to examine their assumptions, guide their inquiry, and achieve a better idea of their desired learning environment. First, what is the type of learning space that you are looking for? With this thought come questions such as, “What kind of learning can happen in this space?” or “How far (or near) are our current
learning spaces to this model?” Next, “what is the philosophical foundation upon which you are building this learning space?” In our case, it was the middle school philosophy that pays close attention to the developmental needs of adolescents.

Another question might be, “Who will be the regular users of this learning space?” With the type of space selected and the philosophical foundation decided upon, what dimensions of the space will be given attention? In the case of my study, it was the two dimensions of the learning and social realms. The number of dimensions can be as wide or as narrow as the school is willing to take on.

Another dimension to be considered, most obviously, is that of the cultural realm. However, my interest in the selected realms made the most sense for a starting point for this study. Sometimes there are other obvious dimensions, or sometimes the dimensions looked at will produce another dimension or two that will make it necessary for assessment.

For the general education community, this diagram provides a great start to thinking through learning spaces. More specifically, for middle-level educators, the diagram offers the possibilities that an alternative learning space could provide for adolescent students.
Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Findings
CHAPTER 6. MODIFICATION OF PRACTICE

As a new educational leader at my school, this study has helped me to broaden my focus and look at the overall effectiveness of our new school facility. Having just completed two school years in our new facility, this study was the first organized attempt to do a status check of the learning environment that we provide for our students. Additionally, I remained true to my commitment to student advocacy by honoring my students’ voices. The value of student voice is also echoed in our school’s vision, and this study has helped to provide a safe space for my students to share their voices. In addition to student voice, this study also highlighted the importance of considering adolescent characteristics in a middle school learning environment. Finally, the study helped to expose evidence of the promotion and development of the 21st century skills of communication and collaboration.

It is safe to say that this study has undoubtedly assisted me in changing my practice. Now, when I go anywhere, it is with a new perspective on space (any space) and the use of that particular space in promoting social interaction. I have had the opportunity to visit many schools across the country and those schools not doing something innovative with their space do not seem to appeal to me as much as those who are doing exciting things with their space. I certainly don’t look down upon them, but instead ponder on the things that could be. And if by chance I was asked for my opinion, I would certainly provide it.

Reflecting on my living theory of practice, I return to my trip to Saratoga Springs, New York in 2010 to attend the curriculum mapping institute. On our arrival day, after checking into the hotel, we decided to get a bite to eat and then
walk around the small town area. During our walk, we passed by a construction site that would eventually become the new venue for the institute upon completion. However, at this point, it was only the shell of a building – the outside completed, yet a lot of work left to be done on the inside. I commented to my colleagues, “They should just leave it as is on the inside, then they would have an open space.” I quickly followed the previous statement with the words, “Open space, open minds!” We laughed briefly, but soon realized the magnitude of the words that were just spoken.

We then conversed about how the *open space, open minds* motto would be used to inspire our faculty and staff in preparation for the new open-space learning environment. We even joked about making t-shirts. Although the t-shirts were never made and the words never uttered to our faculty and staff as a group, the phrase *open space, open minds* has remained a motivating mantra for myself and my colleagues.

This year, during my trip to the Harvard University LEfT Institute, the work with my group extended the spirit of *open space, open minds*. As we came up with the design of our future school, we decided to provide a visual (see Appendix N) that would assist others in understanding our mind set while designing our space. Although a group product, the visual highly resonated with my own thinking. The idea put forward was that of a *beginner’s mind*, and the thought that designing future learning spaces would require a bit of unlearning that which we currently accept as the standard learning environment. For many, it seems that what we currently consider a learning space extensively limits our capacity to move beyond
that understanding, thus making it almost impossible to think of a learning space that will appropriately provide for the student of the future.

This study provided some areas for further exploration for our school and this future work will need to be developed into a meaningful inquiry into the things that may need improvement. Part of our ongoing task is to foster the spirit of the open-space learning environment beyond the open-space floors. As such, there are many opportunities for this to happen in other areas that aren't currently being utilized to their full potential. We must also be mindful of providing assistance to the open-space users so that they can utilize the space to its full potential. Teachers must be provided with the proper staff development opportunities to build their confidence within the open-space. Students must also be better prepared for their new journey within our open-space and this can work in tandem with our new student orientation program, options for which are currently being explored.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative study served to capture the voices of middle school students who shared their perspectives and experiences in an open-space learning environment. More specifically, via student survey responses and focus group discussion, this study inquired about students' learning experiences as well as their social behavior in the open-space. Because student voice plays an important role in the vision of the school, this study has honored those adolescent voices by providing a safe venue for sharing. A lot of work went into the preparation for the open-space learning environment and this study sought to record the planning and activities that supported this effort. The findings of this study also have the potential to
inform the school of the student experience, as well as inform other educators and schools who are interested in exploring alternative learning spaces.

The students’ experiences in the open-space learning environment were generally positive, although auditory and visual distractions were topics that came up over and over again in the students’ sharing. For most students, adjusting to the open-space is possible, and our students’ school experience is enriched with exposure to multiple learning venues. Most importantly, the students’ experiences generally fall in line with adolescent characteristics. This alignment also meant that the open-space learning environment supports our promotion of middle school best practice, although other aspects of our foundational beliefs must be looked at.

The open-space learning environment is but one aspect within the complex menu of ingredients that make for an effective learning environment. The open-space cannot make a difference without other factors coming into play in the learning environment. There are many other aspects that contribute to its success. This study has shown, from the students’ perspectives, that open-space learning environments can have a positive effect on student learning and socialization when they are used purposely and in alignment with the school’s guiding beliefs and cultural values.
This We Believe
Keys to Educating Young Adolescents

16 Characteristics
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them. Value Young Adolescents
Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning. Active Learning
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant. Challenging Curriculum
Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches. Multiple Learning Approaches
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it. Varied Assessments
Leadership and Organization
A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision. Shared Vision
Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices. Community Leaders
Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration. Courageous & Collaborative Leaders
Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices. Professional Development
Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships. Organizational Structures
Culture and Community
The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all. Safe Environment
Every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate. Adult Advocate
Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents. Guidance Services
Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies. Health & Wellness
The school actively involves families in the education of their children. Family Involvement
The school includes community and business partners. Community & Business

This chart is based on This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents (AME/NAAMS, 2010). For more information visit us at, www.amle.org/2w
B. KAMEHAMEHA MIDDLE SCHOOL’S VISION

PAHU AS A VISION

KS KMS MISSION

We shape character, performance, and values to help our students find their unique and individual voices to succeed at Kamehameha and contribute to their communities.

KS KMS GOAL

Our goal is to bring out personal excellence in each of our students.

KS KMS VISION

When a student journeys from Kamehameha Schools Kapālama Middle School, his/her inner voice has been nurtured and is now more resilient, recognized and appreciated for its own strength and quality.

Every child we work with is in a different space in his/her life. Some will sing and sound as they leave, some only managing the first whisper of their greatness.

None will leave voiceless or untouched. Until he/she can sing and sound on his/her own, someone will be there to support him/her.

METAPHOR

A pahu represents, and is a reflection of, excellence.
As this is with each child,

The hidden part of the pahu is a resonating chamber, defining the quality of the voice.
As is true with each child,

What you start with has imperfections, wounds...things brought from the environment.
So true of each child,

Lashing the pahu helps define the voice. Once lashed, there is continuous adjustment to transform the voice with subsequent new resonance.
...and so must we with each child.
C. IRB APPROVAL

MEMORANDUM

October 30, 2013

TO: Kyle J. Atabay
Principal Investigator
College of Education

FROM: Denise A. Lin-DeShetler, MPH, MA
Director

SUBJECT: CHS #21525: “Understanding the Implications of an Open-Space Learning Environment at KMS: A Narrative Case Study”

Under an expedited review procedure, the research project identified above was approved for one year on October 29, 2013 by the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program. The application qualified for expedited review under CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, Category (7).

This memorandum is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study. Please maintain it with your study records.

The Human Studies Program approval for this project will expire on October 28, 2014. If you expect your project to continue beyond this date, you must submit an application for renewal of this Human Studies Program approval. The Human Studies Program approval must be maintained for the entire term of your project.

If, during the course of your project, you intend to make changes to this study, you must obtain approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. If an Unanticipated Problem occurs during the course of the study, you must notify the Human Studies Program within 24 hours of knowledge of the problem. A formal report must be submitted to the Human Studies Program within 10 days. The definition of "Unanticipated Problem" may be found at: http://hawaii.edu/irb/download/documents/SOPP_101_UP_Reporting.pdf, and the report form may be downloaded here: http://hawaii.edu/irb/download/forms/App_UP_Report.doc.

You are required to maintain complete records pertaining to the use of humans as participants in your research. This includes all information or materials conveyed to and received from participants as well as signed consent forms, data, analyses, and results. These records must be maintained for at least three years following project completion or termination, and they are subject to inspection and review by the Human Studies Program and other authorized agencies.

1960 East-West Road
Biomedical Sciences Building #104
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822
Telephone: (808) 956-5007
Fax: (808) 956-5643

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution
Please notify this office when your project is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your project. Reactivation of the Human Studies Program approval will require a new Human Studies Program application.

Please contact this office if you have any questions or require assistance. We appreciate your cooperation, and wish you success with your research.
D. STUDENT SURVEY

Survey Questionnaire

Aloha, my name is Kyle Atabay and I am a doctoral student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa conducting research as part of the degree requirements of my program. I am asking you to take part in a study to help me learn more about your experience in the new middle school facility, particularly in the open-space learning environment, or wall-less classrooms, on the seventh and eighth grade floors of Keli‘imaika‘i. As a member of the group of students to first use the building, please describe your experience in the open-space as best as you can in the following questions:

(NOTE: The questions below are open-ended questions, meaning they require more than “yes” or “no” answers. My research is seeking to gain your perspective and hear your story via the narrative that you provide in your answers. Please “tell your story.”)

Demographic Data:

Current Grade: 8/9
Gender: Male/Female
Enrollment status: Day/Boarder
8th Grade Team: Kauila/Lama/Kukui

What do (did) you like about the open-space learning environment?

What advice could you provide to make the open-space learning environment better?

Please share some ways that the open-space learning environment has affected the way you learn?

Please share some ways that the open-space learning environment has affected your relationships with other students?

Please share some ways that the open-space learning environment has affected your behavior during class/instructional time?

What are some examples of creative ways that the open-space learning environment has been used?

Our school’s vision says that we “nurture student voices.” Please share how the open-space learning environment has provided you the opportunity to share your voice?

Please share anything else regarding the open-space learning environment that you think I might want to know?
E. FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

When has the open-space worked for you really well?

When didn't the open-space work well for you?

When is your learning the most enhanced? OR When do you learn best?

When are you most...when do you feel?

Yourself?

“At home?”

Excited?

Bored?

What does it mean to be “good” in the space?

What do you do to block out the noise?

What do you do to block out the visual distractions?
F. RECRUITMENT POSTER

Contact Mr. Atabey if you are interested.
G. STUDENT ADVERTISEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I-MĀNOA

PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Study Title: Understanding the Implications of an Open-Space Learning Environment at KMS: A Narrative Case Study

Researcher: Kyle Atabay

My name is Kyle Atabay. I am the Vice Principal at Kamehameha Middle School/Kapālama. I am also a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH), at the College of Education. One requirement for earning my Doctoral degree is to do a research project. I am asking you to take part in a study to help me learn more about your experience in the new middle school facility, particularly in the open-space learning environment.

Before you decide whether to take part in this study, it is important for you to know that:

It is your choice to be part of this study or not; and if you decide to participate in the study, you can stop at any time

What will you be asked to do if you join this study?

You are eligible to participate because you were part of the group of students who first experienced the open-space learning environment in the new middle school facility. You will complete a survey questionnaire whose questions are primarily open-ended (more than yes or no answers) so that you can provide your narrative (your story) response. Completion of the survey will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes, depending on how much information you provide. Potentially, 640 students could participate, however, I hope to obtain at least 100 responses. The data gathered in the survey will be analyzed and used to provide general themes that will guide a later smaller, face-to-face focus group discussion. If interested, you could also volunteer for the focus group. If you choose to participate in the survey, you’ll later receive an invitation to participate in the focus group that will discuss the themes gathered from the survey responses.

Do you have to be in this study? That is: Will it help or hurt to be in this study?

You don’t have to be in the study if you don’t want or you feel uncomfortable. It’s up to you. Even if you start the survey, you may choose to stop and not complete it. Your decision to participate in this study will not have anything to do with your grades or report card. It’s really up to you whether or not you want to participate in this research project.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated! You won’t really benefit by
participating in this study, but the information you provide may help me and the school better understand more about how the open-space learning environment has affected our students’ learning and behavior.

**How do you get your questions answered?**

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me anytime at:

Kyle Atabay (day phone) at (808) 842-8447 or via email at atabay@hawaii.edu

Additionally, you may contact my advisor at the University of Hawai`i-Mānoa, Dr. Hunter McEwan at (808) 956-4242 or via email at hunter@hawaii.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights, or the rights of your child as a research participant, you can contact the University of Hawai`i, Human Studies Program, by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Mahalo!
H. PRINCIPAL EMAIL

Aloha Kākou,

I am sending this on behalf of Mr. Atabay, KMS Vice Principal, to do research as part of his requirements for his doctoral program at the University of Hawaii, College of Education. His research includes a student questionnaire via Survey Monkey which your child would fill out. However, before the questionnaire can be started, he would need to obtain your consent and your child's assent via signatures on such forms. This "permission" is required to make sure that ethical research takes place, considering your child is a minor.

Attached is an informational sheet that explains to your child his/her responsibilities should he/she decided to participate. If your child is interested and you consent, please email Mr. Atabay at kyatabay@ksbe.edu. He will then forward the appropriate forms to you then he will email the questionnaire link to your child.

Mahalo,
Pua Kaʻai
Principal
Kamehameha Middle School, Kapālama
I. PARENT CONSENT FORM

University of Hawai‘i

Parental/Guardian’s Consent for Child to Participate in Research Project:
Understanding the Implications of an Open-Space Learning Environment at KMS:
A Narrative Case Study

My name is Kyle Atabay and I am the Vice Principal at Kamehameha Middle School/Kapālama. I am also a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH), at the College of Education. One requirement for earning my Doctoral degree is to do a research project. The purpose of my project is to look at the impact of the open-space learning environment on your child’s learning and behavior. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this project. I also will ask your child if s/he agrees to participate in this project.

Project Description - Activities and Time Commitment:
* Your child will complete an anonymous online survey that should take about 10 to 15 minutes.
  
  A couple of the questions included are:
  
  What do/did you like about the open-space learning environment?
  
  Our school’s vision says that we “nurture student voices.” How has the open-space learning environment provided you the opportunity to share your voice?”

* The link to the online survey will be provided to your child once the assent and consent forms are obtained.

* If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that the survey will ask, please contact me using the contacts listed near the end of this consent form.

Required for Participation:
* Your child’s permission, or assent. This will be confirmed with your child’s signature on the assent form.

* Your permission, or consent, for your child to participate. This will be confirmed with your signature on this consent form.

* Receipt of both the consent and assent forms. A school official will email both forms to you and you may email back the signed forms, or have your child drop them off in our main office.

Benefits and Risks:
* There are no direct benefits to your child for participating in my research project. However, the results of this project will help me, other teachers, and researchers learn more about middle school students’ perspectives on innovative learning environments.

* There are little to no anticipated risks to your child by participating in this project.
Confidentiality and Privacy:
* I will do everything I can to protect your child’s privacy. As part of this effort, your child’s identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study.
* During this research project, I will keep all data from the survey in a secure location. Only my University of Hawai‘i advisor and I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawai‘i Human Studies Program, have the right to review research records.
* The responses collected from the survey will be analyzed for general themes.
* When I report the results of my research project and in my typed transcript, I will not use your child’s name or any other personally identifying information.
* At the conclusion of my study, I will destroy all identifiable records - basically the consent and assent forms. I will be keeping the electronic survey results, as well as any notes taken in conjunction with the analysis of the data collected, however, I will make sure to remove all identifiers that would link any data to individuals.
* If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the contacts listed near the end of this consent form.

Voluntary Participation:
*Your child’s participation is voluntary and you may choose not to let your child participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent for your child’s participation at any time.
*Your child may choose not to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer.
*You and your child will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to let your child participate or to withdraw your child.

Questions:
• If you have any questions about this project, please contact me, Kyle Atabay, during the day at (808) 842-8447 or via e-mail (atabay@hawaii.edu).
• You can also contact my advisor at the University of Hawaii, Dr. Hunter McEwan, at (808) 956-4242 or via e-mail at hunter@hawaii.edu.
• If you have any questions about your rights, or the rights of your child as a research participant, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Human Studies Program, by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Please keep the prior portion of this consent form for your records.
If you consent for your child to participate in this project, please sign the following signature portion of this consent form and return it to the middle school main office, or you may email it to me. It would be helpful to turn in this consent form along with your child’s assent form.
Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission for my child to participate in the research project entitled, “Understanding the Implications of an Open-Space Learning Environment at KMS: A Narrative Case Study” I understand that, in order to participate in this project, my child must also agree to participate. I understand that my child and/or I can change our minds about participation, at any time, by notifying the researcher of our decision to end participation in this project.

Name of Child (Print): ________________________________

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print): ________________________________

Parent/Guardian’s Signature: ________________________________

Date: __________________
J. STUDENT ASSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I-MĀNOA

CHILD ASSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Ages 7 to 13

Study Title: Understanding the Implications of an Open-Space Learning Environment at KMS: A Narrative Case Study

Researcher: Kyle Atabay

I am a doctoral student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa conducting research as part of the degree requirements of my program. I am asking you to take part in a study to help me learn more about your experience in the new middle school facility, particularly in the open-space learning environment.

Before you decide whether to take part in this study, it is important you know that:

It is your choice to be part of this study or not;

If you decide to join the study, you can stop at any time, and

Your parent or guardian must also agree for you to be in this study.

What will you be asked to do if you join this study?

Participants will fill out a survey that is posted on the Internet. Survey questions are primarily open-ended so that you can provide your narrative response. Completion of the survey will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes. Potentially, 640 students could participate, however, I hope to obtain at least 100 responses. The data gathered in the survey will be analyzed and used to provide general themes that will guide a later smaller, face-to-face focus group discussion.

Do you have to be in this study? That is: Will it help or hurt to be in this study?

You don’t have to be in the study if you don’t want or you feel uncomfortable. It’s up to you. Even if you start the survey, you may choose to stop and not complete it. Your decision to participate in this study will not have anything to do with your grades or report card. It’s really up to you whether or not you want to participate in this research project.
You won’t really benefit by participating in this study, but the information you provide may help us better understand more about how the open-space learning environment is affecting our students’ learning and behavior.

**How do you get your questions answered?**

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me at:

(808) 842-8447 (day phone) or via email at atabay@hawaii.edu

Or you may email my advisor at the University of Hawai‘i-Manoa, Dr. Hunter McEwan (hunter@hawaii.edu).

Additionally, if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the UH Human Studies Program at (808) 956-5007, or via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Agreement to take part in the study:

Signing your name at the bottom of this form means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

_____________________________  ___________________________  ____________
Your name (print)           Your Signature           Date

_____________________________  ___________________________  ____________
Researcher’s Name           Researcher’s Signature  Date

_____________________________  ___________________________  ____________
Name of Parent/Guardian (print)
K. PARENT REMINDER FOR PARTICIPATION

Aloha,

I am just following up on your original interest in your child’s participation in my graduate research project. To date, I’ve not yet received the parent consent and student assent forms to verify your “okay” for your child to participate.

Please know that it is not too late to get those forms in as more responses will provide me a much richer picture of our students’ experience in their learning space here at KMS. I’ve forwarded those forms again for your convenience. If you did send them in and for whatever reason I have not received them, please let me know.

If you and/or your child are no longer interested in participation, that is totally understandable and I am grateful for your initial response to my request.

If you have any questions, you can also contact me at my office, 842-8447.

Mahalo,
Mr. Atabay
## L. FOCUS GROUP NOTES

Actual Questions/Topics from Focus-Group discussion:

| When it worked | Showing movies – group size: can accommodate whole team or numerous classes  
|                | Ability to see/know what others are doing  
|                | Technology assists communication (white board)  
|                | Can “escape”  
|                | Space flexibility: not necessarily used in the same way all the time  
|                | Easy(ier) interaction with peers  
|                | Traditional spaces also appreciated |
| Getting used to the space | Easy for those who have come from that sort of space (Montessori)  
|                | Difficult, but you get used to it  
|                | Organization and set procedures help  
|                | Noise level: after two weeks, get used to it  
|                | Some teams “set” spaces – routine makes it easier |
| Teacher differences: between grade level | 8th more interactive  
|                | Space use determined to teaching style  
|                | Diversity of styles appreciated  
|                | Rules differ between floors |
| Learning Styles | 8th “tricks” us to learn  
|                | Uses space as needed (loud, takes up two spaces)  
|                | Teachers considerate of others  
|                | Switching up of cohorts within team (can interact with all peers on team)  
|                | Assists reading levels: motivating to improve (popularity not a real issue)  
|                | Math split up for students’ benefit; can learn at your own pace  
|                | Video notes (no need to go over in class); problem if teacher doesn’t go over it |
| When bored...or what makes it not boring | Sometimes too much study time  
|                | 7th gr use passes to move (bathroom)  
|                | 8th grade different between teams  
|                | Kalama used for study time  
|                | When core spills into study time  
|                | Specific examples:  
|                | Science labs (mining/cookie)  
|                | LA Assessment – can choose style  
<p>|                | SS – Discovery Rap |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMUA Project - choice</th>
<th>Experience for the “closed” person; the traditional learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Space assists in group projects</td>
<td>Areas provided for them too; has choice to utilize when necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists in seeing/communicating with friends; open-minded</td>
<td>When presenting, not only for class – all can see; as a learner you may be more nervous and if you mess up, all can hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of teachers – assist each other’s classes; kids can learn in different ways</td>
<td>Distractions – ignore it, learned how to do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps to think</td>
<td>Science has walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual distractions – can’t avoid it, it’s the only walkway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusting – affected by where you come from (the kind of school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Such as noise, visual distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of group stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have to learn to work with others; it’s a part of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Generations project – can work on your own if you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Space has effect on how teachers teach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior:</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-some strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-some depend on a program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-some by the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equally collaborate (sci/math;eng/SS); depends on personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science and English collaboration – was a new experience that took some getting used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science lab is more closed-in; hinders collaboration with other teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Late with something? Some teachers flexible with deadlines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
M. FOCUS GROUP INVITE

What: Focus-group meeting, pizza lunch  
When: Wednesday, April 2, 2014, lunch hour 10:50-11:50am  
Where: Kaʻōleiokū Conference Room (Main office)

You are invited to participate in my focus group that continues my research work  
with the University of Hawai‘i. Because you provided your consent forms and were  
sent the link to complete my open-space learning environment questionnaire, you  
are being invited to participate in this opportunity for me to dig a little deeper into  
the information that I gathered through the questionnaire.

I would love for you to join the group! If you are interested, please respond to this email so that I can prepare a pass for you to come to the office during your lunch hour.

Mahalo,

Kyle J. Atabay, Hope Poʻokumu (Vice Principal)  
Kamehameha Schools ma Kapālama, Ke Kula Waena (Middle School)  
2125 Ali‘i Drive  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817  
direct 808-842-8447, fax 808-845-7234  
http://blogs.ksbe.edu/kyatabay/

"Nurturing all student voices..."

**Please consider the environment before printing. Mahalo!**
BEGINNER’S MIND

LEARN UNLEARN
REFERENCES


Ripp, P. (2013). How to give students a voice in their education. *SmartBlogs from SmartBrief*. Retrieved from 
http://smartblogs.com/education/2013/06/21/how-to-give-students-a-
voice-in-their-education/
