ABSTRACT

During an expansive review of school-change literature that crossed the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education, four problems emerged: Two related to the content of school change (practical and pedagogical), and two related to the process of school change (methodological and theoretical). The first problem quickly led to the development of a table of synthesized research titled “The Destination School.”

The table outlines where decades of research indicate schools should be headed in the areas of curriculum, assessment, instructional practices, views on teaching and learning, professional development, and the organization—in other words, the destination. Based upon the other three problems, the research study had two purposes: (a) to document the complex, holistic process of school change, specifically a traditional school transforming into the destination school, and (b) to analyze why the documented process evolved as it did, through a Vygotskian lens and with the goal of developing explanatory theory. Two main research questions and two related subquestions fulfilled this purpose: (1) What does the process of school change look like when a traditional school transforms into the destination school, as described by literature that is generally agreed upon across multiple disciplines? (2) Why did the process look this way? (a) What was the nature of the learning events (activity settings) that stood out as significant in the school’s change process? (b) How did these learning events, and the conditions within them, influence the teachers as individuals and the school overall? To answer these questions, a
grounded theory methodology was used, specifically, the social-constructivist perspective advocated by Charmaz (2006), which aligned with the theoretical foundation of the conceptual framework (Vygotsky’s theory of learning and development, Clay’s theory of literacy processing, and Tharp and Gallimore’s theory of education). The theoretical construct of activity settings was employed as a methodological unit of analysis.

Findings revolved around the broad theoretical categories of factors, conditions, and consequences and a relationship between them. Based upon the findings, a theory of the process of school change was developed as were practical tools that align with it. As a set, the theory and tools are intended to support educators as they work through the complex process of change in their own context. In addition, a methodological tool was developed: a template for activity-setting description and analysis. The study was based upon on the seven-year change journey of LeRoy Elementary School (K-6) in rural LeRoy, Illinois; the role of the researcher was participant-observer.