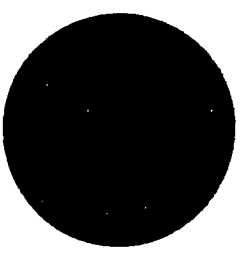


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DAVID M. FETTERMAN



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6 Communicating Evaluation Findings as a Process: The Case for Delayed Gratification

Jolley Christman and Melaine Simon

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss two aspects of ethnographic evaluation which we have found essential to establishing an evaluation process which engages program stakeholders in considering what they are doing and why they are doing it. We use a case example to illustrate how we: (1) collaborate with stakeholders *over time* to design and carry out a study which is credible and useful and (2) derive standards for evaluative judgments which are informed by *emic* perspectives. These are obviously interrelated topics. Both have implications for interpretation and validity: both are centrally related to communicating findings; and both bear on issues of utilization and impact.

Ethnographic evaluation involves extended time in the field setting. It also requires a holistic perspective on the research problem. As our title indicates, our experience with ethnographic evaluation argues for patience, as well as a broader and longer view. Holistic research which enlightens by raising questions, creating agendas of concern, re-orienting perspectives, reconceptualizing issues, and challenging taken for granted assumptions may, in many instances, be of greater use than more focused research which is directly, but narrowly applied. (Finch, 1986.) However, clients do not often share this perspective, at least not initially. In this chapter, we discuss the strategies we used to 'sell' the broader and longer view and how these strategies ultimately enhanced the credibility of the study.

Our engagement with program stakeholders over time included the following aspects:

- negotiating evaluation purposes
- using a series of small pilot studies to increase knowledge about the program as well as understanding of what might be learned from an ethnographic approach
- involving stakeholders in decisions about evaluation design (e.g., identifying the evaluation focus, choosing the unit of analysis, and developing the sample)
- involving stakeholders in interpreting data.

We will show how these activities built validity into the evaluation and helped to insure that stakeholders would value and use findings.

We also describe how we developed our judgments of the program. Schwandt has observed that evaluators have been much more likely to 'focus our evaluation practice on the procurement of scientific evidence of program effectiveness while avoiding any attempt to examine the nature and character of evaluative judgments'. (Schwandt, 1989.) Here we discuss our process of taking an evaluative stance and describe how working with program stakeholders (program staff and participants) over time invites their sustained engagement in data analysis and interpretation which informs the criteria or standards used to judge program worth.

Our process for taking an evaluative stance involved:

- recognizing the need to evaluate the program by not only documenting its impact through a cataloguing of program effects on teachers, students, and schools, but also by examining the worth of its purposes
- identifying and understanding *emic* perspectives on the program's goals, activities, and impact
- making visible the tacit values underlying these various perspectives
- examining our own values and beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy and their relationships to educational reform.

The Program

Since 1984, The Alliance, a collaboration involving the School District of Columbia¹ and local corporations and institutions of higher education, has worked to revitalize public education and improve the academic achievement of Columbia children. The Alliance has sponsored a wide range of programs aimed at the professional development of

teachers and the enrichment of curriculum. The Alliance receives funding from a variety of sources which include: corporate donations, grants from private foundations and governmental agencies, and fees from the School District of Columbia.

The following types of programs are representative of Alliance efforts.

Teacher Institutes

The Alliance offers a variety of summer institutes in which teachers learn new subject matter. Institutes are taught by university faculty and teachers receive a stipend and/or graduate credit for their participation.

Teacher Grants

Teachers submit proposals requesting funds for classroom curriculum projects. Minigrants fund small projects written by one teacher (up to \$300.00); collaborative grants written by two or more teachers fund larger projects (up to \$1,500.00).

Curriculum Renewal Projects

These projects bring teachers and outside experts (usually university faculty) together to develop new curricula.

In 1988, the Executive Director of The Alliance approached the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education to conduct an evaluation of the project's accomplishments. We participated in these discussions in our roles as co-instructors for the course, *Qualitative Methods of Program Evaluation at the Graduate School of Education*.

Working with Stakeholders Over Time

Evaluation Purposes

In our early meetings with The Alliance staff, we learned what they believed about the organization's purposes and how the many and varied programs the organization provided were operating. We also

learned about their perspectives on program evaluation; what they hoped an evaluation would offer them and their Board of Directors. Staff told us that this Board (which is composed of local CEOs, university presidents, education advocates, as well as School District staff) desired information about The Alliance's impact. Program staff interpreted this request as an evaluation which would provide quantifiable data about student achievement outcomes and wanted to accommodate their Board's wishes.

Program staff also said that they wanted a 'comprehensive' evaluation, one that addressed all of their activities. In most cases, staff members had job responsibilities in only one or two program areas, and their knowledge about what other programs did and how they operated was limited. For this reason, staff could only imagine that a comprehensive evaluation would essentially address each program separately, but also include some general findings that might cut across all programs.

As staff talked with us and each other, they articulated two program goals which they saw as integral to The Alliance's mission and educational reform: enriching the School District's Standardized Curriculum and supporting the professionalization of teaching. They hoped that the program promoted such curriculum innovations as multidisciplinary studies, the use of literature in the teaching of reading and primary documents in social studies. They also hoped that institutes which increased teachers' subject matter knowledge would promote teachers' development of rigorous classroom curriculum. In terms of professionalization, The Alliance staff perceived that their programs developed and supported formal and informal teacher networks in schools and across the district and encouraged teachers to assume leadership roles.

As staff members offered different hypotheses and hopes for The Alliance's effects on teachers, they talked at length about certain 'star' teachers whom they considered to be extraordinarily gifted classroom instructors. These were teachers who had usually participated in several programs; they had quickly assumed leadership roles in The Alliance by making presentations at Alliance colloquia. Program staff often consulted with these teachers in developing new activities, and they had played an important role in the evolution of the organization. It was clear that The Alliance staff felt a deep appreciation and respect for such teachers. Many of these teachers were also known to us through our own involvement in the School District since the early 1970s.

As we listened to program staff, we had several concerns about the kind of evaluation that they were proposing. We believed that an

evaluation which focused on student achievement outcomes measured by existing quantitative data (report card marks and standardized tests) would not be valid. We thought that a deeper understanding of how The Alliance's many programs worked was needed before a valid evaluation design which looked at student outcomes could be developed.

We also hypothesized that the various Alliance programs interacted within schools and believed that we needed a broad conceptual frame to capture these interactions. Our ethnographic perspective encouraged us to consider carefully how we might take a holistic look across programs at cumulative impact.

Pilot Studies

We suggested to Alliance staff that we engage in several activities through which we could get to know more about their programs. During this process we also hoped to expand The Alliance's vision of what an ethnographic approach might offer them, to suggest some other ways to think about program impact, and to demonstrate how we might look across programs at cumulative effects.

As a preliminary effort, we began small scale studies of several programs. We conducted focus group interviews of teachers and principals about Writing Across the Curriculum to discern their perceptions of how this program had strengthened the instruction of writing in their schools; we examined how teachers were using the Franklin Institute Museum-To-Go Science Kits, hands-on science materials keyed to the School District's standardized science curriculum, in their classrooms; we looked at how teachers' participation in two summer institutes run by university faculty (American history and 'Heat, Light, and Motion') influenced how and what they taught in their classrooms.

Findings from these preliminary evaluations proved to be an effective tool for expanding Alliance staff's conceptions of what they might learn from an evaluation which was ethnographic in its approach. They also served to sharpen our understanding of what The Alliance was about, keep staff interested in the evaluative process, and build our credibility. For example, the evaluation of the Museum-To-Go Science Kits project provided The Alliance with a picture of what was happening in classrooms, a picture that had previously been inaccessible to them and which they valued. We described the great variety of ways in which teachers were using the kits. Some teachers were not using the kits at all and one reason was that they did not know how to manage

the small group learning activities which the hands-on kits materials demanded. This was a simple and obvious finding, but one that staff had not considered because of The Alliance's emphasis on enriching the curriculum and upgrading teachers' content knowledge as the means to improving student achievement. The Alliance did not perceive instructional strategies as a central concern and, in fact, had most often avoided explicit discussion of pedagogy because in the interest of respecting teachers as professionals, it did not want to violate the strong professional norms of teacher as expert in areas of classroom practice.

Another way that we collaborated with Alliance staff was to develop a conceptual model to guide the evaluation approach. This model emerged from the research on the Museum-To-Go Science Kits Project. In that study, we had provided some analysis of why the classrooms looked the way that they did. We identified and discussed numerous kinds of influences on science teaching and learning and described how those influences interacted. During the discussions, we collaboratively refined the evaluation question from: *Are the Museum-to-Go Science Kits improving student achievement in science?* to: *How have the Museum-To-Go Science Kits strengthened science teaching and learning in the classroom?* We then engaged staff in a discussion of criteria for judging the quality of science instruction that we identified through integrating our observations with a review of the literature. Thus, Alliance staff came to see what teachers and students were now doing in their classrooms as a kind of program impact.

We also involved Alliance staff in thinking about what the purposes and possibilities of ethnographic evaluation were through our graduate course, 'Qualitative Methods of Program Evaluation'. In the course, students become program evaluators and, for three years, The Alliance graciously agreed to serve as a 'laboratory'. In one year, students looked at The Alliance overall; in another, they examined the Teacher Grants Program; and in a third, they looked at the Writing Across the Curriculum Program. Throughout the course, students talk to Alliance staff about their programs and evaluation needs. They also interviewed a participating teacher or principal, observed at a school, and interviewed Alliance staff. The goal of these assignments is for students to generate three or four broad questions which will then guide their development of an evaluation design. Each year we shared our students' work with Alliance staff. This interaction further expanded The Alliance's vision of what an ethnographic approach might offer by providing examples of questions which cut across programs. Staff, who had been wedded to their individual programs, began to see new connections among programs and to talk about them. The questions

piqued staff's curiosity, provided opportunities for them to critique different kinds of questions, and involved us all in a discussion of how an evaluation design might pursue specific questions. All the while, The Alliance was becoming familiar with an ethnographic approach.

Involving Stakeholders in Evaluation Design and Data Analysis

In the fall of 1989, we joined with Carla Asher of the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College to begin work with The Alliance on a design for a holistic ethnographic evaluation which would look at cumulative impact across all programs. Many Alliance projects (all of the teacher institutes) seek to encourage and support educational reform through activities which occur *outside* of the school; most projects also view the individual teacher as the target and agent of change. However, our previous evaluation work with The Alliance, the literature on educational change, and our knowledge of current School District reorganization efforts to support change at the level of the individual school encouraged us to consider the school as our unit of analysis. Teachers who attend institutes return to their schools and classrooms and it is in these settings that they wrestle with how to transform ideas into new ways of working with students and colleagues. It seemed that case studies of schools would offer The Alliance the opportunity to see its efforts at the point of enactment, *inside* classrooms and schools. Case studies of schools would also reveal the ways in which many influences and pressures converge at the school level to shape what happens in classrooms.

As our discussions with The Alliance proceeded, we recognized that the salient evaluation issues would be quite different in the three types of school organization: elementary, middle, and high school. Our sampling strategy involved creating three pairs of schools, so that we would have contrasting cases at each organizational level. We continued to work with program people, this time to choose school pairs which would illuminate the issues which seemed most central at each school level. We constructed a purposive sample so that we could learn about the influence of various contextual factors including the role of the principal, the number of Alliance programs and participants within a school, and interactions with other programs and initiatives in the school. In these discussions, we began to develop the initial working hypotheses which would guide our work.

The Alliance invited a teacher in each school to serve as a liaison to the research team. The research team met with the six teachers and

talked at length with these liaisons about their involvement in Alliance programs and about their colleagues' perceptions of and participation in Alliance activities. We asked them to help us consider what we might look for as evidence of Alliance impact in their schools, and we also talked to them about how we might assess the degree of teacher involvement. We had decided that at each school we would interview and observe teachers who had been 'highly involved' in Alliance programs, teachers who had had no involvement, and teachers who had been moderately involved. The six liaison teachers worked with us to define the attributes of these three categories. They also talked about their perceptions of why individual Alliance programs had or had not taken hold in their buildings. Unlike many teachers we spoke with during the course of the study, these teachers were quite knowledgeable about things going on across the school district and articulate about where their colleagues and their schools fit into this larger scheme of things.

The liaisons helped to negotiate our entry into the schools. They explained the study to their principals, helped us to decide whom to interview and observe, scheduled our visits. Their help in defining who fit the sample categories meant that the selection of informants represented the different levels of involvement *from the perspective of that school*, contributing to validity.

After six months of fieldwork in the schools and numerous analytic meetings of the research team, we met with Alliance staff to discuss the case descriptions. Present at the meeting were the two directors with whom we had negotiated the evaluation, as well as a new Executive Director, who had arrived over the summer after a year long search. We were, of course, eager for their responses to the cases; we were humanly curious about their reactions to telling vignettes and we wanted to know if our portraits of the schools rang true. But most of all, we wanted to hear them discuss our descriptions of what teachers were doing in classrooms; how schools were making use of Alliance resources. Did they see the portraits that we painted as evidence of strong and effective Alliance impact on schools and classrooms or were they disappointed in the images we presented? In hindsight, we realize that these questions reveal our continuing efforts to help Alliance staff to articulate more clearly the kinds of impact they wanted their programs to have on schools.

The interaction was lively as staff told us the ways in which their perceptions of the six schools were confirmed or shaken by our accounts. We discussed individual teachers, many of whom they recognized despite the pseudonyms, and they underscored the fine work

that a number of teachers were doing. This discussion gave us more information about the characteristics of teachers and classrooms Alliance staff valued. It served to involve staff in analyzing data and thus strengthened the validity of our findings as well as contributing to the development of emically derived standards of judgment. We agreed that we would write a cross-site summary of findings and recommendations.

We went to work on preparing a summary which identified the kinds of impact Alliance programs had on classroom teaching and on the students. We discussed:

- the increased use of teaching strategies that actively involve students (for example, small-group work, hands-on materials in science, etc.)
- the increased use of educational resources outside the school (for example, museums, community organizations, etc.) for the purpose of connecting students' educational experiences to their community
- the involvement of students in a greater variety of writing activities which emphasized writing as a process
- the incorporation of innovative subject matter, particularly an emphasis on the arts, an expansion of inter-disciplinary teaching, an increased emphasis on science, and the addition of a multi-cultural perspective.

Based on teachers' perceptions and classroom observation, we also identified a number of student outcomes which resulted from teachers' involvement with The Alliance:

- an increased interest and involvement in learning that searching strategies and materials which more actively involved them, and curriculum topics which were more relevant to their own lives
- an expanded awareness of and experience with the world around them because of exposure to additional school and community resources (for example, Afro-American community leaders who were involved in a 'Return to Roots' curriculum project; videos provided through a school collaborative grant, etc.)
- a greater comfort with writing and an improved quality of writing
- increased self-esteem and pride in their racial and ethnic identity and in themselves as competent learners
- an expanded understanding of multi-disciplinary concepts.

Taking an Evaluative Stance

A Value Position

As we developed and discussed our findings, we grew increasingly uneasy with the report that we seemed to be writing. Although this summary of findings captured the variety of educational innovations we had observed and teachers had reported, it did not account for the variability in the degree to which teachers and schools were involved in substantive change efforts which utilized Alliance resources and were clearly linked to Alliance program activities. The findings offered these changes as separate puzzle pieces with no explanation of what their relationship to one another might be.

For example, at the classroom level, we identified the use of certain kinds of materials (e.g., primary sources in social studies, literature in language arts, hands-on math and science materials) and strategies that actively involved students as evidence of Alliance impact. We realized that we were not addressing the nature of the learning tasks themselves and how those learning activities fit into an overall pedagogical approach. We recognized that, with a few notable exceptions, teachers and Alliance staff were also failing to connect these puzzle pieces into a conceptual framework that joined curriculum with pedagogy. One of those exceptions was Marilyn Foster, a middle school reading teacher highly regarded by Alliance staff and one of our teacher liaisons. Her explanation of how her earliest participation in The Alliance affected her stood out for us.

The Writing Project's summer institute (an institute sponsored, in part, by The Alliance) changed my life. Right before the institute, I had taken a course in learning styles and had realized that I am a global learner. The way it was taught had always been hierarchical, fragmented, and sequential. Then I became a teacher, and they wanted lesson plans with these very specific objectives. I always rebelled against thinking about what I was going to do in forty minute segments.

In a way, the Writing Project was a vindication for me. It showed me that I was right to think that the greater whole is more than all those parts. It makes more sense for me as a teacher to think about an overall approach and then to figure out what I'm going to plug in with this particular class or this particular piece of literature.

The lack of an overall pedagogical framework also represented what we were coming to see as the absence of an evaluative stance in our work. The question for us became: 'How are we going to look authentically and critically at what we have described in the case studies?'

Making Tacit Values Visible

We re-examined our data, looking carefully at what we believed to be the notable exceptions — classrooms like Marilyn Foster's where various pieces of the puzzle fit within the larger framework of a teacher's vision of teaching and learning. As it turned out, these classrooms belonged to teachers whom Alliance staff had frequently identified as outstanding teachers and personifying Alliance ideals: in a number of cases, they were also our research liaisons. The following excerpts from the evaluation report are illustrative of the kinds of things these 'ideal' teachers said about their teaching and what they did in their classrooms. Steve Bolan, high school math teacher:

As he outlined it, he spent the first month 'without touching books'. Instead, students used manipulatives and pattern blocks, made observations, and built theories. Then they began to make arguments to defend statements about what they were observing. Eventually, they would build up theory in geometry, which they would use as they progressed through the geometric concepts.

We observed the class at the point in the year where the students were able to draw on the body of theory they themselves had built for geometry.

Joe Crawford, high school history teacher:

Asked how his participation in The Alliance has influenced him, Mr Crawford responded, 'In every way . . . content and method . . . I think that The Alliance encourages a shift in the way we teach — that we become less purveyors of knowledge and more willing to be co-questioners. . . . Mr Crawford described his educational philosophy as a belief that questions are more important than answers. 'I don't think that the teacher has to have the last word. I want to ask, what do we need to ask, and what kinds of responses can be counted as good answers?'

Expanding on this, he said 'Several people have the belief that they are the possessors of revealed truth, that their knowledge is unassailable. Kids become discipline problems when they challenge that'.

We triangulated this data with our observations of the pedagogy used and promoted in the summer institutes for teachers and with our conversations with program staff. We also discussed our own pedagogical values. From this analysis and self-examination we constructed a standard for our judgments about the impact of The Alliance. In the introduction to the report we wrote that

. . . the fundamental criterion for an excellent learning environment used in this study was the use of inquiry-based learning processes which are embedded in students' exploration of their own and others' questions and concerns about subject matter. Thus, we looked for examples of classrooms where knowledge is not only transmitted from teacher to student, but where it is created by teachers and students together as they pose and pursue problems about the stages of the moon, about the life of a black boy in South Africa, about geometry, and so forth. We looked for the development of skills (reading, writing, computation, etc.) within the context of learning about subject matter. We looked for the use of materials which support experiential learning and for ways that teachers and students are exploring lines of inquiry that cut across the disciplines. We also looked for students who were using writing to make connections between new material and their previous experience and for teachers who build their lessons from the questions and issues raised by students in their writing.

In introducing our recommendations, we elaborated how the concept of coherence was important to us, 'understanding the variability in The Alliance's ability to build and sustain teachers' capacity to enact an inquiry-based pedagogical approach. We wrote:

Teachers highly involved in The Alliance are likely to have an existing philosophy of pedagogy and practice consonant with an inquiry approach. Teachers with beliefs that are inconsistent with The Alliance's philosophy tend not to participate. Those teachers whose pedagogical philosophies are partially consistent with The Alliance's approach present the greatest challenge

and opportunity for change. It is in their classrooms that we most often saw the adoption of features without the supporting framework.

We went on to explain that teachers in this last group, who are experimenting with new instructional strategies on the way to constructing an overall pedagogical approach, are also most vulnerable to factors in the school and district context which are philosophically and/or structurally inconsistent with an inquiry-based approach. For example, a teacher using a process-oriented approach to explore a science topic in depth, may abandon this innovation in the face of standardized tests which emphasize curriculum breadth and factual recall.

Two of our most important recommendations included:

—The Alliance should make its beliefs about teaching and learning more explicit and these beliefs should be incorporated in its mission statement and serve as a set of guiding principles for all of its program activities.

—The Alliance should collaborate with members of the immediate school community as well as the larger setting in which it operates to promote a coherent school context which supports an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning.

Evaluation Impact

The Alliance circulated the report to its staff and its board. Staff appreciated the close look at schools which had previously been unavailable to them. One long time staff member, who had responsibility for a variety of programs, told us,

The concept of the overall pedagogical framework was extremely helpful to me. It really helped me to understand my reaction to visiting classrooms all these years. Yes, I would see a number of things going on that were encouraging, but there were also things missing.

In contrast, the former Executive Director wrote a response to the evaluation which voiced concerns shared by other staff members. The following are excerpts from that letter:

I have read the Evaluation of The Alliance with very great interest, as you can imagine, and found much of it to provide a

useful set of indicators as to where the focus in future years would be most productive. As such, I am sure you have also found this a highly productive piece of research for your planning. . . . There is one aspect of the study, however, that truly puzzles me. The researcher's entire study is based on a statement that the central mission of The Alliance is inquiry-based learning. Inquiry-based learning is certainly one of the by-products of the arts and science focus of The Alliance, but not a necessary goal.

For you, the question being posed [by the evaluation] is whether you wish to shift that goal from subject matter to pedagogy, and to advocate for a particular pedagogy as your central mission. That would be a major shift in purpose, and one which you and your board need to make consciously and not simply as a result of an assumption made by the evaluators. . . . then you must decide if The Alliance is now going to go into the business of changing that (the way teachers teach), which probably entails an entirely different set of activities from those that The Alliance has ever undertaken. Is The Alliance equipped to do so? Does it wish to do so? . . . Your next steps will be most interesting to observe.

These comments represent any evaluator's fondest hope in the sense that they testify to program stakeholders' engagement with substantive issues. They clearly connect evaluation findings to future program direction and therefore increase the potential impact of the evaluation. However, they also raise critical questions about the evaluation: its validity and its evaluative stance. They are illustrative of the challenges that confront program evaluators and stakeholders when they examine the relationship between explicit and implicit values and reveal the ways in which program activities and program context may undermine and/or contradict those values.

The letter was one impetus for a meeting in which teachers, principals and other school district administrators, program staff, and the evaluation team discussed the evaluation and its implications for future program activities. Teachers and principals were appreciative of the 'rich portraits' of schools and agreed with the accuracy of the accounts. Program staff again raised questions about the value and appropriateness of The Alliance taking an overt stance in regard to instructional approach. There was a discussion of the connections between curriculum and pedagogy. The meeting was inconclusive in terms of charting program direction, but it did generate serious consideration of the

critical issues raised by the evaluation as evidenced by one teacher's written comment:

Although the World History Project is based on inquiry-based teaching and learning, I did not know that inquiry-based teaching and learning was a fundamental tenet of The Alliance . . . I think that I saw The Alliance as having less of a philosophical or ideological center. I thought that it might support and encourage competing views of education. I am not sure what I mean by this . . .

Several months later, the Board revised The Alliance's mission statement as part of a strategic planning process and included pedagogy as a focus for program efforts. While the statement does not incorporate 'inquiry-based pedagogy' as part of its language, it does identify the support of teachers in their development of instructional strategies which 'actively engage students in learning' as a major purpose of Alliance programs.

In presenting this case example, we have argued that our criteria for evaluative judgments were informed by emic perspectives revealed not only in the data collected during fieldwork in the schools, but also in our collaborative interactions with program staff and participants during the evaluation process. The teachers who exemplified The Alliance's values viewed curriculum and pedagogy as inextricably connected and they incorporated this view in their development of a coherent conceptual framework for teaching. They explicitly articulated this connection to us and their classrooms reflected it.

But if the criteria for our judgments were informed by emic perspectives, why did the former Executive Director and some staff question them as appropriate for judging program worth and effectiveness? Why did teachers seem to believe that The Alliance had been (and perhaps ought to remain) pedagogically 'neutral'? Why did the Board, when it chose to address instruction in its mission statement, use the language of 'active learning' rather than 'inquiry-based teaching and learning'?

We believe that the former Executive Director recognized that the evaluation recommendations challenged The Alliance to redefine its mission and its relationship to teachers, schools, and the school district. In the words of a teacher, 'The Alliance did not have a 'philosophical or ideological center'. Because it did not advocate for a particular pedagogical approach, The Alliance did not overtly challenge teachers' philosophical orientation nor threaten their roles as instructional experts.

In addition, The Alliance's stated purposes of curriculum enrichment and the professionalization of teaching more delicately positioned it as a complement and support to the school district. A commitment to inquiry-based teaching and learning would require that The Alliance become activist in its advocacy for school district policies and structures which promote a consistent and coherent context for inquiry teaching and learning at the school level.

The Board's focus on instruction which encourages 'active learning' is congruent with The Alliance's historical emphasis on engaging students with hands-on materials. It offers teachers a concrete image of what they might do in their classrooms and seems compatible with a variety of educational philosophies.

We have continued to work with The Alliance as it has restructured its organization, renegotiated its partnership with the School District, and its relationships with schools through such efforts as:

- providing programs which develop the capacity of middle school science teachers to involve their students in extended scientific investigations and to serve as resources and consultants to colleagues in their schools
- facilitating and supporting whole school change efforts through direct involvement of Alliance staff in program planning, implementation, and assessment at the school level
- implementing an alternative assessment initiative which involves schools in pilot projects to integrate alternative assessment processes with the development of new curricula.

In all of these efforts we, in partnership with Alliance staff and school people, are continuing to engage with the issues generated in the evaluation discussed here. Understandings deepen and dilemmas continue in this unfolding story. We have tried to understand and be more sensitive to stakeholders' perspectives on the political context in which they operate, but this remains a continuing challenge in a large urban school district. We have appreciated the opportunity to continue our collaboration as program planners develop ways to enact recommendations and new understandings.

In this chapter, we have described the ways in which we collaborated over time with stakeholders to design and carry out a program evaluation. This collaboration occurred during conceptualization of the evaluation focus, design of the study, data collection, analysis, and

interpretation. It occurred with two groups of stakeholders: program staff and program participants. We believe that this case illustrates how an ethnographic evaluation approach, which reveals and scrutinizes taken for granted assumptions and tacit values, helps to engage program stakeholders in critically examining what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Note

† 'The Alliance' is a pseudonym; as is 'Columbia', which is a large urban school district serving more than 200,000 students in the north-eastern United States.

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