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Taking Stock/Making Change: Stories of Collaboration in Local School Reform

IN CURRENT APPROACHES to educational reform, two processes are being called for at the same time. One is to tighten external accountability loops, with policymakers mandating the focus and purposes of school change and often its means as well. A second approach emphasizes accountability *within* the local school community. Such accountability requires collaboration, with principals, teachers, parents, and children responsible for working together to determine directions for change and to accomplish it.

In this article we report on a partnership between the School District of Philadelphia and the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at the University of Pennsylvania. Titled Taking Stock/Making Change (TS/MC), this collaborative action research project was designed to support schools as they moved toward school-based management and shared decision making (SBM/SDM).

How We Came to Do This Work

In 1991 the school district asked the GSE's Center for Urban Ethnography (CUE) to evaluate the district's new reform initiative, school-based management and shared decision making. Instead of developing a traditional evaluation that positioned the university as a distant and objective outside research institution, CUE designed a formative evalu-

ation process that would be school based and school conducted. In the past, the work of local schools has been monitored and assessed by others. We believed it was time for schools to learn to do this for themselves—and then to do it. We further believed that ethnographic perspectives and methods would be useful in collaborative action research and that CUE staff could be helpful as “friendly outsiders.”

Late in 1992 the Knight Foundation awarded CUE one of its first 10 Excellence in Education grants, so that school self-study efforts might go forward in a 3-year partnership between the university and the school district. Taking Stock/Making Change was undertaken together with Research for Action, a Philadelphia-based organization that has initiated collaborative action research in a variety of school communities nationally.¹ Since May 1993, TS/MC has been working with five Philadelphia Schools: H.A. Brown, Levering, and Webster Elementary Schools, Guion Bluford Elementary Science Magnet School, and AMY Northwest, an alternative middle school that is also affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Collaborative Action Research

The aim of Taking Stock/Making Change has been to assist school-based teams of teachers, administrators, parents, and students in using the perspectives and methods of ethnographic research to examine current issues in their schools and to chart new directions deliberately. Taking Stock/Making Change derives from collaborative action research

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more generally. It is in the tradition of the 1930s work of Lewin and of Whyte's involvement with labor-management and community studies in the 1950s (see Lewin, 1946; Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 1989; see also Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Argyris, 1993; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Tripp, 1990; Winter, 1989).

Elements common to collaborative action research include: an emphasis on the pragmatic, the solution of everyday problems; professional development and personal growth through systematic inquiry; and open communication throughout the process. Yet it is not always recognized that collaboration is a multi-valent term. One aspect of collaboration is mutuality; sharing in work. The presumption is that such sharing is actually mutually helpful, i.e., it is more than just the appearance of help through conjoint activity but the substance of it, mutually recognized (see Erickson, 1989).

There is a shadow side to collaboration. While the term literally means "working together," that is not necessarily easy. The articulation of joint effort in a social group always involves issues of the distribution and exercise of power. Foucault (1979) points to this in his epistemological notion of *power/knowledge*. He asserts that all knowing is situated in, and thus inevitably shaped by, the power position and the power interests within which the knower inquires. Collaboration in inquiry among university-based researchers and public school-based practitioners and parents, then, involves sharing power across lines of institutional turf, professional status, and personal identity. When power and prestige are unequal, "collaboration" can easily result in co-optation, or even in domination masked by a euphonious label. It is sobering to remember what the French Resistance in World War II meant by the term "collaboration."

One way in which power/knowledge manifests in collaborative action research is in control over the conduct of the research: from the initial framing of topics and questions of research interests, through the use of various methods in data identification and data collection, to analysis of the evidence collected and conclusions drawn from it (see Erickson, 1994). At one extreme of "collaboration," the university-based researcher sets the questions of research and determines the research methods. The school-based practitioner helps answer the questions and has a minor voice in the analysis and reporting. University-

based ways of knowing predominate in the power relations. At the other extreme, the practitioner sets the questions and the university-based researcher helps answer them. Practitioners' ways of knowing predominate in the power relations.

In our TS/MC work we were closer to the latter extreme than to the former, but there were tugs in the direction of university-based ways of knowing that occurred more than occasionally as our collaboration proceeded. Those tugs came not only from the university-based researchers but sometimes from the school-based people, as will be apparent later in this article.

Collaborative action research has not been the only arena where researchers and practitioners have sought to join in the co-construction of knowledge and, in so doing, have confronted issues of power/knowledge. This has been an enduring concern in feminist research. For example, feminist researchers have sought to position ourselves as distinct persons with distinct sensibilities in the work that we report. This is in contrast to the traditional stance of the researcher, even of those who do qualitative research, as invisible and anonymous in the research report (see Christman, 1988).

Another concern of feminists (and of other recent critics of traditional narrative reporting in various forms of qualitative research, including ethnography) has been with the power relations inherent in occupying the role of narrator (and of executive director). In the report, who actually gets to tell the story of what happened? Is the narrator only the university-based researcher or is the narrating role shared between school-based practitioners and the university-based researcher?

In forms of practitioner research such as "teacher research" (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), the problem of university-based domination of knowledge construction and of the narrative role is addressed by drastically minimizing the voice and visibility of the university-based facilitator of practitioner inquiry. That can be an appropriate way to redress a historical imbalance in power/knowledge relations between the academy and the public schools. However, in the work of TS/MC research and reporting, we wanted to aim for joint visibility and voice—to move toward greater parity in reporting responsibility between those collaborators who worked from a university base and those who worked from a public school base. Like all ideals, this aim has been only partially realized in

TS/MC, but its attempt has been an important feature of our collaboration.²

Beginning Assumptions

We began Taking Stock/Making Change with the following set of assumptions.

The whole school as the basic unit of change. The orientation of site-based management and shared decision making assumes that the individual school is the basic unit of change and that the focus and processes of change must, to the greatest extent possible, be determined collaboratively by local stakeholders in that school.

Linking research and action and making them collaborative processes. Developing, implementing, and assessing school change are activities that necessarily go together in school renewal. Continual stock-taking is an essential component of school-based management and shared decision making in that local school staffs must have the capacity to assess their efforts so that they can revise them. Taking stock means looking more carefully than usual to see what is already in place.

We knew that linking assessment and reflection with school change would be a tough job in part because of a long-standing tendency in attempts to improve America's schools. The usual approach can be called "ready-fire-aim," or even "fire-aim-ready." This is to say that the problems schools face, especially urban schools, are so severe and the pressure to do *something* is so intense and continuous that efforts to improve educational practice often do not involve collective deliberation and decision making, and therefore, are not fully "owned" by school staff. Educational fads come and go as educators become increasingly cynical about the possibility of real change. The TS/MC process is an attempt to break this cycle of cynicism by making educational improvement more collaborative, deliberate, and data-based.

Ethnographic perspectives as a ground for collaboration. Ethnography documents the daily life of a local set of people and their points of view in what they are doing. The ethnographic perspective assumes that everyone is active and making sense. Yet people become so accustomed to their daily routines and so busy in doing them that they generally do not pay much attention to what is going on. Everyday life becomes invisible in its living. That is why taking stock is necessary. It focuses attention on questions

such as "How do we teach reading in this school?" "How are decisions made and what do staff understand about that?" and "When do students feel successful and what contributes to and undermines their confidence in their competence?"

Such attention is necessarily collective because views differ among the various participants—students, teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff—and the content of those differences needs to be surfaced and articulated through collective inquiry and discussion, rather than ignored or swept under the rug. The ethnographic assumption that differences in perspective are normal within a social group helps provide a safe environment to make visible the differences that obtain among key participants in the school.

The TS/MC Process

In the summer of 1993, we met together at our first 8-day institute. CUE staff helped each TS/MC school team to develop a plan for integrating school-based self-study into the design and implementation of their educational renewal plans. We challenged schools to broaden their questions so that they would address issues significant to school culture. For example, one school re-framed an issue concerning the supervision of noon-time aides to focus on how the school as a whole might work on creating a "culture of respect."

We offered support in anticipating at the outset what kinds of information would be useful and how that information might be used. In subsequent summer institutes and school-year retreats, we have continued to offer staff development and technical assistance in self-study design and in particular research skills (such as how to construct a questionnaire, conduct a focus group interview, document one's own classroom practice, visit and observe in a colleague's classroom, and document students' learning by various means other than test scores).

As TS/MC unfolded, CUE staff developed institute and retreat activities that responded to issues and challenges arising across the five schools. For example, in the second summer institute, school teams developed two parallel timelines of their previous year's activities. First they charted their school's research/data collection activities; then, on a parallel line, they marked other important school decisions, actions, and events. School teams then analyzed how these two timelines had and had not

worked in concert as preparation for planning their second year's activities. We also provided technical assistance in how to structure and facilitate meetings so that larger groups throughout the school might look at and interpret data, deliberate meaning, and generate and choose options for action.

In the following examples we look back over 3 years of collaborative endeavor to share what we are learning about the hard work of embedding systematic assessment and reflection into change efforts, so that school-based reform is intentional, collectively owned, and reflexive.

We focus on how applying ethnographic methods to the assessment of school change efforts provided new perspectives on what collaboration is and how it occurs in two TS/MC schools. These stories are partial, shaped to fit this issue's theme of collaboration. When we (university-based people) shared drafts of the stories with school people, several commented that they thought it important that all TS/MC team voices be represented in the accounts. They also pointed out that in our fervor to describe how interviewing and participant observation had illuminated problems that often remain invisible and undiscussed in school, we shortchanged the action side of the story—what schools have done to address those problems. We incorporated this feedback into our next revision. We know that a particular struggle of TS/MC will be the ongoing collaboration about when and how to write together and separately.

Bluford: Making Communication Processes Visible

The Guion Bluford Elementary School's self-study focused on how its communication processes were supports for and obstacles to the school's emphasis on strengthening its science program. Staff at Bluford had a history of collaboration: They were proud to be among the first Philadelphia schools to take up the district's school-based management/shared decision making initiative; they had also mustered enough community support to change the school's name to honor one of its graduates, the first African-American astronaut (not a minor accomplishment in a large urban school bureaucracy!). But collaboration was not always satisfying and/or productive and the TS/MC team instinctively knew that good communication would be vital to forwarding the school's ambitious science plan.

During the project, however, the TS/MC team unwittingly fell into the very communication problems it had set out to understand and prevent. And this was not the only surprise in Bluford's self-study process. Although surveys and focus group interviews were intended to be the team's primary research methods, field notes from team and faculty meetings provided the richest opportunities for seeing communication patterns at Bluford. Additionally, the opportunity (sometimes perceived as more of a burden than an opportunity) to return to the data again and again and re-search its meaning in light of present knowledge and understanding offered a fuller view of the problem and thus the possibility of more complete problem solving. Below Carol Shiffrin and Gretchen Brosius describe what happened as they read and re-read field notes from a difficult and contentious faculty meeting:

Carol Shiffrin, teacher

Reading field notes from the meeting was a real revelation to me. I shouldn't have been so surprised! The kind of communication problems that surfaced are characteristic not only of our school, but of many situations and settings. Often, large staffs meet monthly at best, after a long hard day, in a rushed atmosphere, where there is too much to do and not enough time to do it. Still, seeing our conversation in black and white made the problem of communication so real to me.

In a meeting of less than one hour, there were several instances of communication problems around the science issue, which resulted in confusion, uncertainty, anger, and frustration. Here are some of the unanswered questions the meeting triggered but never resolved:

1. What was the purpose of the science survey on textbooks?
2. Are we deciding between textbooks and materials?
3. Would the textbook decision be made at this meeting? Would people have to decide on the spot with no thought or discussion?
4. What is our science curriculum? Who has it? Has it been agreed upon? Who knows about it?
5. What will happen next? What has been resolved?

There was no resolution of the textbook question. Instead, the meeting moved on to the next issue, the detention room, which suffered a similar, unsatisfying fate! After re-reading those notes, I understand why staff might be reluctant to meet more frequently!

Gretchen Brosius, teacher

It's funny, but sitting in that faculty meeting amidst all the turmoil and confusion, I felt "This is normal. This is the way things operate at Bluford." Sure. I was

aware that we had difficulty reaching conclusions. I just figured it was all due to our large staff and the array of personalities that come into play. I never thought that the bad communication at this meeting could be something fixable.

When given the opportunity to revisit that afternoon, I saw things from a much different perspective. By reading the notes that were taken days later, I was better able to remove myself from the emotions that I felt during the meeting. This gave me the chance to analyze what was actually happening. The problem became very clear to me when I saw it occurring time and time again throughout the faculty meeting: Nothing was ever resolved; everything was left hanging.

Returning later to look carefully at a record of what happened helps Carol and Gretchen to make the familiar, strange. With more distance they raise issues and questions that are difficult, but not impossible, to address.

As discussed earlier, TS/MC put a variety of data collection methods and analytical processes in the hands of school people. Below, Linda Staple describes how activities such as constructing charts, diagrams, and models, used in concert with participant observation and interviewing, provide frameworks for understanding what is happening, what knowledge people share, and what remains ambiguous, so that action plans can address real and significant problems.

Linda Staple, counselor

Our mission was to explore ways of facilitating better communication among our staff. We explored how information was generated and spread through the building. One of the institute's activities was to reflect on the field notes from the May faculty meeting; another was to draw an organizational diagram of how communication works and how decisions are made at Bluford. In doing this, we realized even we were confused about certain areas. Was the Governance Council a decision making body? Or was it a facilitator of information?

As he reviewed field notes from TS/MC planning meetings, Bill Garberina, Bluford's principal, built a fuller picture of what was going on. He began connecting events, instead of looking at them in isolation, and traced the roots of the communications "disaster" at the faculty meeting to "either/or thinking" that unnecessarily bifurcated issues.

The deadline for a decision regarding the purchase of textbooks created a sense of urgency and crisis that undermined thoughtful planning; themes were men-

tioned as important to the science program, but the discussion framed the issue as themes *versus* textbooks, rather than as textbooks complementing the continued development of the themes. The TS/MC team mapped out an outline for the faculty meeting discussion of science curriculum without a discussion of the coordinator's role or of the kinds of materials that might be helpful to teachers other than black line masters. The team only cursorily discussed the relationship of themes to the curriculum developed by the science committee. The TS/MC team agreed that unresolved issues should not be discussed in isolation at the faculty meeting. Unfortunately, the issues were discussed in isolation at the planning meeting.

Bill's analysis and interpretation moved us into considering how communication patterns and habits of mind *within* the Taking Stock/Making Change team complicated and undermined our communication with the rest of the school. His reflections show us how seeing the whole picture is vital to creating a context for productive deliberation.

Over time, Bluford made a number of changes that supported broadened participation of staff and parents in decision making and more deliberate and thoughtful decision making. But changes occurred over time, and could not be connected to a particular "aha" moment of the TS/MC team. Instead, these shifts emanated from a more amorphous but also deeper understanding of what good communication entails.

Everline Smith, teacher

We have made a number of changes as a result of "taking stock":

- Five members of the Home and School Association serve as members on the Governance Council and have the opportunity to be actively involved in school planning and shared decision making. The parental involvement committee of our Governance Council, led by our parent representative, now also works closely with the Home and School Association to have regular attendance at site-based meetings so that parents will have a voice at what were once all faculty meetings.
- Committees and the Governance Council now present several options to staff whenever there is a decision to be made, so that there can be deliberation about different courses of action.
- Each staff member agreed to serve on at least one subcommittee. Communication lines between the committees and the Governance Council were clarified, with committee members giving regular reports to the Council.
- Representatives of the Governance Council now meet with their constituents on a regular basis to

further inform staff and serve as their liaison at Council meetings.

- The minutes of committee meetings are distributed to the entire staff and additional copies are posted on the bulletin board and Philadelphia Federation [of Teachers] news board. This has decreased many concerns about not being informed.

People also became more aware of obstacles to communication and began to predict where breakdowns might occur and what was needed to prevent or at least alleviate problems.

Nancy Bernhardt and Denise Godwin, teachers

Now that we have adopted the small learning communities (SLCs), we will be making decisions and assessments by SLCs rather than grade groups. Our current communication and decision making problems and issues are: (1) lack of knowledge about what each SLC is doing, (2) each SLC sets their own standards and goals. . . . We need to (1) work to create more harmony through good communication among SLCs (2) SLC chairs should report information at whole faculty and Council meetings (3) grade groups need time to talk and collaborate.

AMY Northwest: Making Student Experience Visible

At AMY Northwest Middle School, parents and teachers on the school study team investigated students' experience at school, asking the question: "Are we doing what we say we're doing at AMY? How is AMY preparing our students for high school, according to the outcomes stated in our learning plan?" Parents, having been key to the direction this research project has taken, have pressed for students' involvement at every turn.

Linnie Jones, parent

Parents on the team agreed that if students were truly going to be workers and teachers were going to be their coaches, not their managers, then kids needed to do what they could to explain what AMY was doing and not doing. We kept asking: How do we know that AMY is getting the results it claims unless we ask students about their experience? How do we know what is working or not coming through unless we find out what kids think about what's going on and what students who graduated from AMY look back on? That is why I pushed to have students participate in the TS/MC project as co-researchers. I didn't think it was a frill or a come-on to make us more interesting. I believed that the students had very valuable information to offer that we might never hear unless we asked. So I wasn't surprised to hear one student comment about her participation in TS/MC, "I didn't realize I was

thinking clearly about these things until you asked the questions."

Gene Campher, an AMY teacher, recalls his uneasiness and excitement about the first meetings we had with students about the research.

Gene Campher, teacher

I know now that I had a lot of fears going in. What if the students didn't buy into the research, then what? Was I really prepared to hear what they had to say? What would it mean professionally and personally if I did not like what was said? It meant putting one's belief system on the line and taking whatever came along.

We often talk of school climate and school culture, but it's usually from the viewpoint of adults, the ones "in charge." Here we were daring to ask our consumers, current students, how they thought about what was happening with them and to them. . . . What a novel idea, asking students what the school setting looked and felt like to them!

As part of their reform, AMY has been exploring alternative forms of assessment aligned with exit standards the school developed. This excerpt from the first focus group interview of students became the heart of the matter for the AMY team's research during the first year of TS/MC:

Jody, researcher: If you were talking with a friend who was interested in coming to AMY, tell me something you would tell them about the school.

Student: I would tell them it's okay. It does have small classrooms; it's a good school because we're close and we know people. . . . But like here they pass you in the sixth and seventh grade, but eighth grade they start piling on the work. And so they pass you even if you don't deserve to be passed and when you get to eighth grade you expect to be passed and then they just like sock you.

Positioned initially as informants, this group of articulate students moved into co-researcher roles. By the end of the year they had generated a list of recommendations about assessment for faculty. The following are excerpts from the student recommendations:

Recommendations for consistency: Make standards, expectations, and practices very clear across the grades and subject areas at the beginning of the year. Give students rubrics at the beginning of the year. Spend time to show how they work and plan strategies so students can learn to use them for all work.

Recommendations for accountability: Find out whether teachers are doing what they claim they are doing. Make sure that the same standards and expectations of work are similar from teacher to teacher and are clearly understood by students.

Recommendations for building student trust: Make AMY more for kids than adults. Think kids will do the right thing. Trust kids so that they learn how to become trusting. Don't use bribes or threats to gain trust or respect. Group people who are different, so all relate to one another and can see better how to do things well.

With the support of parents and a teacher, students planned a presentation to staff during lunch. Faculty attendance was small and adult relationships strained as TS/MC team members wondered, "Don't teachers want to hear what their students have to say?" But the AMY team's vision of what they want school to be for young people is strong and the group remained committed to working together to make sense of what students were telling them. Parents added their perspectives on what student voices meant.

Bonnie Mason, parent

Although parents understood that evaluations were supposed to help them understand what each child was doing, the absence of clear criteria and expectations made it difficult to judge whether they were doing well or needed help. The question remained: What do the written evaluations tell us about achievement?

The problems with written evaluations for the whole community did not mean that they were useless and should be abandoned. One of the outcomes of learning to take stock/make change was seeing that each segment of the community perceived glitches but also sought constructive alternatives.

Student recommendations made their way into assessment practice and school staff reflected on who their students are and what committed adults want for young people.

Pat DeBrady, teacher

We [adult team members] have come to realize that two distinct realities function within the same space and rarely do the inhabitants of either realm view the emperor's raiment with the same eyes.

Lana Gold, teacher

It almost creeped me out reading [the transcripts of student interviews]. . . . They became a mini-society amongst themselves that I'm not aware of, a community of kids with a culture unto themselves that I'm alien to. None seemed to hesitate with questions. They are cognizant about what's happening. They hung together. The experience seemed unifying. There is not a lot of contradiction between them. They share a value system.

Holly Perry, principal

Academic success . . . was rarely mentioned by students as an indicator of success. . . . Students focused

on relational matters, on being heard and considered, on mattering to adults. Adults in schools spend a lot of time listening to youngsters. How do we expand our evaluation methods to capture and validate youngsters' finding their own voices and taking risks to change schools so that others might also experience such success?

Jody Cohen, CUE staff member, reflects that at AMY, the process had become the product:

Listening to student voices became the point. In order for the TS/MC team to really hear students, not only did we have to listen as individuals but also we had to negotiate with each other—from our different positions in youngsters' lives—our understandings of what students meant. In this way, by learning to listen to students not only as individuals but as a group, we struggle to make student voices integral to taking stock and making change in school.

Collaboration and the TS/MC Process

Has the TS/MC process made a difference in the schools? We can consider the key question for program evaluation that we posed in our proposal to the Knight Foundation: "By the end of the three years of the project, was more information, of more diverse kinds, being shared and used by the school in site-based management than at the beginning of the three years, and were more people involved in making shared professional decisions rather than individual ones?" That question presumes that TS/MC would foster collaboration in the schools. Presently there is evidence in each of the five schools that the answer is "Yes, but . . ."

As self-study progressed, the schools began to identify and pay attention collaboratively to different kinds of evidence than they had been accustomed to considering previously. At the beginning of the project, surveys and focus group interviews were the most often used methods of data collection. Eventually school people began to value field notes, written records of what was happening. In one school, videotapes of the school yard during lunch time became a stimulus for problem solving and reflection. Diverse information sources became essential as the need for greater collaboration within the schools became apparent through collective dialogue in which school participants began to see how various parts of their school's invisible culture fit together.

Connecting the research process to decision making and action was a challenge in each school. Usually this involved problems of incomplete collaboration

within the school and between TS/MC participants and the whole school. Sometimes there were not communication mechanisms in place to connect the TS/MC team's research to other groups in the school. Sometimes there were not forums or processes available for whole school deliberation of issues.

We began with the assumption that when people from different positions (e.g., parent, teacher, student, principal, noon-time aide, university outsider) collect and analyze ethnographic data, they not only learn more about everyday school problems, but their collaborative action research process itself can help to interrupt routinized, dysfunctional communication and inequitable power arrangements. We found that this was not always the case. Sometimes, teams became marginalized in their work with groups (noon-time aides, parents, students, teachers) perceived by others in the school as irrelevant to a school's current decision making and change. Sometimes, decisions serendipitously occurred in other parts of the school because whole-school processes for deliberation were incompletely realized or were out of synchrony with the press for immediate action.

Yet, while TS/MC school stories hold their share of disappointment and frustration, each school in its own way and its own moment has been a site of possibility actualized. Information is indeed being generated and shared more widely (among more people and across more constituent groups) and new kinds of information are actually being drawn on in the school's daily work. This means that collaboration is more wide-reaching within each school now than it was when the TS/MC work began.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the TS/MC experience, we are impressed by three points concerning our collaborative action research. First, research, reflection, and action did not link in the ways that we anticipated. Schools did not make *decisions*, in the usual sense of the term. It is difficult to identify particular moments at which insight precipitated plans for new action. The initial assumption of the CUE staff that we could interrupt the "fire-aim-ready" sequence by asking schools to *reflect first* was not borne out in our TS/MC experience. CUE staff, school staff, parents, and students learned that if reflection and taking stock were to happen, it would have to take place in the midst of the action of daily practice, not only in

moments of "time out" that consultants could create by fiat. As Holly Perry, principal at AMY put it. "We're always making change. This project helped us take stock as we do it."

Second, we have learned that in spite of the immediacy and the fragmentation of their daily life, schools as whole communities can become more collaboratively deliberative in the process of change. When constituencies across the school community take stock by documenting their current ways of doing things, this makes visible and thus discussible what is happening and the variety of ways that people are "making sense" in the school community. The obvious *so* often becomes invisible—silent and sometimes silenced as well. Documenting it becomes the kind of self-study that can strengthen a school's capacity for collaboration and shared governance.

Through paying attention that is closer than usual, schools begin to develop a collective organizational history as a knowledge base for change. In the process of paying attention to a variety of kinds of evidence, they can learn to communicate more fully and openly as a whole school community. But as the Bluford and AMY stories illustrate, constituent groups do not move neatly into alignment as they research together. Bonnie Mason, AMY parent explains:

It's important to note that there is and was no simple cause and effect between what the team could see in the data and constant revision of changes. Faculty did not re-evaluate [assessment practices] *because of* student recommendations or parental concerns.

It was our experience that "taking stock"—paying closer attention than usual—could also make barriers to open communication more visible and more openly painful than they had been before. Collective organizational self-scrutiny takes courage.

Third, we have learned that collaboration between friendly outsiders and those inside schools is important in school improvement. CUE staff have realized how arduous and continuous is the process of genuine school change. Ongoing contextualized work with friendly outsiders—not only people from the university, but also people from other public schools—can help keep momentum going. As true friends, such outsiders provide both support and challenge. As outsiders who have come to possess local knowledge, they model views that are long and wide yet are realistic about specific difficulties that lie ahead for the school site.