Reflecting on Reading
Improvement at the
William Levering School

TAKING STOCK / MAKING CHANGE

Reflecting on Reading Improvement at the William Levering School

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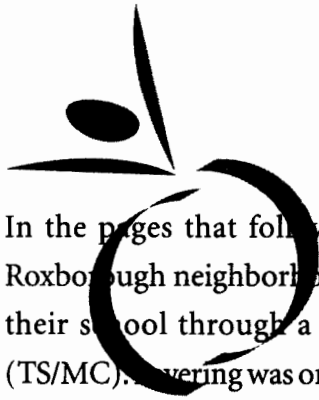
INTRODUCTION

In the pages that follow, members of the Levering School Community in the Roxborough neighborhood of Philadelphia tell the story of their efforts to improve their school through a three year project called Taking Stock/Making Change (TS/MC). Levering was one of five schools in the School District to work with "friendly outsiders" from the Graduate School of Education's Center for Urban Ethnography (CUE) at the University of Pennsylvania. In this public school/university partnership each school staff studied their school and used what they learned as a basis for reforms—a means of school change known as action research. Also participating in TS/MC were the Brown and Webster elementary schools, both in Kensington; the Bluford Elementary Science Magnet School in West Philadelphia; and AMY Northwest school in Mount Airy.

These schools were chosen to participate in TS/MC through an application process open to all schools involved in School Based Management/Shared Decision-Making, an initiative of the School District of Philadelphia that allows participating schools to make decisions at the local level, rather than having decisions made for them at the level of the central office. TS/MC called for a team of teachers, parents, and administrators from each of the five schools to perform school self-study, with the belief that continual stock-taking is an essential component of school-based change; schools must have the capacity to assess their decision-making and improvement efforts so that they can revise them.

In week-long summer institutes and Saturday retreats from 1993 to 1996, the five school teams worked with staff from CUE at Penn to learn ethnographic research methods such as one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, participant observation, surveys, and analysis of school documents. In addition, CUE staff consulted with the teams throughout the year as they carried out their research, analyzed their data, planned reforms, and gathered further data about what was happening in their schools.

Taking stock means looking more carefully than usual to see what you have at the moment. Ethnography documents the daily life of people and their points of view on

what they are doing. Ethnographers have realized that most of the time people are so accustomed to their daily routines and so busy doing them that they don't pay much attention to what is going on. Everyday life becomes invisible in its living. There is an ethnographic proverb, "The fish would be the last to discover the existence of water." That is why taking stock is necessary.

People in schools need access to what often remains invisible to them, so that they can solve the significant, everyday problems that block school improvement. Ethnographic research methods are important tools for problem solving. While Philadelphia schools had, for some time, examined a variety of kinds of data about school outcomes like attendance rates, standardized test scores, and report card marks, they were unaccustomed to considering information gathered through reviewing documents, interviewing, and observation—the traditional research methods of ethnography. Answers to questions like "How do we teach reading in this school?" "What do staff understand about how decisions are made?" and "When do students feel successful?" remained part of what was invisible.

Taking Stock/Making Change began with the assumption that the problems schools face, especially urban schools, are so severe that the pressure to do *something* can lead to a "ready-fire-aim" approach to school reform—with deliberation and reflection after the reforms have been implemented, if at all. When this happens, reforms that have been conceived and mandated from above are often not fully "owned" by local school staff, and 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 collective, deliberate, and data-based; less a matter of lip service, more a matter of actual commitment.

> **Taking Stock/Making Change Staff:**
> Fred Erickson, Center for Urban Ethnography
> Jolley Bruce Christman, Research for Action
> Judy Buchanan, Philadelphia Education Fund
> Jody Cohen, Research for Action
> Paul Skilton Sylvester, Center for Urban Ethnography

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I hate the summer heat and the very last thing I wanted to do was to spend the hot, humid days of July 1993 in a classroom at the University of Pennsylvania with another new principal. (We had had five others over the past 5 1/2 years!)

> Orcilla Wilkinson, first-grade teacher

As a first-time principal, I felt fortunate to participate in a summer workshop which enabled me to meet at least one third of my staff. It provided insight into the program and the personalities at Levering.

> Diane Luffy, in-coming Principal

Another new change program. Another new principal. There was good reason for the old-timers among us to be cynical: Previous programs and previous principals had not brought the sweeping changes we had idealistically envisioned. Yet we went, many of us with that feeling of cynicism, hoping for the best, and determined to positively change the William Levering School. Taking Stock /Making Change, the university-based change agent, was to be our vehicle for moving forward with site-based management and shared decision-making.

Naming the Problem

During the first Taking Stock/Making Change workshop a number of areas of concern came up, but ultimately our school's team chose to focus its action research project on reading. At our school, too many changes in leadership had occurred in recent years, leading to an inefficient, dysfunctional reading program. This was the problem which

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was to become the focus for our TS/MC project. To improve the reading program, we felt that we would first need to understand its present state, what actually was occurring in classrooms, so that we could understand where changes were needed. The range of concerns of the TS/MC team members can be seen from notes taken by Judy Buchanan and Paul Skilton Sylvester, "friendly outsiders" from the University of Pennsylvania, in one of our group's early meetings.

Another new change program. Another new principal.

"What is the nature of the 'reading problem' we are talking about at Levering?"

"We don't have a reading program. How do these kids progress?"

"We need to meet."

"We need to plan across grades."

"We need to know 'Are the children reading? Are they being challenged?'"

"I would like someone to say, 'This is our reading plan. Kids in this grade are doing this. Kids in those grades are doing that.'"

Such concerns as these were distilled into two research questions: "What is happening in the language arts at the Levering School? How do we discover this while building morale and keeping lines of communication open?"

To get feedback on whether the rest of the faculty thought we were on the right track, the team held focus groups in September, asking teachers their opinions of these research questions. Teachers overwhelmingly approved of the questions.
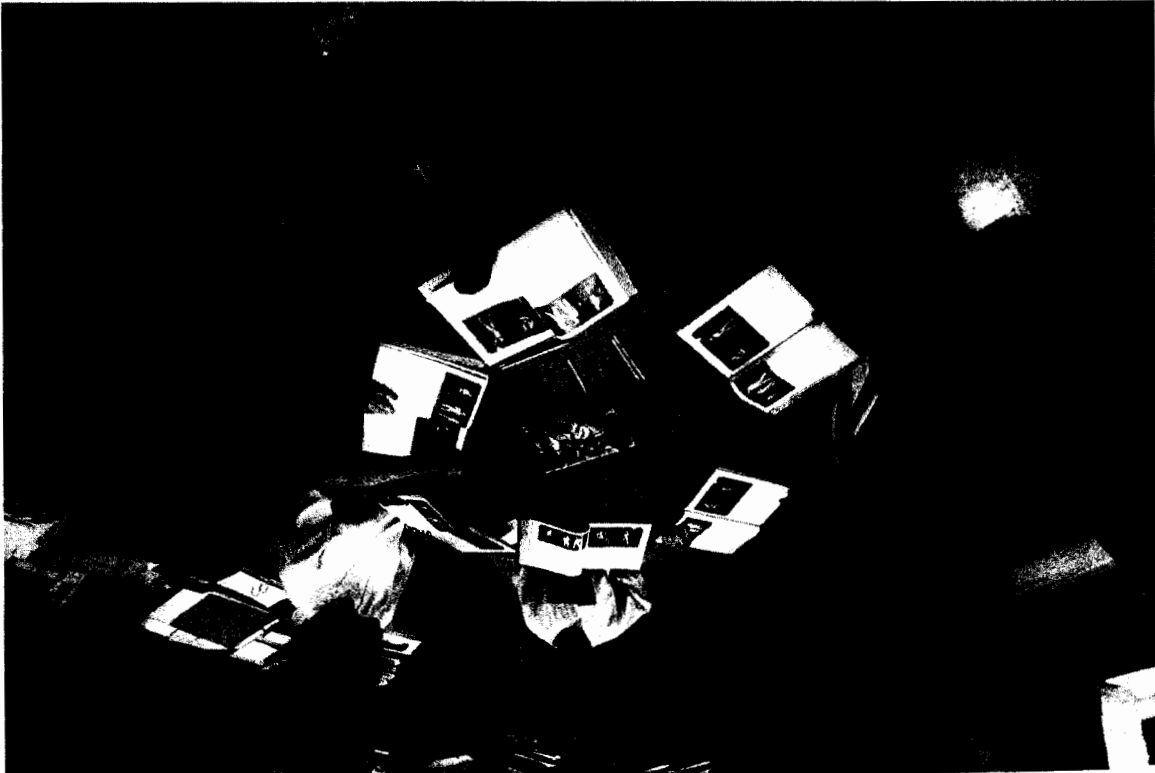
During the focus groups with the rest of the faculty, it became clear that the lack of coherence in the reading program overlapped with another issue: a division between the faculty of the lower school, housed in one building, and that of the upper school, housed in another. Carol Gillin, a reading teacher in the upper grades explained.

"New building, old building": two terms I found misleading when I came to Levering. First of all, neither building comes close to looking "new"; so what was the terminology about?

There was good reason for the old-timers among us to be cynical.

I think that it actually reflected a state of mind and a wall build between "them," and "us." The "them" and the "us" were the divisions between the lower and upper school. Due to being in different buildings and having uncommon preps, we had little knowledge of each other or each others' programs. Misconceptions come about when people can see their own goals and problems more easily than the goals and problems of others—more so when separated from the others.

Teachers in focus groups added another perspective on this problem. We heard that while geographic separation was one factor in this division, so was the shortage of resources and the feeling of resentment that the upper grades had in the recent past got-

ten more than the lower grades. Many people attributed the lack of supplies to the school not being a "Chapter I" school.

There was also talk in the focus groups about needing to improve not only the school's program but also the perceptions about the school's program by the parents and outside community. On this subject, one teacher said that walking in the building, there didn't seem to be a clear image of what the school was about. In another group a teacher said, "We visited a school where there were displays when you walked in...things hanging from the ceiling. You got a good feeling." Another teacher said, "We need publicity."

We need to know "Are the children reading? Are they being challenged?"

As the team articulated more and more dimensions to their concerns about reading, Paul, the team's facilitator from the University of Pennsylvania, drew the following diagram to show how the group's concerns fit together (Figure 1). The diagram seemed to help us, as a team, hold the focus of the project in our minds without having to oversimplify it.

Reading the diagram from the center to the periphery, to us it meant

1) The focus of our action research project was on reading.

2) Our goals within the school were to make reading more meaningful for kids, for them to gain recognition for their successes so that reading became an esteemed activity.

3) The means by which we would improve reading were

    a) understanding students' experience of reading and supporting what they found meaningful,
    b) fostering common understanding between parents and the faculty,
    c) allowing ownership and involvement on the parts of parents,
    d) unifying the teachers in the upper and lower schools.

FIGURE 1

improved external reputation of Levering School

PARENTS

common understanding
of goals,
ownership/involvement

PRINCIPAL   READING   TEACHERS

reading esteemed by
kids—meaningful, not a
chore,recognition of progress

STUDENTS

improved external reputation of Levering School
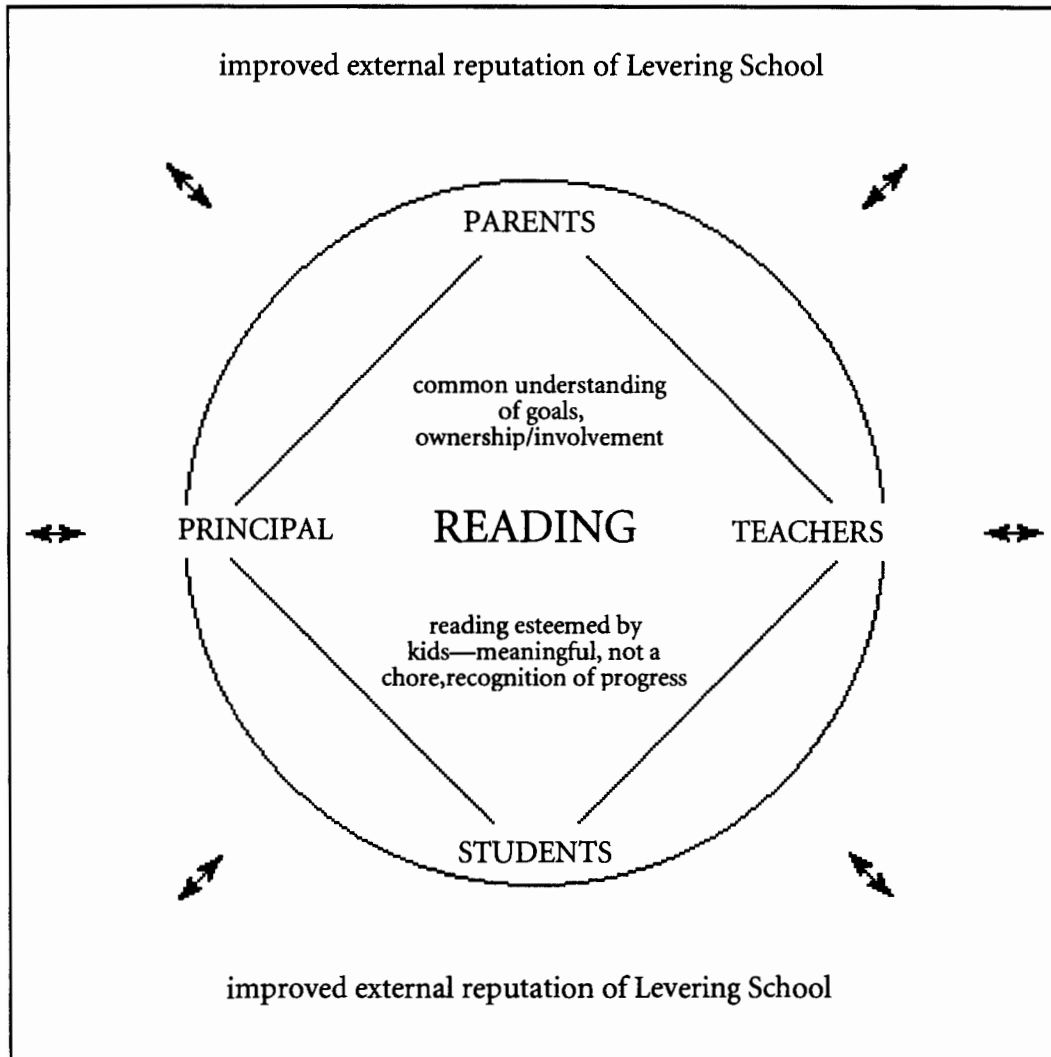
4) Finally, our goals outside of the school were to use improvements in the reading program to improve the school's reputation. We hoped that an improved reputation would boost motivation for learning. This interplay between the community's perceptions and what occurred within the school was shown in the diagram by the arrows pointing in both directions between the outer circle and the school community within.

By bringing diverse members of the school community together, TS/MC helped us to develop rapport and to "surface" issues that had been previously hidden.

Research/Reform: What is Happening with Classroom Reading?

As we will describe, the TS/MC program did allow us to gather data about what was actually happening in classrooms with regards to reading as well as students' personal experiences of reading. The TS/MC program also had an unintended consequence for us: By bringing diverse members of the school community together with our new principal to discuss the academic program, TS/MC helped us to develop rapport and to "surface" issues that had been previously hidden. Aided by their lack of involvement with the internal politics of the school, TS/MC's facilitators were able to pull staff ideas together and created a comfort zone where staff was not at odds with each other. There were new chances for dialogue.

TABLE 1		
Question:	Our goal in asking it:	Research method used:
1) What is happening in the classrooms with regards to reading?	Clarify the school-wide reading program.	• Written surveys of teachers • followed by focus groups.
2) What are kids' experiences of reading?	Improve the school-wide reading program.	• Written survey of students, • Interviews of students, • Written surveys of parents re: their family's reading habits.
3) How can we improve standardized test scores?	Improve motivation for learning.	• Trying new instructional strategies while tracking CTBS scores over years/comparing to reading grades.

Our research activities followed three parallel paths shown in Table 1.

In one of the early meetings of the TS/MC team, a special education teacher in a learning-support classroom related frustrating experiences in the area of reading which had occurred since arriving at Levering in January, 1979. For many years, she had had to adjust to many different reading specialists and their varying attitudes about what special education students should and should not have in the area of reading, language arts, phonics, etc. Budget constraints affected purchasing decisions too. To her amazement, several of the regular education teachers were having some of the same problems: They too were effected by the changes in the reading teachers' instructional philosophies and the lack of funds for materials. She found that she was not alone in her struggle.

To address these concerns over a lack of coordination in the reading program and concerns about how money was being spent, the TS/MC team chose to collect data on what was being done in classrooms and what teachers felt that they needed.

She found that she was not alone in her struggle.

At the time that the team was beginning to think about the best way to collect data on how the faculty was teaching reading and what materials they were using, Dr. Frederick Erickson (another of the team's facilitators and a professor of education) offered suggestions based on his experience with previous research he had done at Michigan State University. He said that needs assessments can end up being superficial if all the data is collected from the teachers' first pass at the question; teachers may end up saying what they need before they have a chance to think about the range of possibilities. If, on the other hand, the surveying is done as a recursive process, with two or more cycles of data collection, teachers' "wants" can get "smarter and smarter."

As a result of this conversation, the TS/MC team ended up first doing a written survey of teachers' reading practices and needs, followed by focus group interviews. We asked questions such as: What reading materials do you use in your classroom? How many reading groups do you have in your classroom? Are you comfortable with the reading materials that you use? Do you think that these materials meet the needs of the children? The results of the survey are summarized in Table 2.

Needs assessments can end up being superficial if all the data is collected from the teachers' first pass at the question.

The survey helped us learn the truth about a number of our concerns: the number of books, assessment tests, and continuity of the reading program. The truth was that there were books, but many of them were old and tattered. Teachers and students were not anxious to use them, and understandably so. Some grades had a surplus of materials to use, while others suffered for one reason or another. As for the reading program's continuity, it was actually more consistent than was at first believed. The same series was used throughout grades K-8; it contained the necessary reading books or basals, skillbooks, and assessment tests.

Under our new principal, money was earmarked for developing the reading program. The TS/MC team, together with the assistance of the reading committee, was to carefully assess the needs of the school. We perused and evaluated several reading series and decided on an updated basal similar to the one being used because it addressed many teacher concerns: It had an emphasis on whole language and literature, yet had a basal format for those teachers who were more comfortable with a traditional method. Moreover, it appeared to offer means for reliable assessment.

To date, over half of the school population has updated reading books and materials, multicultural literature, and some high interest/low ability-level books. The updating of our books has been a gradual process due to a persistent lack of funds.

TABLE 2: Summary of Interviews of Teachers Re: Reading Program 12/94

	Burning need felt by teachers?	Materials?	# Groups?	Placement in groups by...	Assessment of student progress?	Are you comfortable with the materials you use?	Do you think the materials meet needs of kids?	What happens to a kid who doesn't fit in groups?	Should 7th & 8th grade have readers or literature or both?	How do you prepare for standard. tests?	What are the most reliable indicators of reading level?	What are you measuring in reading?
K		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1st		a) Ginn basal b) trade books c) other basals	at least two; (one teacher said "4 and working on a 5th.")	testing for placement or using level recorded at end of previous year	a) unit tests for readers b) teacher made tests for trade books	OK	yes	a) resource room b) minimal movement between groups c) 1st	N/A	teacher made activities		a) book tests b) standardized tests "in the background"
2nd		a) Ginn basal b) trade books	at least two	use level recorded at end of previous year	(same as above)	OK	*needs a basal more suited to bottom group*	(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	1) IRI 2) class performance	• vocabulary • comprehension • decoding • study skills
3rd		a) Ginn basal b) trade books	(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	*needs trade books in sets of 10-15*		(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)		(same as above)
4th		(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	OK		(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)		(same as above)
5th		(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	comprehensive questions from teacher's text	OK		(same as above)	(same as above)	teacher made activities and reading unit tests		(same as above)
6th		(same as above) *needed: assessment tests, workbooks, skill packs*	5 groups plus groups to Mrs. Valentine	retesting many students for placement	(same as above)	*7th grade text needed*		(same as above)	(same as above)	purchased materials		(same as above)

TABLE 2 (continued): Summary of Interviews of Teachers Re: Reading Program 12/94

	Burning need felt by teachers?	Materials?	# Groups?	Placement in groups by...	Assessment of student progress?	Are you comfortable with the materials you use?	Do you think the materials meet needs of kids?	What happens to a kid who doesn't fit in groups?	Should 7th & 8th grade have readers or literature or both?	How do you prepare for standard. tests?	What are the most reliable indicators of reading level?	What are you measuring in reading?
7th	• better placement • more special services • definite program consistency	a) Ginn 6th grade level b) Prentice Hall 7th c) newspapers d) trade books e) skill pages from 6th	3 groups plus groups to resource room	• sixth grade teachers • Mrs. Valentine	group 1: teacher tests, book reports, projects, journals	*comfortable but new books needed. Vista readers needed in lower 7th. DONE*	not all; need high interest materials	more information needed ("That's the problem; not much choice provided.")	some feel no readers should be used; others feel that some groups do need readers	if you mean CTBS—through vocabulary, comp. sheets, once a week	ability to handle material	• vocabulary • comprehension • decoding • study skills
8th		a) African American literature text b) Prentice Hall test c) trade books	3 groups plus resource room and Mrs. Valentine	(same as above)	(same as above)	*Vista readers need in lower 8th. DONE* *need another 16 for full set*	yes	(same as above)	(same as above)	(same as above)	end of book tests. CTBS % for previous spring	(same as above)
Reading Specialist		• 1982 books: 1-8 • 1989 books: 2,4,6 (1 set each) • 1993 books: 1,3,5,6 (1 set each)	groups also seen by reading teacher	levels are used according to evaluation (*Reading teachers?*) teacher assessment	• level tests • unit tests • placement tests • IRI's • teacher made tests	Some 7th and 8th grade Vista readers ordered *needed: high interest/low reading books, Scholastics or Scope, additional MultiCultural literature books*	it varies— high interest/ low readability materials needed to reach all students	• cycle • pair with class where students will fit • put in group that nearly meets student's needs • individual help	both	• teacher test-taking strategies • use purchased materials (samples) • use teacher made materials	• IRI's • performance • multiple test indicators	• comprehension • reading levels • growth

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What are Kids' Experiences of Reading?

Through informal contact with parents, the TS/MC team was aware of parents' concerns about their children's reading practices. Because of these concerns, the TS/MC team decided to enlist parents help in learing about students' reading practices. Forty-five parents were asked to fill out a survey asking about their reading practices and those of their children. We asked how frequently they read to their children, whether their children say they like reading in school and at home, and whether they find it difficult to help their children with book reports. At the end of the survey, we solicited suggestions for improving our reading program.

"The hardest part of reading is hiding the book from the teacher on my lap under the desk."

Around the same time, other teachers added to this data by surveying their students about their own reading practices, asking complimentary questions and adding another dimension to our data. We received some quite refreshing and positive responses to these inquiries. For example, "The hardest part of reading," one student wrote, "is hiding the book from the teacher on my lap under the desk,"—certainly a truthful response! Another student responded that she liked to read "because it is like you are in the book on an adventure."

But such responses as these weren't at all "in sync" with the majority of students at our school. Across the grades, the general consensus was, "Yes, I read," but, "No, I don't do it for fun." One area of agreement among the general school population was that book reports were "the pits" and, if anything, hindered a desire to read. "I'm always nervous I'll forget important parts of the story," one student admitted. Many emphasized that book reports "take all the fun out reading."

Students also expressed an abhorrence for historical fiction, science fiction, and biographies. If given a choice, most would choose mysteries, real-life fiction, and humorous stories. Hundreds of students also admitted it was "hard for them to find time to read." Many confided it was rare for them to read a book from cover to cover, especially in a genre they disliked.

The TS/MC-generated survey provided insight for teachers as to the reading interests and habits of our students. The information resulted in a change in teaching practices and led to significant modification in student reading habits. For example, the surveys helped one teacher on the TS/MC team, Jo Ellen Peterman, realize that her kids were really doing little extended, meaningful reading. They were accustomed to reading sections of stories in the old basals, rather than losing themselves in an entire book. Her goal became to get her class to read a full length novel from beginning to end.

The general consensus was, "Yes, I read," but, "No, I don't do it for fun."

Three to five times a week, Jo Ellen set aside periods to read using the newly purchased, multicultural, literature-based books. Three genres were chosen: realistic fiction, historical science fiction, and legend. The class started with the most well-liked genre, realistic fiction, by reading the book *Just My Luck*. Students were amazed that they were going to read the whole book, even though it was relatively short—a mere 103 pages at a 4.6 level. They were further amazed when they actually completed it.

They were aghast when *Willie Bea and the Day the Martians Landed* was distributed to their individual desks (208 pages; no pictures). Every pupil was certain there was no way they'd read all of it. They did, and they admitted historical science fiction wasn't so bad after all. At the end of the year, the class easily accepted a short and sweet legend, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. And, yes indeed, book reports were completed on each book read, but we found that students enjoyed doing the book reports more when they had the chance to do them in collaboration with friends.

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Another regular education teacher, also a part of the TS/MC team, Marie Lee Malen, discussed the subject of her students' dislike of reading with two friends who are educational psychologists. The psychologists assured her that any reading children did was beneficial regardless of whether it was comics, sports magazines, or baseball cards. Marie Lee shared this with the TS/MC team, adding it to the pool of shared under-

standing. In her own classroom, she decided to change her expectations as to books read and book reports. She still expected each student to read at least one book a month, but instead of assigning genres, students in her class were allowed to choose books that appealed to them. Partners were chosen and they recommended books to each other. She tried non-traditional book-reports: Students designed book covers and wrote blurbs; they made bookmarks; they wrote acrostics of characters; they shared their stories orally with small groups; and, they acted out their favorite parts.

Through the collaborative exchange of ideas and discussions, we came up with a wealth of new and challenging strategies in reading.

The results were very positive. The students found a particular author and read everything they could by that author. They willingly read on their own! At report card conferences, many parents expressed relief that they didn't have to struggle and fight over the completion of book reports any more. The teacher didn't feel guilty about omitting disliked genres because our new reading series was literature-based and included all genres.

Special education teachers began to incorporate some of our new ideas, based on the student reading survey, in coordination with the regular education teachers. This was something totally unheard of in past years. They ventured out with yet another strategy for teaching reading. Teacher Marilynn Pace got the book *Pagemaster* and read to all of the eighth graders. Then it was discussed in detail. Later, after the completion of the book, the class went to see the animated movie. They loved it! The teachers involved decided to continue this new trend in school using video movies (funds were low) after reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The students got a change from the routine of the basal studybook and skillpack. Teachers cooperated together in the planning of a new strategy and brought students together who were often separated from one another.

The student reading survey, mentioned earlier, was used to facilitate and to increase the time students spent reading and to demonstrate students' ability to read a whole book. A further benefit to the students was that they seemed more able to concentrate

on the long stories in their literature-based basal reader. Teachers reported informally that they were finding less need to cajole students into sustained reading and that reading appeared to be becoming less of a chore and more of a pleasure.

Along with the changes in classrooms, reading was made a priority throughout the school: Bulletin boards promoted it; the library was opened for students to use at recesses; money was put toward the purchase of sets of multicultural books for every classroom. Our goal was to provide every possible opportunity to increase the students' love of reading.

As anyone who works in a school can attest, sometimes very mundane problems can derail attempts at improvement.

Through the collaborative exchange of ideas and discussions among our teachers, we came up with a wealth of new and challenging strategies in reading. Taking Stock / Making Change meetings, work-shops, and retreats fostered these changes; a foundation was laid toward a better understanding of how reading could be creatively taught to stimulate our students' growth. It was a process long overdue.

The Next Stage: How Can We Improve Test Scores?

The Summer Institute in 1994 gave the TS/MC team a chance to review where we had been and to help us decide on the directions we wanted and needed to go. We were able to see what problems were affecting the other schools involved in TS/MC and how they worked together in approaching, dealing with, and solving their problems.

The main mission for the teams from the five schools that got together in the second Summer Institute was to discern if there was a visible progression of changes. In the fall of 1994, the TS/MC team added a concerted and specific effort to improve our reading scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to the agenda of positively changing our reading program. The CTBS is the standardized tests given to students throughout the School District of Philadelphia. We wanted to know if the changes we were making were, in fact, improving our test scores; and if so, we wanted to make this known inside and outside of the school to improve our "academic morale."
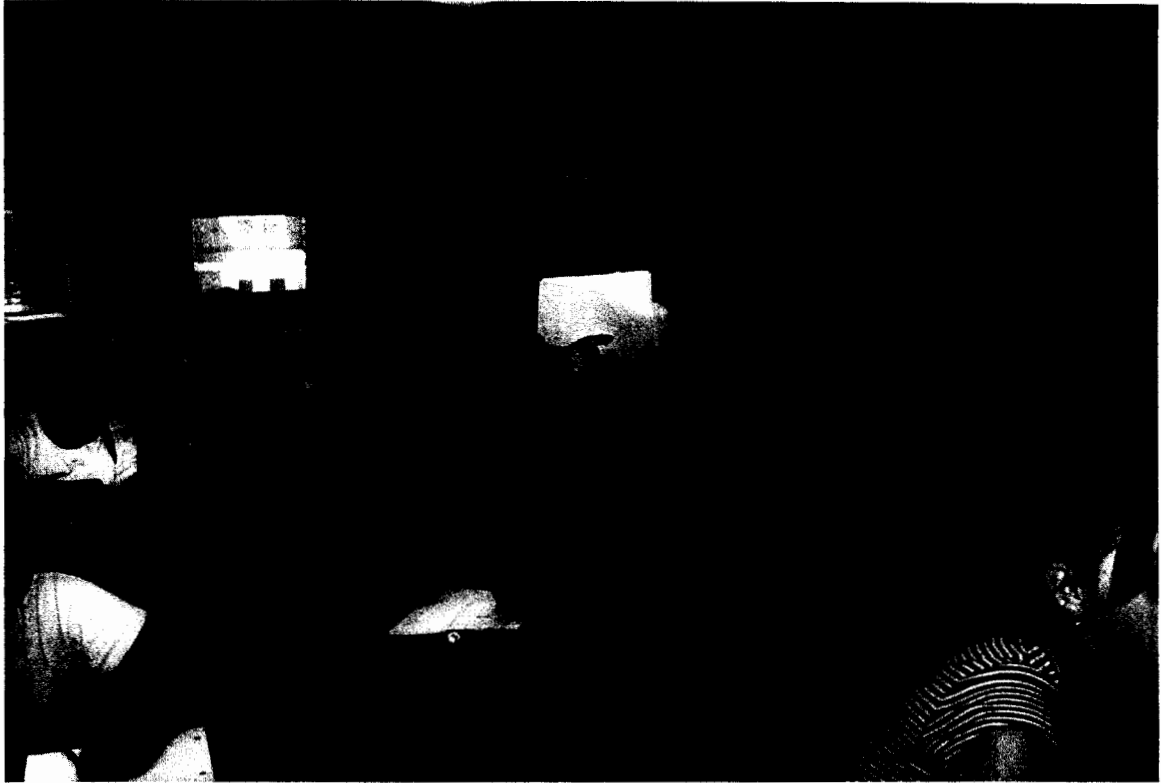
We also knew that standardized tests scores reflect not only reading ability, but also test-taking ability. To make sure that students were adequately prepared in this second area, we decided to offer lessons in test-taking. Since many of our students did not perform well on either vocabulary or critical reading skills, we, the TS/MC team decided to facilitate extra work in these areas. Materials intended to better vocabulary skills were purchased. Teachers were asked to allot time twice a week to work with their students using the purchased supplies.

Although our focus was on the reading program, much else was accomplished.

All went well for about three months: Papers were run off, distributed, and completed. As anyone who works in a school can attest, sometimes very mundane problems can derail attempts at improvement. In this case, the person in charge of the Xerox machine went on indefinite sick leave. For a while, no papers were run off. The person who then took over, refused to run off the vocabulary sheets, saying that if the people from Penn's TS/MC wanted them done, they could pay for it. He was steadfast in his posi-

tion. One of the sixth grade teachers began running off the papers on the antiquated ditto machine: four classes, 140 sheets at a time. She couldn't use both sides of the paper so instead of using 280 sheets of paper per week, she was using 560. She quickly depleted her personal paper supply, was covered with purple ink all of the time, and became just plain frustrated. She eventually "abandoned ship" by continuing to do papers for her own class, but not for the others.

At this writing, a new person has taken on the machine. Full speed ahead! So far the results have been encouraging: School-wide reading scores have improved on an average of 4.5% per child between 1994 and 1995. At a faculty meeting, the principal read these scores to the staff and also entered them in the daily notice to teachers. One teacher on the TS/MC team remarked about the scores, "The most remarkable thing is that our scores were as good or better than schools that are thought to be much better than us. We're holding our own or improving." The next step will be to make sure that the parents and community members are also aware of Levering's improvements.

We plan to continue to use the action research format of TS/MC. Professional development time will be devoted to the topic of how to meet the reading needs of low achieving students. The expectation is that this will bring the whole language method into focus, as well as continuing the discussion on the limitations of the basal method; currently Levering's program uses both the basal reader and whole language. The professional time will involve critical thinking on the part of staff members with regard to pedagogical approaches for the "at risk" students.

Conclusion

> Although our focus was on the reading program, much else was accomplished....It took me several months to realize that TS/MC might be and was going to be a channel for introducing our new principal to her staff in small groups and visa versa....Due to our involvement in TS/MC and her openness, better communications and an open dialogue between her and the staff was begun, giving us all a better understanding of what our mutual vision for the Levering School was, and is.
>
> Orcilla Wilkinson, kindergarten teacher

TS/MC afforded the team the time to recognize and analyze the reading program. Teachers, in general, often feel overwhelmed. At Levering we were feeling particularly

pressed, especially for time to meet professionally and discuss issues such as the continuity of the reading program between the grades and where to spend our precious little funding to augment our reading supplies. TS/MC allowed us to work together in a professional way—with compensation—to solve the problems.

Paul, from the University of Pennsylvania, expressed the work of Levering this way:

> At a family wedding I learned something from my cousin that has helped me to make sense of the work we've done at Levering. My cousin works as an engineer for Intel, the computer chip company. Discussing changes in their company he said that they used to have an expression, "Throw it over the wall." What this meant was that on any given project the work of one group was "thrown over the wall" to the next group: The research and development people would do their work and "throw it over the wall" to the design people; the design people would work do their work and "throw it over the wall" to the manufacturing people, and so on. The expression was meant to describe the lack of communication and coordination between functional groups. To his great satisfaction, my cousin reports that at Intel they have made changes to remedy this: Now a product is made by a single team made up of people from different divisions.
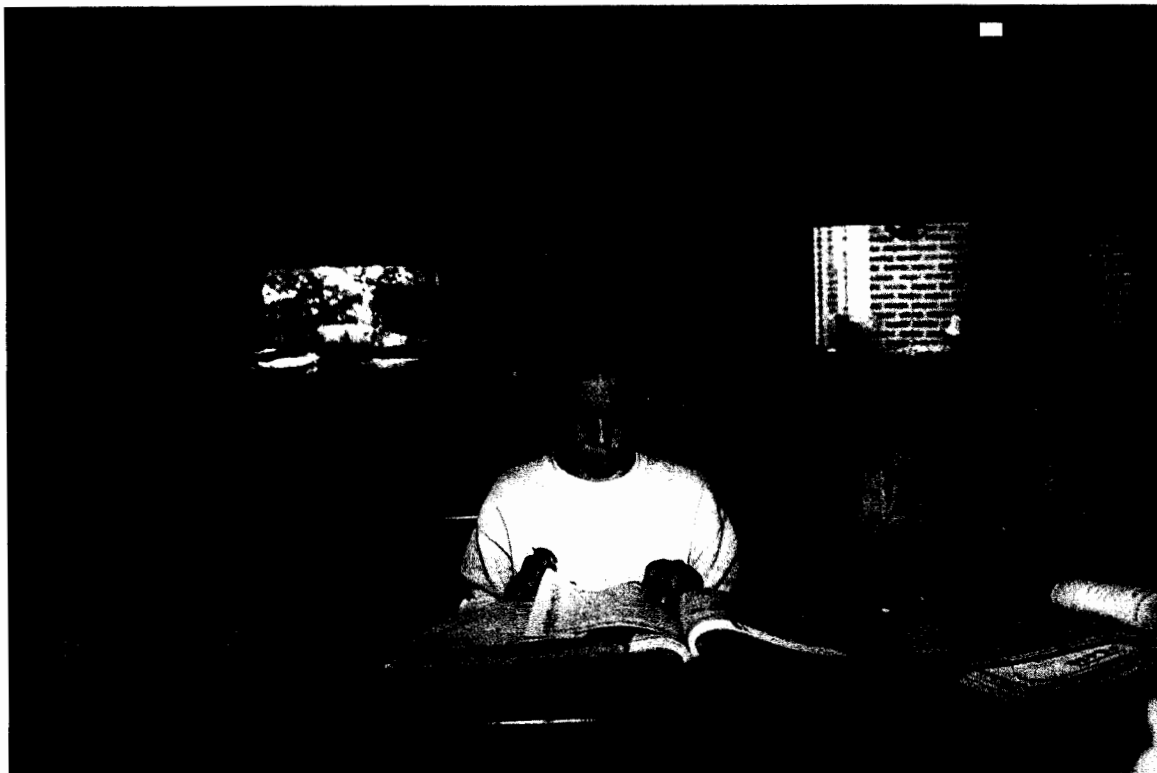
Thinking of my cousin's anecdote in terms of schools, I wondered what it is that we, as educators, throw over the wall. I cringed when it occurred to me: the kids! We throw kids "over the wall" as they proceed from classroom to classroom, from teacher to teacher, from elementary school to middle school, from the "old building" to the "new building."

TS/MC provided a variety of opportunities for cross-talk within the Levering school community. At Levering, the kind of isolation that my cousin described at the old Intel led the team to start a whole-school dialogue about what teachers were actually doing when they taught reading, and whether this made sense given students reading practices.

Our treatment of the decidedly critical issue of reading has led to improved feelings among most of the staff at Levering. Our TS/MC team of facilitators, teachers, parents, and administration feel good about creating a more open and collegial atmosphere for teachers and a more effective reading curriculum for Levering students. Through our TS/MC research, analysis, and problem solving, the Levering staff has been able to show many parents just how far we are willing to go to provide a curriculum to meet their children's needs, especially in the area of reading.

Hopefully, with the implementation of the new reading program and innovative strategies, we will raise our students' level of achievement. Simultaneously, we hope to elevate their attitudes towards reading and school, and their pride in accomplishment and self. With teachers, parents, and students all feeling uplifted and more educationally successful, TS/MC has helped create three groups of messengers who will all spread the good news of the revitalization of Levering. In this way TS/MC endeavors will help us meet a secondary goal of improving our school's reputation in the community.