MAKING CHILDREN LARGER AND CRACKS SMALLER:

THE ROLE OF A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION IN SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Program Leaders:

Linda Gottlieb, Principal on Special Assignment, 1991-1993
Carol Rose, Teacher on Special Assignment, 1991-1995
Charlotte Silversteen, Teacher on Special Assignment, 1994-1995

Connectors:

This list includes the names of only those Connectors who followed students as part of this study. The dates following their names indicate the school years in which they were participants.

Allen
Rosemary Howard, 1991-1993
James Morley, 1991-1995
Elizabeth Riley, 1991-1995
Bernice Walinsky, 1993-1993
Gail Zalut, 1993-1995

Bethune
Vernece Nobles-Harley, 1991-1994
Shirley Riley, 1991-1995
Eliza Watts, 1991-1995

Cleveland
Anne Foti, 1991-1995
Janice Green, 1991-1995
Cathi Clegg, 1991-1995

Dick
Betty Avery, 1991-1995
Kathy Fleming, 1994-1995
Gwen Green, 1991-1994
Sharon McIntosh, 1991-1993

Duckrey
Kathi Bride, 1992-1995
Peggie Johnson, 1991-1995
Margaret Mullen-Bavwidinski,
　　1991-1993
Ruth Ann Pigford, 1993-1995

FitzSimons
Rochelle DeVor, 1991-1994
Fannie Fisher, 1992-1995
Arvel Wells, 1991-1995

Gillespie
Diane Brown, 1991-1995
Mary Dillman, 1991-1995
Susan Gelfand, 1991-1995
Beth Shanken, 1991-1995

Gratz
Rochelle Henderson, 1991-1993
Jackie Myers, 1991-1994
Melvina Quillen, 1993-1995
Gail Sklar, 1991-1995
Sharon Waldman, 1991-1993
Ellen Weiser, 1991-1993

Kenderton
Mary Clayton, 1991-1995
Linda Stevens, 1991-1995
Constance Womer, 1991-1995

Peirce
Mary Bonner, 1993-1995
Lucretia Gordy, 1991-1995
Terrel Parris, 1991-1995

Pratt
Veronica Barbour, 1991-1995
Patricia Hunter, 1991-1995
Phyllis Webb, 1991-1995

Rhodes
Carolyn Greenwood, 1991-1995
Margaret Pierre-Louis, 1993-1995
Alta Watkins, 1991-1995
Adam Yaller, 1993-1995

Stanton
Jay Cohen, 1991-1992
Sydney Easton, 1992-1995
Marjorie Tittle, 1991-1995
Marion Wells, 1992-1993

Steel
Marge Bolton, 1991-1995
Ethel Malone, 1991-1993
Barbara Monaghan, 1991-1995
Diane Pensabene, 1993-1995

Walton
Janice Carr, 1991-1995
Joanne Forston-Williams, 1991-1995
Ernestine Freeland, 1991-1994

Whittier
Charlotte Silverstein, 1992-1994
Joseph Sortino, 1991-1993
Sylvia Stallworth, 1991-1995
Sylvia Thomas, 1991-1995

Wright
Cindy Bennett, 1992-1995
Wayne Covington, 1991-1995
Dennis Fiandra, 1991-1995
Edith Stephens, 1991-1993

<u>Others Who Followed Students:</u>

Dick
Sadye Pierce, 1991-1992

Gratz
Deidre Farmbry, 1992-1993

Rhodes
Jacqueline Parrish, 1991-1993
Deborah Trent, 1992-1993

Many thanks to the schools and their staffs, both inside and outside The Gratz Connection cluster, that hosted Connectors' visits with their students.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"One knows the world by seeking to change it."
(Sartre, quoted in Hess, 1992)

"The only way we can stop children from falling through
the cracks is to make the child larger and the cracks smaller."
(Gratz Connector, 1993)

By the mid-80s, the accepted wisdom that students who drop out of and fail at school were the harvest of families who sent them to school "deficient" in the basic attitudes, skills and behaviors needed for school success was giving way to new perspectives that highlight the ways in which schools and school systems fail students (e.g. see Fine 1991). At the same time, the federal government was issuing grants to several major urban public school districts to pilot drop-out reduction programs. The Philadelphia School District, whose 22 comprehensive high schools had a 36% drop-out rate of those entering ninth grade classes, [1] received federal money in 1991 to fund The Gratz Connection. This project framed the drop-out problem as a systemic issue: a phenomenon likely to be rooted in earlier school experience even though the actual moment of exit typically occurred at the high school level.

This paper reports on a participatory evaluation in which a group of teachers and school counselors in a set of neighborhood schools worked collectively to generate and implement reforms which would lower the number of children leaving school before graduation. Their commitment to change grew out of dissonance--the disharmony of watching students they cared about flounder as they progressed through the school system. In order to deepen what they already knew about children's school experience from their positions as teachers and counselors, they inquired into their students' school lives. As they assumed a child-centered point of view, the world of schooling--one with which they were already familiar--took on new dimensions. With this fresh perspective,

---

[1] Data collected by the Philadelphia School District show that for new ninth graders in the 1989-90 school year, the rate of drop-out before graduation was 35.9%.

these teachers and counselors took steps individually and with others to set in motion a process of institutional change which would render the child larger, and make the systemic cracks through which so many seemed to be slipping, smaller.

Throughout the two-and-a-half years of the study this report covers, there have been moments of stepping back and taking stock. This paper represents another occasion for such reflection. It explains

- the history of the participatory evaluation;

- what the evaluation revealed about the school lives of 67 students; and

- how the participatory evaluation catalyzed and supported change among individual teachers and counselors, within schools and across a cluster of schools.

Overview of The Gratz Connection

The Gratz Connection focused on catalyzing school restructuring within a cluster of neighborhood schools--Gratz High School, its feeder middle schools, and their feeder elementary schools. Its goals were comprehensive, seeking "far-reaching changes in how teachers teach, what and how children learn, how families, schools and communities interact, how schools communicate and share information with each other, and how decisions are made within and among schools."[2] Although the district was not yet organized administratively into "clusters," in fact the neighborhood schools were a continuous educational path for many children.

In order to address the array of issues critical to reducing the rate of drop-out, The Gratz Connection sought the involvement of school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and parents in a variety of local school activities, including school governance, professional development and the creation of a parent corps that would involve parents more directly with the schools, while also offering them opportunities to further their education. The program leaders' (a principal and teachers on special assignment) key responsibilities lay in planning and coordination; the day-to-day

---

[2] From an introductory brochure written by The Gratz Connection.

execution of the project was left for local school communities to implement in ways appropriate to their specific contexts.

A group of 62 teachers, called Connectors, was instrumental to implementation at the school level.[3] The Connectors represented all three levels of the educational continuum: three teachers from each of the elementary schools, five from each of the middle schools, and eight from the high school. Teachers interested in participating as Connectors applied for the position and were selected by their local school principals. The final group was composed of both African American and white men and women. All were seasoned staff and included classroom, expressive arts, special education and program support teachers, as well as counselors. The Gratz Connection provided each participating school with a substitute teacher whose responsibilities included covering Connectors' classes so that they would be free to work with other teachers, attend meetings and participate in professional development sessions during school hours.

The Participatory Evaluation

Research for Action (RFA) joined The Gratz Connection as a local outside evaluator. RFA's intention was to work with the project to develop an assessment which would support the process of change. We believed that to be an effective tool for change, the evaluation needed to involve the active participation of school stakeholders and that it needed to be embedded within the practices of school communities.

The evaluation was a collaboration between school "insiders" and "outside" researchers with the overall goal of learning more about the phenomenon of dropping out. Statistical data on urban schools and drop-out suggests that transitional moments, particularly the movement from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, are often the most treacherous for youngsters (Newberg 1995). In a group discussion held at the start of RFA's involvement, Connectors acknowledged that they often did not know what happened to children after they left their classrooms. For

---

[3] The number of Connectors associated with the project varied from year to year, with 62 the highest number participating and 50 the lowest.

example, one Connector from an elementary school commented, "I can't believe that in 16 years I had never crossed the street to see what went on at Gratz High School." This gap in knowledge about what happens to children, along with The Gratz Connection's conceptual understanding of school failure as systemic, contributed to the decision to use a longitudinal case study approach in which the Connectors would be paired with students whom they would follow as the youngsters traversed school levels. Conducting longitudinal case studies brought all project participants face to face with the daily realities of children's school lives. They made student experience central to considerations for restructuring schools.

Equally important in guiding the research was the belief that looking at students as they made school transitions, and reflecting together on students' experience, would help build formal and informal links among schools. The development of cross-school networking was a key component of The Gratz Connection, but few school personnel within the participating set of neighborhood schools had had any previous experience with inter-school dialogue.

As the Connectors pursued the question "What happens to our children [when they leave us]?" they closely followed children's school lives. They questioned their students about their daily experiences, sought their ideas and opinions, and occasionally interceded on their behalf. The participation of these teacher-researchers was profoundly important to the research endeavor. They brought to the design, data collection and interpretive analysis phases of the project their accumulated wisdom about students and their experience with schools. They also enriched the research with their deep caring about what happens to students as they make their way through school.

Research for Action contributed its expertise in conducting qualitative research and facilitated formal moments of stepping back and looking across the individual students with whom Connectors were paired in order to identify patterns common to the children as a group. RFA, in conjunction with program leaders, created a forum in which many voices talked through the patterns and disjunctures that were becoming evident in the data. Thus, the participatory approach offered unique opportunities for professional development as teachers grappled with the complexity of what they were learning about

students' experiences, looked closely at ways in which schools meet and miss children's needs and became empowered advocates for change at their schools.

At several junctures throughout the two-and-a-half year study, other voices joined this ongoing inquiry. Principals were apprised of the research through regular written communication from RFA and the program leaders, through talk with their school Connectors and occasionally through group presentations in which the Connectors shared summaries of the data. The district superintendent joined several sessions which focused on implications of the data for school restructuring. School faculty heard about and discussed the data through both formal and informal conversations with Connectors. Parents were informed of the study and formally asked to give permission for their children to participate. On one occasion they were invited to accompany Connectors as they met with their children during a school visit and then to discuss with Connectors what they had heard and seen of their children's school lives that day.[4] Overall, however, parents' participation remained underdeveloped.

The Study

Using matched student-Connector pairs, the case studies investigated children's school experience as they made transitions from one school level to the next. In order to select students for the sample, Connectors began by articulating among themselves the ways in which they typically thought about their students. They identified three categories of youngsters--those for whom they had high hopes, those for whom they had concerns, and those about whom they knew little. With RFA, they also named the attributes they associated with each group. The individual students included in the sample were chosen by Connectors, many of whom enlisted the aid of other school personnel (e.g. other teachers, principals, counselors).

After selecting students in the terminal year of elementary and middle school and from ninth grade at Gratz High School, Connectors interviewed the students about their

school experience thus far. During subsequent years, they visited their students in their new school, accompanying them through morning classes and then interviewing them after lunch. RFA researchers joined Connectors visiting students at the feeder pattern schools to act as troubleshooters and, in some cases, to join the Connector and student as a participant observer. Following each site visit, all the Connectors and RFA staff gathered together to review and analyze what had been seen and heard during that day, as a prelude to generating ideas for change. Between visits, RFA documented themes emerging in the study, which helped guide planning for the following visit.

Participants' experiences in the field, supplemented by analyses of data collected from school records, provided rich material for reflection on the ways in which schools as institutions both work for and fail youngsters. Looking and listening to students and then reflecting as a group on the meaning of what study participants saw and heard brought a diversity of perspectives that stimulated new ideas about what "child-centered" reform might look like.

Learning About and With Students

Accompanying students through school days enriched the group's understanding about schools as institutions. The following examples illustrate how seeing children's school lives up close shaped our thinking.[5]

Many Connectors, not knowing what to expect on their first site visits, were pleased to find that their students were flattered and excited by the attention.

> I know my visits are special to Cecelia[6] because she loves the extra attention. I don't think she really understands the purpose of this whole project, but she goes along for the ride anyway.

And another commented, "I think my visit made Sherita feel important for a change." Some Connectors found that their sustained interest helped students "open up" and provided the young people with moments for reflection on the meaning of their school

---

[4] Only a few parents took advantage of this invitation to visit their children and the Connectors at school.
[5] All the examples in this section are from the Connectors' fieldnotes.

experience. For example, one Connector wrote of her student, when he was first selected for the study

> Isaiah was a transfer from another district during the second half of the school year. He is often quiet and answers in monosyllables when spoken to. He is pleasant but says little about himself or his family.

Two and a half years later, more at ease in a now-familiar setting and in regular contact with an adult who asked about his concerns and interests and listened to what he had to say, Isaiah shared his thoughts much more easily

> I was extremely impressed with Isaiah. He is taller, his chest is broader, and he is now 'sporting a goatee.' His voice is calm, mellow and sounds very mature. In the past, I had to 'work' to get him to share and respond. Now, he is much more reflective and willing to share his insights. ... He volunteered a lot of 'pieces of his life' without any prompting from me.

Other Connectors were amazed by the resilience of the youngsters they were following. One, who was discouraged by the many seemingly insurmountable problems his student faced, reflected in an early report

> As I groped for positive things to say, I could tell by Cecelia's face that she had heard it all before. The counselor and House director know of her problems.

Later in the study, he discovered ways that Cecelia was making adaptations to her situation which he would not have predicted on the basis of his earlier encounter with her. Her resourcefulness, along with some opportunities the school was providing, was making her (and him) feel more positive about the future. During his third visit with Cecelia, she announced

> I have new friends that I met ... on a school trip. ... I'm an office aide and I work every morning and some afternoons. I like the responsibility of working there and the people treat me nice. The training I'm getting would be good if I ever become a secretary, but I want to be a teacher. ... I've changed my study habits. Since I can't get work done while I'm watching my brothers and sisters [in the afternoons and evenings], I get up at 4:00 AM in the morning and study then. Sometimes I fall back to sleep and then wake up at 6:00 AM to finish.

But other Connectors grew frustrated and discouraged when they saw their students disengaging from their schools and their studies. Some believed that the only

---

[6] The names of all of the children in this report have been changed.

hope for real solutions lay beyond the schools' walls--e.g. by bringing parents into closer connection with their children's school lives.

> When I left [the middle school] I felt very depressed about the whole situation. Sherita is in danger of dropping out of school in a few years. She is falling behind in her school work and she is not motivated. School seems completely boring to her. She also is still not wearing her glasses. I hope my visit and talk with Sherita have an impact on her. Somehow I have to talk to her mom and get her more involved in Sherita's schoolwork. I know she's the key to the whole situation.

And a few, like the following two, found themselves pained and even angry as they witnessed their students faltering.

> Otis was absent today but the picture I get from his [pupil] pocket[7] is that he has problems getting along with peers. There were two suspension slips from [middle school] that mentioned him 'slapping' one student in the face, and using profanity at a teacher. After [middle school], there wasn't any more information in the pocket about Otis. No middle school report cards, no teacher comment sheets, etc. Also, I noticed that the child's attendance was okay until he got into middle school, then there were lots of absences. ... What's going to happen to Otis? He needs help to stay in school!

> Taylor presently has been indicted for murder. ... [Visiting him at his new high school] I saw Taylor begin to go downhill. ... I tried to guide Taylor, but, unfortunately it wasn't enough. Taylor needed help, counseling, and the system failed him as it does others. My question is why? When he was at high school and his grades were going downhill, no one took the time to see why. This, to me, is a major problem in our system. We need services to help our children who are falling. How can we help?

One of the most significant contributions of the participatory research was that it highlighted the gradual nature of children's disengagement from school. Youngsters tended to hover at the edge of the cracks before they fell through them. Transitional years often spelled disaster as previous academic difficulties were "aggravated by [changes] to new schools with different organizational configurations and academic expectations" (Newberg 1995: 713). Creating bridges, both human and administrative, between school levels is a potent "safety net" for keeping students connected with schools.

---

[7] Pupil pockets are students' official school records.

This Report

The body of this report provides a detailed description of the participatory process of researching students' school experience. It also tracks the ways in which the participatory research influenced various school stakeholders and shaped plans for school-wide restructuring. Chapter II introduces the reader to the students in the sample and to the design of the research. In explaining how and why the students were selected, it discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the first cohort (N=51) and the circumstances that necessitated the addition of a second cohort (N=16). The chapter also presents statistical profiles of the students over the course of the study, using analysis of data drawn from district records. Chapter III provides the reader with an intimate view of the relationship that evolved between one student-Connector pair, using their story as a lens for viewing the experiences of other participants in the study. The chapter illuminates how adults looking closely with students at their school lives supports the development of a child-centered perspective of schooling. Chapter IV continues the focus on the student-Connector pair, now looking at how the participatory evaluation created unique opportunities for developing and implementing change at many school levels. The reader learns about "child-centered" initiatives which look at children's needs and learning over time. The final chapter reflects on the lessons learned during the years of the study. The reader hears from participants about how their inclusion in the study transformed their thinking about their work as teachers, strengthened their roles as change agents within their schools, and helped forge connections between and among schools. The chapter also identifies obstacles to change, opening up questions for further investigation and reflection.

CHAPTER II
The Sample and Research Design

This chapter introduces the students who participated in this study and describes how we tracked their progress. Like their peers across the set of neighborhood schools in The Gratz Connection, the youngsters were primarily African Americans who shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds.[8] They differed from one another, however, in how their teachers thought about them as students. The selection of students for this study was intended to capture three important ways teachers conceive of youngsters in their classrooms: those for whom they have high hopes; those for whom they have concerns; and those about whom they know little. Each school in The Gratz Connection chose three students, one representing each category, to be part of the study.

The participatory nature of the study influenced several aspects of the sample, including its distribution across school levels, its selection at individual sites and its final composition. A key goal of the evaluation was to create a platform for collective inquiry into students' school experience. Our assumption was that learning about students' experience would be more compelling within relationships where students and researchers (Connectors) felt a bond, and that it would be more meaningful for school staff to hear about what happened to students who had once been "theirs."   This commitment to coupling Connectors with students whom they and their colleagues had an interest in knowing more about resulted in the sample including more elementary school students (N=47) than middle school students (N=17), and more middle school than high school students (N=3), reflecting the feeder pattern of The Gratz Connection schools: Thirteen small elementary schools feeding into three larger middle schools, which in turn feed into a very large high school. The process teachers used to select students for the study and the final sample that emerged are examined in detail below.

---

[8] Since all the participating schools were Title I institutions, socioeconomic differences among the students would likely have been slight. Families from the neighborhood in which The Gratz Connection was located were for the most part working poor, unemployed or underemployed.

This chapter also describes the research design as a whole. We gathered and analyzed two kinds of data on our sample: qualitative information from the Connectors' visits and interviews with their students, and quantitative information drawn from district records. This chapter focuses on the quantitative data, looking across the categories of students at factors such as retention, absences, suspensions, tardiness and transience. The analysis of this data helps map how teachers think about the youngsters in their classrooms and begins to create a picture of how different kinds of students fare in school. We then identify factors that made it difficult for some Connectors to maintain contact with their students during the course of the research. We turn to the qualitative data in

Chapter III.

Selecting the Sample

When the Connectors formulated the three categories of students that were to be the focus of the study, they did so only in general terms. The Connectors returned to their local schools, where they introduced their colleagues to the study and with them fleshed out the three kinds of students, bringing their knowledge of individual youngsters to bear on elaborating the categories. Choosing student participants happened in a variety of ways. Some Connectors and/or Connector teams made the selections without assistance; most, however, chose to involve others at their school site, such as the principal, counselor and fifth grade or eighth grade teachers. These staff members' positions provided them with different ways of knowing youngsters in school. Thus, individual members of the school-based group frequently had different criteria for identifying students for whom they had high hopes, concerns and insufficient knowledge. These differences typically required Connectors and their colleagues to negotiate the choice of students. As a result, the students were selected on bases that varied across school sites and levels. Initially, 51 students were selected. All were in their terminal

year in elementary or middle school, or in the Ninth Grade Institute at Gratz High School.[9]

A few months into the study, limitations of the selection process surfaced. First, despite the participation of special education teachers as Connectors, the sample included only one special education student. In this way, the selection process mirrored a pattern within the district of excluding special education students, in samples for public reports of student outcomes, contributing to the invisibility of an already marginalized group. One of the special education teachers who was a Connector remarked on the irony of the absence of special education students, whose drop-out rate was even higher than that of regular education students. In response, the group decided it was important to expand the sample to give greater representation to these students. The plan was to add one special education student from every school to the sample at the end of the study's second year. In fact, only 14 special education students were actually selected, two from Gratz High School, one from each of the three middle schools, and the rest from the elementary schools.[10]

Second, a Connector who was a high school teacher pointed out that only two of the nine middle school students selected for the study intended to continue on to Gratz High School.[11] The Connector questioned what the study could accomplish with so few students going on to Gratz. Unspoken, but implicit in her remark, was the frustration and bitterness she and many other teachers at comprehensive neighborhood high schools feel: In a system of special admission magnets which siphon off the best and the brightest, neighborhood high schools are perceived by district staff, parents and often students themselves as schools of last resort. This Connector's sense of isolation and her mistrust of the study's approach recapitulated on a small scale the larger long-standing and

---

[9] When the study began, students from middle school going to Gratz High School would first enter the Ninth Grade Institute which, in the tenth grade, fed into Charters (Small Learning Communities). Following the first year of the study, the Ninth Grade Institute was disbanded, and regular education students entered directly into Small Learning Communities. Special education students, for the most part, were in a separate special education program.

[10] Those elementary schools that did not select a special education student probably did not do so because their Connectors, each of whom was already following a student, believed they would not be able to keep track of yet another youngster.

[11] One parent did not give permission for her child to participate in the research. The other six students were transferring out of the feeder pattern to attend one of the district's desegregation, magnet and/or vocational high schools.

systemic issue of distance--social, structural, psychological and curricular--between the high school on one hand and the middle and elementary schools on the other.

Confronted by this issue, the group decided that in addition to incorporating more special education students, the sample should be increased by two more regular education middle school students from each of the three feeder middle schools. All the youngsters selected from the middle school level--regular education and special education--were to be students intending to go on to Gratz High School. This would increase the number of students being followed at Gratz from 5 to 14. In practice, only one of the three middle schools selected two additional regular education students to be part of the study and one of the special education students ended up not going to Gratz. Reasons for the partial success of the strategy are complicated. Competing demands at the school sites at the time Cohort II was being selected and resistance on the part of some middle school Connectors to having the high school Connectors influence whom they would and would not be able to follow both contributed. Of the five middle school students selected for Cohort II, four went on to Gratz, bringing the total number of students being followed at Gratz to nine.

The Students When We Met Them: Statistical Profiles

With the help of school district personnel, RFA collected student data considered relevant to understanding student experience and drop-out. We include gender in our analysis because we found it significant to how teachers think about the youngsters in their classrooms. We collected information on retention since studies have shown this increases the odds of dropping out (e.g. see Darling-Hammond 1994:14 and Fine 1991). In addition, we looked at data on transience, attendance, tardiness and disciplinary suspension--factors that interrupt youngsters' connections with schools and schools' connections with students. Below is a summary of this data across the various categories of regular education and special education students at the time we met them.[12]

---

[12] See Appendix A for data on individual students and Appendix B for similar data at the school level.

Overwhelmingly, regular education students whom teachers felt most confident about when they were being selected for the study were girls. Of those regular education students for whom teachers had high hopes, nearly 72% (13 of a possible 18) were girls. Among students for whom teachers had concerns, the pattern is strikingly different. Seventy percent (12 of 17) of this group were boys. At 64% (9 of 14), boys were a slightly higher percentage of students whom teachers believed that they did not know well.

The data drawn from the children's school records show that regular education students whom teachers had high hopes for generally attended school regularly and did not have histories of retention, tardiness or suspensions. In contrast, among the group that teachers were concerned about were students who missed school frequently and had been retained once and sometimes two times. Although suspensions were still rare among elementary students in this category, they were a more common occurrence at the middle school level. Among the students teachers knew little about, more than half had been retained and many had histories of chronic absence. In several instances (3 of 16), the school records of these youngsters were incomplete. Overall, the records of students in the sample indicate relatively little transience. The group that showed the strongest tendency to move from school to school, however, were students about whom teachers had concerns.

The data on the special education students is sketchier than that for the regular education students,[13] but contrasting what is known about regular education and special education students suggests that special education students are more vulnerable to drop-out. Five of the eleven special education students for whom we have data had been retained, and 6 of the 12 for whom we have data had histories of chronic absence. Interestingly, across several factors, the three special education students for whom Connectors had high hopes aligned with the characteristics of regular education students for whom teachers had concerns: Two of the three for whom we have data were retained more than once and three of the four for whom we have data had histories of chronic

---

[13] Many of these students were not designated as representing any of the three categories into which the rest of the sample was divided. In addition, the records of three of the fourteen were incomplete.

absence. School records also show that at least two of the four had a history of transience (i.e., they had changed schools several times).

The Students During the Years of the Study: Statistical Profiles

School records during the years of the study for regular education students for whom teachers had high hopes indicate that they continued to maintain most of the positive patterns they evidenced at the beginning of the study. As they moved through middle and/or high school, their regular attendance continued and none were retained. A number of them (5 of 13) at the middle school level, however, were suspended one or more times, and one of five now at the high school level had been suspended once. At both the middle and high school levels those suspended were girls.

Overall, the group of students for whom teachers had concerns grew increasingly disconnected from school. During their middle and high school years many developed patterns of chronic tardiness, and absences and suspensions occurred more frequently. Several were suspended multiple times in multiple grades. This is the only group for whom a pattern of transience was prominent during the years of the study. Ninth grade was an especially vulnerable moment. Many of these youngsters did not accumulate enough credits by the end of their ninth grade year to be considered tenth graders; some got into serious trouble and/or disappeared from school rolls.[14]

Of the group of students teachers knew little about, only a few were retained in middle school, but as with students for whom teachers had concerns, ninth grade was especially treacherous. Two out of three students in this category did not accumulate enough credits to be considered tenth graders the following year. The pattern of absences within this group continued as in their earlier years, although, for the most part, the data available demonstrates that these youngsters did not develop histories of chronic suspension.

---

[14] The phenomenon of ninth grade being a year when the difficulties of many students is heightened is true across the district and nationally.

The data for special education students continued to be less complete than that for the other students, but it is clear that the group as a whole continued in school. Two students experienced significant difficulties at the high school level, one in ninth, the other in eleventh grade. One youngster who had changed schools multiple times before the study started continued this pattern during the years of the study.

Making Connections: Listening and Looking

The research design called for pairing the 67 students in the sample with the Connectors.[15] The Connectors had six opportunities to meet with their students over a two-and-a-half year period. The study began with the Connectors interviewing their students at the end of their terminal year of elementary or middle school, or at the end of ninth grade at Gratz High School.[16] The interview typically lasted about 45 minutes. After the students had made their transitions to a new level, the Connectors monitored their school experiences through five visits in which they accompanied their students from class to class in the morning. The Connectors usually observed three or four classes which varied over the course of a school year in accordance with the students' rotating rosters. Following the morning visit, the Connectors went to lunch with their students and afterwards conducted one-on-one interviews.[17] Interviews between Connectors and their students lasted about 30 minutes. Both observation guides and interview questions were scripted beforehand, but as Connectors became more familiar with their students, many modified the language of the interview questions to make them more appropriate for their student and/or added their own spontaneous questions to the prepared

---

[15] Half of the student-Connector pairs remained stable over the course of the study. Among the other half, one Connector would fill in for another temporarily because of illness or absence, or permanently when a Connector left the project. In a dozen cases, students were followed by up to three Connectors, and one student was followed by four different Connectors. Eleven Connectors routinely followed two students each.

[16] See Appendix C for a sample of the Exit Interview.

[17] On one occasion, the students enrolled in feeder pattern schools met at their schools with Connectors for a group discussion in place of the visit where Connectors shadowed individual students. Connectors with students enrolled outside the feeder pattern schools followed the regular procedure of accompanying their students through the day.

questions.[18] The Connectors jotted notes during their observations, which they wrote up as fieldnotes later on. Interviews with students were conducted in libraries, counselors' offices or other quiet spaces.

The visits with their students provided Connectors with formal opportunities for understanding how children view their own school experiences. Many Connectors supplemented this perspective by talking to their students' current teachers. Connectors were encouraged to share what they were learning with the group as a whole during discussion sessions following visits, and with their school faculties.

Some African American Connectors held multiple roles in the community covered by The Gratz Connection schools; they saw their students in a variety of non-school contexts--for example, at church or as part of neighborhood youth programs--and they had access to other family members and friends of their students for "inside" information. This often supported their being able to contextualize what they were learning about their students' school lives. Their own embeddedness in the community also heightened their sense of responsibility to the community and its children. Often urban teachers' relationships with students are circumscribed by classroom walls; for those African American and white Connectors who did not have other connections with their students, observing and interviewing provided a means for building less unidimensional relationships.

Broken Connections: Truncated Student-Connector Relationships

---

[18] See Appendix D for a sample of the observation guides and interview questions. The same protocols were used across all categories of students and all levels of students. They were revised somewhat between visits, based on the experience the Connectors had had during their previous visit. Although RFA drew up the protocols, they were informed by discussions with the Connectors.

Although the Connectors were overwhelmingly successful in following their students,[19] by the study's end, the connection between 12 student-Connector pairs was broken, and Connectors were deeply concerned about what was happening to three other youngsters.

Connectors lost contact with two students because the parents withdrew their permission for participation in the research. One, a middle school student, pulled out after the initial interview; the other, a special education student, left during the first year. There was no record of why the one parent refused permission altogether and the other changed her mind and retracted permission. One additional student (in Cohort II) was selected for the study but never followed, apparently because the Connector assigned to follow her left the system, and the student was not picked up by any of the other Connectors from her school. Connectors lost contact with two other students because they moved out of state. And one student requested that her Connector stop following her, perhaps because the turmoil in her life made the attention the study was bringing feel threatening. Or perhaps the fact that Connectors assigned to her changed several times over the course of her participation in the study was disquieting and heightened her sense of the constant flow of adults in and out of her life.

The stories of the six remaining students, five young men and one young woman (all in high school), with whom Connectors struggled to maintain contact were often the hardest for us all to hear, and for individual Connectors to witness.[20] Connectors trying to keep track of these students brought them to the group's attention, often expressing anger, frustration and discouragement. A Research for Action researcher noted the disconcerting parallels between our difficulty in finding effective ways to retain the students in our sample and the schools' ongoing failure to prevent students from dropping out. As the Connectors supported one another in searching for ways to maintain contact with these youngsters, their experiences informed the group's understanding of the obstacles schools face as they attempt to serve students. We saw

---

[19] If the Connector was able to conduct an interview as the student was leaving elementary school, middle school or ninth grade and visit his/her student three times out of a possible five times and had contact with the student at the end of the study, then the student was considered to have been "followed" throughout the study.

[20] See Appendix E for brief summaries of the contact Connectors had with these students.

firsthand the effort it takes to keep contact with a student who is routinely absent, to track a student who changes schools and moves frequently, to find a student who has gotten in trouble and is in jail or at a disciplinary center. As Connectors inquired into the whereabouts of these young people, they often found themselves up against what they perceived to be at best overburdened, and at worst indifferent, school personnel. When they were able to reach the student's family, they often found them worried, overwhelmed and discouraged--feeling betrayed both by their youngster and by the school system. The Connectors wondered time and again, "Where are the safety nets [for these young people]?"

Lastly, toward the end of the study the group's attention was brought to three middle school boys. These students' Connectors had become deeply worried about them. The boys, two of whom teachers had concerns about at the time they were selected for the study and one whom teachers believed they did not know, were experiencing discipline problems, were absent frequently and had been suspended from school multiple times. Their Connectors were able to continue to meet and speak with these boys, but noting their increasingly belligerent attitudes, the Connectors wondered how much longer the youngsters would remain in school and whether, if the study had continued, they would have been able to maintain contact with them.

Summary

As Connectors embarked on the research into students' individual school experience, they were paired with youngsters whom they had been intimately involved in selecting to follow. As they pursued these youngsters through their transitions to the next school level, they were building on knowledge they and their colleagues at their local schools had shared about the students. They knew that back at their schools, as well as among their fellow Connectors, there were audiences eager to hear news about how these youngsters were doing.

The process of bringing these children's school lives into sharp focus was an ongoing, collaborative and reflective undertaking. No single source was paramount,

whether it be the quantitative profiles that emerged from analysis of the district's student records; the qualitative sketches that arose from the Connectors' site visits; the supplementary information garnered from talking with students' current teachers and/or from sources in the community at large; the insights gathered from the discussions among the Connectors, program leaders and RFA staff following site visits; or the feedback from conversations Connectors held with colleagues at their own local schools. Rather, it was the ready and repeated access to all these resources that resulted in a better understanding of the students and the schools in which they spent so much of their daily lives.

The next two chapters underscore the importance of this kind of multidimensional approach by examining the far-reaching effects of a relationship forged between one student-Connector pair. The story that unfolds in Chapter III illustrates the ways in which individual student experience is complexly textured, sometimes fulfilling expectations, sometimes turning them upside down. The in-depth look at an individual student provided in that chapter also acts as a lens through which we can begin to perceive themes common across many youngsters as they traversed school levels. It reveals, as well, the kind of connection and caring that teachers as researchers brought to the study, deepening the investigation and broadening its implications. Chapter IV traces the ways in which the student's experiences, her Connector's actions and reactions and the creative and sustained support of a school principal and the school staff coalesced into a plan for school-wide restructuring.

CHAPTER III

Listening to Learn: Reflecting on Students' Stories

Discussions of individual case studies following site visits helped the group develop a shared language for talking across students' school experience. As Connectors discussed what they were learning by observing and interviewing their students, the group began to recognize overlapping concerns--themes that seemed to characterize many students' experiences in schools as they made transitions from one school level to the next. This chapter presents the story of one student, whom we call Lynnette, as she moves out of her last year at Washington Middle School and into her first year at Gratz High School.[21] Some of Lynnette's experiences highlight the individual nature of children's school lives; other parts of her story illuminate the needs and concerns of numbers of students. The discussion interweaves these children's voices and the perspectives of the Connectors following them, as well as data from their school records, to help illustrate broad themes in students' school experience.

The Descriptive Review Process

The themes that we came to identify across student experience often emerged most clearly when we focused most narrowly and examined a student-Connector pair deeply. In order to help us do this, we invited members of the Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative (TLC) to lead a small subset of the larger group in a Descriptive Review of the Child.[22] This chapter is based on what we learned from a Descriptive Review of the student we are calling Lynnette. As Philadelphia teacher and TLC

---

[21] In addition to the student's name, her school of origin and the name of her Connector have been changed.

[22] The Teachers Learning Cooperative is a group of Philadelphia public and independent school teachers who have met weekly for the past 16 years. It uses the documentary processes, including the Descriptive Review of the Child, developed by the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont, for investigating

member Rhoda Kanevsky explains, the Descriptive Review is a collaborative process which builds teacher knowledge and collegiality while making the child central to considerations of educational change:

> Because the Descriptive Review is a collaborative process, it can contribute to the current efforts to restructure schools. The Descriptive Review process allows teachers to hear individual voices and to pursue collaborative inquiry. As teachers draw upon their experiences and knowledge, they begin to envision new roles for themselves and new structures for schools. They are also creating a body of knowledge about teaching and learning that starts with looking at a particular child in depth and ends with new insights and understandings about children and classrooms in general (1992: 57).

Ms. Michelle Smith, a language arts and program support teacher as well as one of five Connectors at one of the middle schools, followed Lynnette as she made the transition from eighth grade to high school and presented Lynnette for the Descriptive Review. As the Descriptive Review revealed new and more complex aspects of Lynnette to Ms. Smith, her questions about Lynnette were transformed. Here is an excerpt from Ms. Smith's account of this evolution.[23]

> What makes my information unique is once the data [about Lynnette and her transition] had been collected, we decided to add on another level or another process, and that's called the Descriptive Review of the Child. The purpose of the process is to paint a picture at a particular moment in a child's life ... a full holistic picture of the child.
>
> I began by telling the group how impressed I was by the reports about Lynnette in middle school and how favorably I looked on how she had been dressed at middle school graduation. When I first interviewed her [at the end of eighth grade] she told me, 'I have to get my education. I have to graduate from high school. I have to learn to read and do math better.' She also told me that 'boys get in your way of getting a good education.' She seemed to me almost a model child, pretty and well-behaved. Even though I knew she was disappointed with her first months in high school [after my first visit with her there], I was still focused on what I saw as her strengths. I wondered how Lynnette was able to have embodied her family's values [about getting an education] so fully. My initial question to the group was: 'How did Lynnette hold onto her values?'
>
> But after I described Lynnette to the group, a colleague turned to me and asked, 'But Michelle, who is Lynnette?' That was really deep. There was a lot going on

---

classrooms, children and children's learning. See Appendix F for a full outline of the Descriptive Review process.

[23] Ms. Smith has presented her study of Lynnette at several public meetings. Her descriptions of Lynnette and the Descriptive Review process quoted throughout this report are drawn from tapes of two such presentations.

beneath the surface. Lynnette had believed she was going to get a good education and have a good life. But the strategies that Lynnette had used in middle school needed reshaping to make the transition to high school. After going through the Descriptive Review my focus shifted to, 'What is the comprehensive high school doing to support the vulnerabilities and strengths of a student like Lynnette?' and 'What's in place to help students reshape their strategies [for negotiating school] when they make transitions?'

In reflecting on her introduction to the Descriptive Review, Ms. Smith acknowledged initial misgivings about the approach. She felt uncomfortable when she believed the process was leading her away from her personal interest in how Lynnette sustained her values and refocused her on how students like Lynnette might be better supported in school. Ms. Smith's reaction is emblematic of a tension that persisted throughout the years of the study: The Connectors struggled with the discomfort created by their immediate personal concerns for their students--often their very human need to take action and "do something" to help their student--and the frustratingly slow-moving nature of organizational change.

Lynnette's Story

Lynnette and Ms. Smith first met in spring 1993, when Lynnette was almost 14 years old and completing eighth grade. Ms. Smith's first impression of Lynnette was that she was "about 5 feet 2 inches, 100 pounds, and extremely pretty ... stylish and nicely dressed." Ms. Smith observed that at Washington's graduation ceremony Lynnette and her twin sister Lynnetta wore identical dresses that she thought were "age appropriate, while many of their peers were dressed in outfits sophisticated enough for a 25 year old woman." Ms. Smith believed this was an indication of "their mother's strong influence over them."

Lynnette's school records show that she had attended two different elementary schools and had been retained in first grade and then again in second grade. They also show that she missed many days of school during kindergarten and the first year she was in first grade. Her elementary teachers described her as "quiet and well behaved. Doesn't put forth much effort. Needs to study." After third grade Lynnette was

"promoted by exception" to Washington Middle School, where she was placed in special education classes.[24] During her early school years, her records indicate that Lynnette's "primary caretaker" changed twice. During these early years, Lynnette's school experience, including her retentions, absences and transience, was typical of the experience of the special education students in the study.[25]

Lynnette was selected for participation in the study by a team of eight of her middle school teachers. Although labeled "learning disabled," Lynnette was identified by her teachers as a special education student likely to succeed in school. They had high hopes for her because they found her very adult-focused and very mature. They noted that Lynnette's mother (with whom she now lived) was very involved in her daughter's education--she helped Lynnette with her homework, worked with her on her reading, and had attended every one of her Individual Educational Program (IEP) conferences. They also believed the attention Lynnette would get from being part of the study would further bolster her confidence and increase her chances of success.

The criteria Lynnette's teachers used for selecting her illustrate the complexity of teachers' thinking as they worked through their ideas about what makes a student one for whom they have high hopes. When Ms. Smith looked back on the selection process, however, she noted certain drawbacks. The comments of Lynnette's teachers, who said Lynnette was "mild-mannered and adult-focused" and "very serious about her education," left Ms. Smith fairly knowledgeable about some of Lynnette's personal and emotional attributes, but less informed about her specific academic skill levels.

Before interviewing Lynnette for the first time in spring 1993, Ms. Smith went around to her classrooms. When she asked for Lynnette, she remembers that one student said, "Oh, you mean the twin? Oh, you mean the pretty one?" From talking with Lynnette's peers, Ms. Smith believed that Lynnette "fit in well, was accepted, even admired." She also discovered that Lynnette, who was reading at a third grade level and doing math at a second grade level, and Lynnetta, who was higher functioning, were in different classes.

---

[24] Washington Middle School goes from sixth to eighth grade. By skipping fourth and fifth grades, Lynnette was no longer overage for her grade level.
[25] See Appendix A, Chart 6.

Recalling her first interview with Lynnette, Ms. Smith noted:

Lynnette was extremely composed, serene, and made eye-to-eye contact. She was like a well-rehearsed star witness. When I asked her, 'What has life been like here? What are some highs, what are some lows? What are your worries and concerns as you make the transition to high school?' all her answers were in the same key. 'Oh, everything's fine. Oh, I like all my teachers. Oh, I like everyone. My mother helps me.' When I tried to disturb her very serene presence and said, 'Don't you have some concerns?' she would not deviate. My questions never disturbed her surface level response. I wasn't really able to get below that layer of how she responded to me.

In the course of investigating Lynnette's school experience, Ms. Smith talked to her sixth, seventh and eighth grade teachers. These conversations provided a more in-depth picture of Lynnette's middle school years.

Lynnette's sixth grade teacher told me that she was the only girl in a class with some very rambunctious boys. The teacher said that she was like the 'Queen Bee' and enjoyed that status. She went on to say that Lynnette kept the boys straight. According to her, when she was talking and wanted quiet, Lynnette controlled those boys better than she did. Her teacher characterized her as 'ruling things.'

By seventh grade her teacher said some problems and limitations were showing. The teacher sensed that Lynnette was academically frustrated and felt she flourished best one-on-one. When Lynnette was not ready to tackle a new problem she quickly grew frustrated and needed support and encouragement in the areas that were not comfortable. The teacher also told me that Lynnette liked rote learning. She loved blackboards of work to copy and worksheets.

And the eighth grade teacher told me that Lynnette did everything that her level permitted her to do. She always did her homework, she was focused on academics, and she was growing aware that she did have some limitations.

With the additional information provided by Lynnette's teachers and peers, Ms. Smith augmented the picture she had of Lynnette before she went to Gratz High School. As Lynnette clearly told Ms. Smith in their first interview, she was concerned about academic achievement. With the support of her teachers and mother, however, Ms. Smith saw strategies in place in middle school which helped Lynnette meet her goal of success in school. Ms. Smith perceived Lynnette as developing into a socially competent adolescent. She noted that Lynnette had established a respected place among her peer group. As Lynnette was moving toward high school, she told Ms. Smith she had no worries. Lynnette's strong standing among peers and teachers alike, her supportive

home environment, and her seriousness about doing well in school led her to expect as positive an experience in high school as she had had in middle school.

Common Themes in Children's School Experience

Much of what Ms. Smith observed and heard about Lynnette's school experience echoed what other Connectors learned about their students.[26] Across the elementary and middle school levels and across all categories of students, success in school was equated with doing well academically. For regular education students, good marks usually were indicative of success. Special education students often had a more complicated way of looking at school success. Rather than focusing on a single indicator (e.g. a mark), they described the subjects that they were successful in as ones in which they were working hard, felt they understood the material because it came to them easily, and/or in which the teacher was able to make the material accessible to them.

In the sample as a whole, many students linked success to opportunities to act as responsible members of their school community. In elementary schools this often happens through one-on-one relationships with an adult in which the youngster is a "helper" to his/her teacher. By middle school, youngsters often perceived themselves as successful because they lived up to the responsibilities associated with greater independence, such as going from class to class unattended by an adult, keeping lockers, and arriving in class with the proper books, etc. They also named participation in group efforts (such as a sports team), and special events (such as a talent show or an opportunity to make a video), as making them feel successful. As a group, special education students' sense of success seemed to be more connected to relational issues. For example, one student said he was proud of his role in managing a sports team, while another said, "I take good care of [the science teacher's] rabbits." Another special education student reported more generally, "I just feel comfortable helping, or doing those things for others."

---

[26] Because there were so few (3) high school students selected to be in the study at this initial phase, there is not enough data to reveal patterns for those at the high school level.

Like Lynnette, who told her Connector, "My mother practices my reading with me and helps me," elementary and middle school students in the sample named family members as providing important supports for their academic achievement. Students told their Connectors, "She [mother] checks my homework before I come to school." "I have been successful because my mom, sisters and brothers helped me at home." In addition to naming family members, regular education elementary and middle school students frequently cited teachers--and even sometimes a principal--as important members of their support networks. On the whole, special education students appeared to feel supported by a broader school community than did regular education students. They named counselors, aides, and non-teaching assistants (NTAs) as those who helped them, along with family members and teachers. For example, one special education student told her Connector, "[The NTA] always wants us to be the *best*!"

The comments of middle school youngsters in the sample, as well as observations made by Connectors, aptly illustrate a growing awareness of peer relationships at the middle school level. "She [student] has managed to find a comfortable niche with friends." "I will remember ... the friends I made [in middle school]... I am looking forward to meeting new friends. Maybe I can study with them or something like that." "I will remember ... my friends, especially Tamika, because I can talk to her about my problems." And the remark of one special education student connects peer relationships with a positive sense of self at this stage of development. "I will remember Mark because he was my best friend... I also will remember how my teachers took time and worked on my shyness. They encouraged me to interact with my peers and I feel better about myself. I am more social."

Across all categories and kinds of students at the elementary and middle levels, school success was attributed to serious intention and hard work . Youngsters often spoke of the personal effort they were making, trying "very hard," "listen[ing] to and follow[ing] instructions" and "... com[ing] to school prepared and ready to learn and follow the rules." One youngster told her Connector, "If I apply myself, I can achieve anything I want at my new school." By middle school many students were also identifying role models as important to success. For example, one young man talked

about "watching others" (such as Michael Jordan) become successful at basketball as important to his own success.

And similar to Lynnette, many children, across school levels, categories and kinds of students, believed that the future would be continuous with the past--unless they consciously decided to make it different. For example, one student told his Connector that he anticipated his current improved performance in math to continue next year in his new school: "Math will be my best subject. My grades have started to improve." Other children expressed their intention to make the future different from the present: "I will try to be better in math and English [next year]." "I didn't do so good this year but I'm gonna do better next year." "Mostly I'll try to be more mature and more responsible for handing in work and completing projects [next year]."

A number of youngsters worried about the school climate at the next level. As they approached middle school, several elementary students wondered, "Do they beat people up after school?" "Is there a lot of fighting?" On the whole, middle school students' worries about high school focused on the kind of academic environment they would encounter. "[My student] worried that the teachers [in high school] would not have time to devote to individual students, helping them." "My new school might be harder or it might be easier... I'd like to know what subjects I'm going to have. I'd like to know if the teachers are going to be the same as the ones [in middle school]. I'd like to know if the teachers are going to work me hard or are they going to work me easy." Special education students worried about whether there would be people in their new school who would look out for them the way they had been cared for in the earlier grades. "Do they care for you and help you feel comfortable?" They also expressed concerns for their safety, wondering if they would have to deal with "mean teachers and students," "bullies," "tough kids" or "a fight almost every day."

The Transition

Over the next year and a half, Ms. Smith visited Lynnette in her new school two times, during the fall of 1993 and spring of 1994. The following reflects what she learned about Lynnette's transition as she interviewed her and accompanied her through school days.

Visiting Lynnette at the high school for the first time, Ms. Smith found that "all was not well." During her first high school semester Lynnette had failed two subjects. Questioning her student about these failures, Ms. Smith discovered that Lynnette had never gone to one class because she did not know it was on her roster and that she didn't understand what was going on in the other, a health class where she was being mainstreamed with regular education students. Although Lynnette named two teachers whom she felt she could turn to for help, when Ms. Smith talked with some of the high school teachers, she found them disinterested in Lynnette and unaware of her capacities and vulnerabilities.

> I talked to the health education teacher--the subject she failed. He told me, 'She is not doing well. She's an introvert. She's very slow. She's not working up to par.' When I observed the class, I realized that it was much too difficult for her. There was a list of 16 letter vocabulary words on the board for the students to memorize.

> Because I wanted to get Lynnette books and other things that would be of interest to her, I asked her high school teachers 'Where do you see her going? What do you see in the future for her? What skills does she show now?' I was attempting to get some guidelines and direction but felt very frustrated by the lack of response.

Ms. Smith asked Lynnette whether her mother had been to school to check into her academic problems. Lynnette responded that her mother was hesitant to come to the high school and that she had told her daughter to "just try harder and do your best." Although her mother still cared about Lynnette's education, she was not taking action on her behalf as she had in middle school.[27]

In addition to her academic setbacks, Lynnette suffered a series of interpersonal traumas during the first few months of high school. Before leaving middle school, Lynnette told her Connector that she already knew other students at Gratz, and that this

---

[27] Lynnette's mother, who had given birth to her twin daughters when she was 14 and then dropped out of school, may have been reluctant to intervene once her daughter reached the high school level because of her own truncated education.

helped her not to worry. During her first visit, however, Ms. Smith learned that Lynnette had grown increasingly isolated that fall. As she walked through the halls of the high school with her student, Ms. Smith heard a great deal of name-calling directed at Lynnette by other girls, and several students shouted out, "Hey there, twin." Lynnette returned some greetings and initiated others as students passed, but she confided to Ms. Smith, "I have no real friends." She quickly abandoned her dream of being a cheerleader because "some girls had put out the word that they did not like her, so rather than have a confrontation, she just withdrew from that dream and didn't go after it."   Ms. Smith began to see that "pretty girl issues were emerging and some of the girls did not like her. I discovered that there were boys that followed Lynnette from class to class, and when I asked Lynnette about them, her comment was, 'They are knuckle heads. They don't want to learn.'" Perhaps most importantly, Lynnette and her twin seemed to have lost their former intimacy and were not getting along well together.

> I discovered some resistance emerging to her identity as a twin. Her twin was higher functioning than Lynnette. In middle school they had made a point of not having them in the same class. In high school Lynnette shared some classes with her twin. Her twin and she, however, were at odds. Where they used to support each other, all of that had changed.

In a few short months Lynnette's support network had shrunk considerably, leaving her not only isolated but confused and vulnerable. She no longer seemed to be a promising student, or a Queen Bee with an admiring court, or even a twin. Her eroding self-confidence probably also contributed to the depth of her reaction to the fights and conflicts she witnessed at school. She took care to avoid students "who are violent and crude," and she told Ms. Smith that she wished that someone would "take all the bad kids away."

It is not surprising, then, that when Ms. Smith visited her in spring 1994, Lynnette talked about wanting to go to another high school. Ms. Smith believed that Lynnette was struggling with the need to establish her identity, even though a math teacher reported to Ms. Smith that in the last month "Lynnette and Lynnetta had begun sitting together and helping one another more." Lynnette's marks at that point were all "passing," but she did not feel good about her academic progress. Although in fall 1993, Lynnette had

expressed an interest in a number of after-school clubs and extracurricular activities, by spring she had joined none. It was also about this time that Lynnette reported that she no longer talked to her mother because she did not want to bother her. Lynnette's mother confirmed this shift in a conversation with Ms. Smith. In a parallel development, Lynnette was turning to her Connector for intimacy: Ms. Smith noted that Lynnette was increasingly sharing "a great deal of personal issues with me."

When Ms. Smith went to visit Lynnette in fall 1994, she was absent. In looking at her school records, Ms. Smith noted that beginning in the middle of her ninth grade year, Lynnette had been missing school more and more frequently.

Lynnette's transition from middle to high school was rocky, at best. Although her experience was more rugged than that of many students, it incorporates themes that reverberated across the sample of youngsters moving from one school level to another.[28] As middle school students entered the larger and more impersonal environment of Gratz, it was not unusual for them to feel alone during their first months.[29] Like Lynnette, several found themselves failing one course or another. For example, one regular education student explained to her Connector that she had failed a class "because I didn't understand the grading criteria." Over time, however, many of these students, in contrast to Lynnette, found that Charters, because they grouped students into smaller units, assisted them in getting to know peers, teachers and the layout of the building. Thus, they were able to develop relationships that helped them feel comfortable and allowed them to succeed in school. One Connector who had been worried about her student reported how pleased she was to find him settled in his new Small Learning Community, clean and well-dressed and negotiating peer relationships. The problem that remained-- he still sometimes got lost in the building and was late for class--seemed small by contrast.

---

[28] Although there was overlap between the transition experience of those who stayed within the feeder pattern and those who left the feeder pattern, because our purpose was to understand children's school experiences within the Gratz cluster, we focus in this section only on the experiences of students who, like Lynnette, attended the neighborhood schools.

[29] The kind of experience Lynnette and others in this study had entering Gratz High School is not unique. Students in many urban high schools face the same kind of problems and express the same kind of concerns.

The experience of elementary youngsters as they moved into middle school was much less alienating. Many found this transition "easy" because there was a support network already in place when they arrived at middle school: neighborhood friends and sisters, brothers and cousins eased their transition into a new social world. In addition, just as Charters helped high school students negotiate their new and larger school setting, structures such as Houses, and programs such as Academics Plus or special education, helped middle school students settle into smaller communities where they were able to get to know a new circle of friends and teachers. Still, not all students made the transition smoothly. A few students confided to their Connectors that it was harder to connect with their teachers in middle school than it had been in elementary school. One Connector observed that by Christmas of her student's first year in middle school, she was still spending most of each day alone, she didn't have a locker and was carrying her coat and all her books around with her from class to class, and she missed lunch regularly because she could not figure out when lunch was scheduled on her rotating roster. Several Connectors commented on surprising changes they observed in their students' conduct. One was shocked to discover his student sucking her thumb, something he had never seen her do in elementary school. Another commented that his student had stopped wearing her glasses.

Many Connectors, like Ms. Smith, found themselves anxious about their students' academic and social well-being. They worried that what safety nets there were, were not catching many of the youngsters who were experiencing difficulties. For example, one Connector reported that she feared her student was getting lost in his new middle school: "I see a more subdued student than when he was in my room ... now he just seems to blend in with his classmates." The Connectors were particularly worried about students whom they had been concerned about or felt they did not know well even before leaving elementary and/or middle school. Among these kinds of students, they reported seeing youngsters who never raised their hand and/or were never called on, who put their heads down on their desks during instruction periods, who came to class having done the wrong assignment the night before, and one whose teacher "didn't say anything to him from arrival to departure." Connectors following high school students found that very few asked for help, either inside or outside of school, when they were having trouble, socially

or academically. For their part, students, when asked directly about classes they found most exciting, commended those in which they were active learners. One student explained why she liked science class by noting, "I feel I am able to create in science, try different things." It was not uncommon for students to mention gym, the expressive arts and extracurricular activities as their favorites.

Like Lynnette, many students found that they needed to re-evaluate their relationship with peers. They put a new emphasis on staying away from children who might lead them into trouble or distract them from their school work. Remarks such as "[I] spend my time with the right people," and "Children start a lot of trouble [but] I know how to avoid trouble" were common. Only rarely did a student move beyond the notion of individual responsibility for staying out of trouble to talk of ways in which schools created safe climates. One exception was a student who observed, "[There] are no conflicts ... because the NTAs don't allow it."

From the Connectors' perspective, some students made less wise choices than did others. Among Connectors who were worried about their students' new friends, concerns centered around the failure to avoid trouble and the tendency to spend too much time with friends and too little time on school work. "My student was shy in elementary. [He is] more active and in trouble now because of peer interactions. This hurt his grades in some classes." And of a high school student, "[He] allowed peers to influence him during the third report period and received three Fs." And of another high school student, "When I arrived, he was missing. Gone to the store with peers who are not plugged in."

As a group, Connectors described special education students such as Lynnette as quiet, shy and self-conscious in their new settings much more frequently than they did regular education students. Connectors observed that special education students did not talk much in their classes, in some instances because they were not volunteering responses to teachers' questions, in others because the classroom did not offer opportunities for talk. Like Ms. Smith, who noted that in her initial interview with Lynnette she could not disturb her surface responses, other Connectors observed that special education students seemed more reluctant to talk during one-on-one interviews than did regular education students.

Summary

Despite the fact that schools have in place mechanisms for keeping track of children--daily attendance sheets, report cards, etc.--and staff such as counselors, social workers and sometimes home visitors who are alerted when youngsters are having difficulties, these student support services are often neither comprehensive nor coherent, and they rarely bridge one school level (or school) to the next (Newberg 1995). Lynnette's story poignantly illustrates the limitations in the way schools have historically responded to youngsters, missing developments that are multidimensional and manifest themselves over time. The process of listening to Lynnette and observing her--experiencing school *with* her--as well as talking to her teachers and peers provided Ms. Smith with a unique window into Lynnette's life in school. Her notes on what she saw and heard provided Ms. Smith with a record which she and her colleagues could reflect on in order to make sense out of Lynnette's school life. Many of the themes which manifested themselves in Lynnette's story rang true in the stories other Connectors were documenting about their students. In Chapter IV we will see how collaborative examination of children's school lives created the potential for change.

CHAPTER IV

From Words To Action: How Participatory Evaluation
Contributed to School Restructuring

In The Gratz Connection the Connectors participated in all aspects of the evaluation research process, including conceptualization, data collection and interpretive analysis. They became central to the construction of knowledge about students and not marginal to what "experts" know about youngsters. Collaborative investigation gave them practice in looking together at data, listening to one another as they reflected on that data, and, finally, considering the implications for their classrooms, school and cluster.

Through The Gratz Connection, many Connectors became members of leadership teams at their schools. From this position, they introduced specific processes and suggestions for change, including ideas generated by the case studies about how schools might better support students during transitions. Also, the Connectors were a resource to and support for others at their sites, as their schools moved to replace traditional, hierarchical models of governance and teaching and learning with more collaborative approaches. Their new skills in inquiry and reflection supported them as they moved into these new responsibilities. Overall, teachers who participated in The Gratz Connection came to view their roles as multidimensional; they began to look beyond their own classrooms as they engaged with colleagues in the consideration of complex issues about students' education.

Most of The Gratz Connection schools made changes as a result of their involvement in the project. Changes at some sites were considerably more dramatic than at others. This chapter focuses primarily on the sweeping changes undertaken at Washington Middle School. We return to the story of Lynnette and Ms. Smith and examine specific ways in which collaborative inquiry into Lynnette's school experience influenced this Connector's classroom practice and spurred school-wide restructuring. Washington's experiences are unusually well documented because Ms. Smith and her principal made public presentations detailing how the faculty and administration at their middle school had worked to restructure in response to insights gained from Lynnette's

story and from the case study research in general. This public record of the change process at their school allows us to see how the convergence of participatory evaluation with strong leadership, frequent and open communication among school staff, and good timing can broaden the scope and deepen the nature of change. To widen the discussion, we interweave the experiences of other Connectors and schools with that of Ms. Smith and Washington Middle School.

The Impact of Participatory Evaluation on Teachers

Through the Descriptive Review of the Child, Ms. Smith discovered that looking closely with colleagues at one child can be helpful in thinking through how schools might better support all children. "I was surprised that some of the insights we had looking at this one child in depth had systemic implications." She described several dimensions where looking deeply at Lynnette influenced her thinking about her classroom and school.

> As I walked around with Lynnette, I began to see what her day was like and what was happening to her through her eyes. My relationship with her started to change once that happened. At first I was asking her my scripted questions and she was giving me her scripted answers. But somewhere in the process--after I had begun to look deeply at her experience--we stopped giving each other the script. I started to listen and respect what she said and she sensed it and she started opening up.

> From this experience I understand more the importance of dialogue. Sometimes at the middle school level we are so programmed for order and structure: Pre-classwork on the board or get journal writing started, then get into motivating the students by drawing their prior knowledge into the lesson, then get the lesson going. And do we really allow time for dialogue? This taught me to allow more time for kids to talk to me. I also realized that along with time for dialogue we need time for careful listening. I understand now that if you have kids tell you something over and over and you just listen, the truth of what is happening will emerge. Even within the classroom setting, I had a new appreciation for how dialogue validates the knowledge production process.

> I am more plugged into faces, gestures, movements. What a student does when they are disgusted, when they are happy. I spend time now studying the gestures and movements of my students.

> As I reviewed Lynnette's school experience and what teachers had said about her, I felt that schools value the quiet good students, but they do not always meet their needs. The research, in general, also pointed out that while the onus is on students to stay out of trouble, we in schools do not provide trouble free environments.

> When I considered Lynnette's failure in health [class] that first year of high school, I saw that while the work was at a ninth grade level, far above her capacities, she might have had more success if the teacher had supported her with a more active learning environment. I believe she might have met success if she could have dealt with the material in a different way rather than just as 16 letter vocabulary words on the board.

Similarly, other Connectors began to view their own classrooms and schools differently because of their involvement in the case studies. For example, one Connector, a fifth grade teacher, described how she developed an "independence curriculum" after visiting the middle school and observing the many new responsibilities her students would have to assume. Another Connector, a first grade teacher, was impressed by how much she learned from her case study student by listening to him. Now she no longer relies only on school records to acquaint herself with her students; as new pupils enter her classroom, she interviews each one individually.

Ms. Smith also described the ways in which the initial inquiry into the school experience of a few students led her and other Connectors from her school to further ponder all students' school experiences. This reflection, coupled with discussions the Connectors held with school-site colleagues, contributed to innovations.

> My colleagues and I who were following kids through their school transitions from one school level to the next talked about what we were learning with others at our school. We were asking, 'What kind of questions can we ask about school systems and restructuring by looking deeply at our questions about individual students?' With our colleagues we extended this investigation by inviting elementary school children over from our feeder schools so we could just listen to what their worries were. We asked them, 'How do you feel about coming to this middle school? What do you hear about us? What are your concerns? What are your worries? What do you like doing in elementary school that you hope to continue in middle school? What do you hope you'll do differently?'

At other sites, professional collegiality also led to action. For example, when a Connector reported on his student at a faculty meeting, his fellow teachers were distressed to learn that the student was no longer wearing her glasses. As a group, they decided that when students were leaving their school, they would attach "alert" notes to a student's pupil pocket if they wanted to be sure that the next school level was aware of a particular situation or problem. Similarly, at a middle school, all five Connectors

volunteered to "look out for problems," making themselves available to teachers from the feeder schools who wanted someone to intervene on behalf of a particular student. At an elementary school, after seeing students' positive response to teachers from their "old" school visiting them in their "new" school, it was decided that all their graduating fifth grade students would be assigned an adult mentor for their first year of middle school.

The Impact of Participatory Evaluation on Schools

At Washington Middle School, the participatory evaluation moved from being a catalyst for change among participating teachers and their closest colleagues to becoming the foundation for school-wide restructuring plans. Below is the way Ms. Melanie Hopkins,[30] the principal of Washington Middle School, described the influence of the research on her school to a gathering of teachers, parents and administrators. She began her account by pointing out the importance of the intersection of the case study research with a commitment to school restructuring, a goal of all the schools within The Gratz Connection.

> The Gratz Connection has been in existence for four years and this information was shared with the principals within the Connection and it was shared at Washington with our staff. The issues that Ms. Smith learned from following Lynnette and its impact on her and her classroom could have been left there. She could have come back to our school, shared that in a professional development session and that would have been the end of that. That is so often the case when we go to a conference or we collect data. We talk about it once and it ends there. But we were searching for ways of restructuring within our building and we took the research that was done in the longitudinal study along with other surveys we did and we used them to guide us.

> As a result of the data that was collected through the longitudinal case studies, we believed there were many things that we had to take into consideration before we began the restructuring process within Washington Middle School. Five or six years ago middle schools had been restructured into Houses. In our school, which had grown by leaps and bounds, a House is too large to be a small learning community. We needed something else to guide what we were doing. This research guided us.

---

[30] The name of the principal has been changed.

Collecting data and reflecting on it as steps in the process of implementing change was not an approach unique to Washington; other schools that participated in the case studies began to incorporate similar processes.   For example, teachers at another middle school had begun to use cooperative learning in their classrooms and wondered what was really happening when children worked together. They collected data on group learning by observing each other's classrooms and by asking students to maintain journals during group work time. Together, they looked at their observations and at students' accounts, sharing their findings with other teachers in their House. Insights garnered from this process suggested adjustments to their curriculum. They began to plan how to introduce group skills sequentially, taking into account children's developmental stages through the middle school grades. They hoped the changes would better support their House-wide goal of teaching children to work together and not depend solely on their teachers for answers. At this school, as at Washington, data collection was not an end in itself. Instead, it was a means for achieving a more important goal--in providing teachers with more information, it enhanced the process of reflection and discussion that shaped plans for change.

Ms. Hopkins also believed that Lynnette's experiences were not unique.

> We knew the Lynnette story was not an anomaly. I believe there are many Lynnettes. For many of them, their needs and interests are not served at our middle school. What happened to Lynnette at high school happens to many students when they make the transition from elementary into middle school. Even in the elementary schools you can have a quiet child who gets nice grades because they do not create any problems. I have worked in all three levels and I have seen it.

This recognition that the case study stories captured the experiences of large numbers of school children was widely shared among those participating in the research, and led to reflection on ways in which schools could exchange more in-depth knowledge about youngsters. The group as a whole critically reflected on pupil pockets, recommending that students' administrative records include information which would present a more holistic picture of each child than is currently achieved through statistical data such as test scores, marks, total number of absences, etc. One suggestion was to add samples of students' work yearly, so that over time each youngster's school record would include a

"portfolio" documenting his/her development. A smaller cross-school working group agreed to carry this effort forward.

Ms. Hopkins explained how Lynnette's experience and that of other case study students led the Washington faculty to look deeply and critically at their middle school. As they began to raise questions about the implications of Lynnette's experience and that of other students, inquiry became central to their change process.

> Some of our considerations were so deep because of the Lynnette story. We did not want to make change for change's sake. We had to become a very large learning community so that when we made the changes they would serve the needs not only of the Lynnettes, but also the 1,425 other students in our building. After hearing Lynnette's story, the teachers raised the following questions:
>
> • Will Lynnette be able to survive through the four years of high school? Will she be successful?
>
> • What will Lynnette be able to do when she completes high school?
>
> • Are we in the middle school providing Lynnette with the knowledge and skills to negotiate high school?
>
> • As a middle school, what can we do both for special needs children and for regular education students?
>
> • Was Lynnette's story unique or was this story being repeated by many students not only at the high school level but also in middle school?
>
> • Were children coming to us from elementary school who had been very special there but now were having difficulty succeeding at the middle school level?

The questions the Washington staff asked, which arose out of repeated opportunities for discussion and reflection, shaped a plan for action. First, key curricular, organizational, cultural and structural sites for change were identified. Second, steps were taken to fill in knowledge gaps and to expand the faculty's vision of what was possible. With this added information, the school was ready to find ways to balance the needs and desires of students with those of teachers and administrators and move toward a plan for change.

These questions forced us to look at how curriculum was being presented in our school, and we wondered, was it meaningful? Is it engaging enough? Does it provide opportunities to explore so that when the question is asked, 'What do you want to do?' a student has the knowledge to say, 'I want to be a fashion designer,' or 'I want to be a city planner.'

We also wondered, How are the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the staff affecting students' success? How does the organizational structure of our school impede student success? How do scheduling and rostering support or impede the teaching and learning process?

Lynnette's story caused us much anxiety. So we formed a small group that began to go out and visit other middle schools in the city to see how they were delivering instruction, to see what the climate was like within their buildings, to see what rostering and scheduling were like. We asked about assessment and how students show that they have gained material. A paper and pencil test is not enough to show what a student like Lynnette has gained. That group of teachers made a report to our school's leadership team and the faculty at large about what they discovered.

Although the team learned the ways in which 45 minute time slots no longer meet the needs of children, we knew from the case studies that children valued the independence they thought they were gaining by changing classes at the middle school level. The staff, on the other hand, was concerned about the disruptions that occurred in the hallways and what we could do to have a calmer school. They wanted to restrict movement by having self-contained classrooms because our trouble occurred during transitional periods and we saw other schools with less transitional time and less difficulty. So, we had two problems: children wanted one thing and staff wanted another. This led us to look at how we might restructure the way we use time. We now have five 70 minute periods and one 25 minute advisory. Students still travel to a degree, but less than before and school climate has improved. Teachers get a lunch and an expressive arts period for prep, and working in teams plan how they will use the rest of the day.

We also knew from surveys that the children enjoyed the expressive arts. They enjoyed music, art, and they look forward to going to those classes. They did not like going to math or English because it was boring and social studies was out of the question. We had another problem: How are we going to be able to teach the children the basic knowledge they need and make the learning process an enjoyable one for them? We had to integrate what they liked with what they needed to make it work for them. Expressive arts teachers now each work with two teams and their areas are an integral part of the teams' plans.

Readying themselves for change was neither simple nor easy for Washington staff. Structural constraints--such as the union contract and their own community

standards--needed to be accommodated. And reconceptualizing professional development to support staff as they moved into new multidimensional roles was critical.

> We restructured our building into eight teaching teams, two in each of four Houses. After teachers divided into teams they presented their ideas for a theme, which we call an option, to the whole faculty to see if it would be accepted as part of our OPTIONS program. Our options include Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism; Creative and Performing Arts; Young Entrepreneurs; Law, Government and Consumer Education; Project Med; Bridging Cultures; and Math, Science and Technology. The teachers were able to select the option they wanted to work in. But we had to balance that with other things that make a good climate, for example a balance of experienced and inexperienced teachers, a balance of male and female teachers, racial balance. We wanted children to understand that we live in a world of many kinds of people.

> A lot of effort, pain, work and struggle went into this. We wanted to create an organization where all of us would be in a continuous learning mode. After their team was selected, the teachers--five regular education and one special education -- were responsible for developing curriculum that engages children using their theme. They have begun to develop activities within their classes that help children to explore; they have developed a relationship with community organizations that allow children to engage and serve in learning projects; they have learned about themes that they may not have known much about. Teachers cover for each other so they can go out and go to conferences. That has created an atmosphere for learning in the building.

Other schools also decided to try new teaching and learning configurations. One elementary school restructured into two teams and children are now promoted within teams, following a predictable path. In conjunction with this change, they have instituted what they call "the switch-a-roo," where once a month for one period teachers teach the group just below them (i.e. the fifth grade teacher gives a lesson to the fourth grade teacher's class on her team, and so on, down the line). In this way, children become acquainted with upcoming teachers, and teachers with children they will have in the future, thereby easing grade transitions.

Implementing changes at Washington prompted staff to think across school levels in ways that involved a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents, in their reform plan.

We did an interest survey and writing sample in our elementary feeder schools in

fifth grade, and scored the writing sample holistically. We wanted to have an idea about the children coming into the school. We met with counselors, parents and children in feeders to explain our program. With their parents, the children select which OPTION to be in, and we try to give them their first choice.

Several counselors directly involved in the case studies also initiated cross-school interaction. They brought together counselors from feeder elementary schools with their middle school in a step toward considering supports for youngsters K-12. One of the counselors who initiated this effort had participated in a Descriptive Review of the Child. And like Ms. Smith, this counselor realized how looking at one child in a systematic way with a group of colleagues could help her and other counselors better support many children.

As changes take hold at Washington, new ideas for strengthening change efforts continue to be generated. Linking new innovations to past ones, the staff strives to keep in place a reflective stance where learning is continuous and the hollowness of "change for change's sake" is avoided. Ms. Hopkins describes the ongoing cycle of data collection, reflection, evaluation and innovation.

What I see emerging, and I need to emphasize that restructuring is a process not an event, is [that] restructuring must be a reflective process and what we are trying to do is put in place changes that will allow us to prevent the Lynnette story from reoccurring. Since making changes and developing the OPTIONS program we have seen a decline in discipline problems and attendance is up and so is improvement in achievement. Students are working on projects they like. And new learning communities are emerging: Across teams an interest in literacy is developing, and things like the science fair also cut across teams. Ms. Smith's research surfaced gender issues and some teachers wrote a grant and received funding to study gender issues in our school. A technology group is emerging. We want to give children the kind of experiences that make our school a learning community for them, and make changes that make it a learning institution for all of us.

During this current school year (1995-96), Washington Middle School has introduced the Descriptive Review of the Child to House directors as part of the school's professional development program. As the House directors have become involved in learning this process, Ms. Hopkins has found them re-engaging with instructional issues, and making connections between instruction and control. Next year, she and the House directors hope they will be able to start using the Descriptive Review to look deeply at

children, in conjunction with teachers in their programs, and to systematically document their experiences. Thus, change continues to suggest change.

Summary

The story of restructuring at Washington Middle School and accounts of change at some of the other Gratz Connection schools illustrate the ways in which participatory evaluation, and particularly its focus in The Gratz Connection on children's school experience, inspired student-centered reform on many levels: individual teachers, teams, Houses, whole schools and clusters. Although not all teachers or all schools were equally affected by participation in the research, and not all efforts to make change were equally successful, in schools where good timing, strong, supportive leadership and willing teachers converged, change processes took hold.

An especially important aspect of the participatory evaluation was its commitment to involve multiply positioned school staff in formulating a response to drop-out rates among neighborhood school children. In the final chapter, we examine how approaching the question, "What happens to our children?" from a participatory research perspective influenced people and institutions. We also see how the participatory research both strengthened change processes and made visible the barriers which inhibit change.

CHAPTER V
Reflections and Recommendations

This final chapter explores the reciprocal nature of participatory research, i.e. the way in which the program planners and Connectors shaped the research and were themselves shaped by it. It looks both at the potential of participatory evaluation for strengthening the change process at the individual and school levels and at some of the barriers inhibiting its effectiveness. The chapter then turns to an examination of what happened to students in the study. Finally, it discusses the implications of the participatory evaluation for achieving The Gratz Connection's goal, to forge connections within, between and among schools as a strategy for reducing drop-out.

The Participatory Evaluation Model

Research for Action was written into the original grant to provide a local evaluation that would be "significant and meaningful" to The Gratz Connection. In contrast to the responsibilities of the federal evaluators, who were focused on student outcomes, the program planners wanted Research for Action to "enhance understanding of what was going on in the schools in the project." For its part, RFA conceived of its contribution in terms of a general conceptual and methodological framework that would maximize the use of evaluation findings. Research into what kinds of evaluations are useful increasingly point to studies in which the contribution of practitioners is both deep and wide. These offer "a powerful learning system designed to foster local applied research and thereby enhance social discourse about relevant organizational issues" (Cousins and Earl 1992:8).

In building a partnership with The Gratz Connection, RFA sought to share control of the evaluation through early involvement of key stakeholders (program planners, principals and teachers) in developing the research focus, and by having teachers conduct the investigation, be integral to the interpretive analysis, and disseminate findings within

their local schools. Within and among The Gratz Connection schools, the participatory evaluation was intended to be a seamless part of the on-going reform process, or as Cousins and Earl suggest, a powerful catalyst to conversations in schools about changes which would influence a significant organizational issue--the rate of drop-out.

The program planners and Connectors' involvement with the evaluation research was the deepest among the various school stakeholders. Their ongoing, reciprocal relationship with each other and with the research defined the issues and shaped the outcomes. Their engagement with the phenomenon of drop-out and a realization of their own limited perspective--confined to their individual classrooms and maybe their schools--generated the essential research question, "What happens to our children [when they leave us]?" And it was their relationship to children that contributed to the case study design, in which children's voices were positioned as central to the task of shaping and implementing reform. The program planners and Connectors reported that the research affected them in two important respects: It changed their thinking about the work of teachers, and it helped them develop a positive attitude toward the value of educational research.

Participatory Evaluation: A Support for Individual Change

In focus group discussions conducted by RFA periodically during the study, Connectors described how, when the project began, they thought they would receive training and then go back to their schools and train colleagues. The participatory evaluation approach prompted them to re-think this "best practice" model of professional development in which teachers are cast as consumers of the ideas and knowledge of others. Gradually, the Connectors began to refer to their roles in their schools less in terms of words like "mentor" and more in phrases and words like "resource to other teachers" and "facilitator." Program leader Carol Rose pointed out that over time her own conceptualizations of the Connectors' role within schools changed.

I used to think if you provided a lot of [staff development] to teachers, that would be

the way they would improve their own practice. That is, that a linear relationship exists between exposure to best practices and improvement of instruction. Now I see the process of instructional improvement as more circular, with the teacher central to the creation of this practice. The teacher reflects deeply on classroom practice to make change and then reflects on the consequence of that change in planning future lessons.

A new view of teachers as reflective practitioners was emerging.

Similarly, a broadened notion about the value of the social world of teachers was taking shape. From the beginning of The Gratz Connection, there was tension over whether it was appropriate for teachers to leave their "real work" in the classroom behind while they participated in activities such as the case study research. This tension was especially evident in the comments of principals and colleagues. Even the Connectors struggled with divided loyalties when participation in the research seemed to challenge their commitment to their classrooms. As the following comment demonstrates, however, for many teachers, the time they spent outside the classroom provided rich returns for their students:

> I was really getting to the point where you burn out. But I'm saying [when you get out of your classroom and into other settings], you start to see things a little differently, and see how things could be incorporated in your classroom. ... I had become just like the cinder block [in my classroom walls]. Real rigid. Some of us were very timid and rigid, I think. We didn't quite know where this [the longitudinal case study] was leading us. Like I had a teacher tell me, 'Maybe if some of you would stay in the building, maybe some of the kids would learn.' I said, 'Back off. Because we are going out of the building, we are making a difference in some of our classes.' ... All those years never going to any type of meeting where you're meeting any of your colleagues, where you're sharing ideas.

A broadened notion of her world as a teacher--and particularly the collegial exchange that was part of The Gratz Connection--re-engaged this teacher with her own classroom. Her experience punctuates the observation made by researchers Ann Lieberman and Milbrey McLaughlin on the importance of teacher communities to the task of rethinking schools' goals and structures:

> Teachers choose to become active in collegial networks because they afford occasion for professional development and collegueship and reward participants with a renewed sense of purpose and efficacy. Networks offer a way for teachers to experience growth in their careers through deepened and expanded classroom expertise and new leadership roles (1992: 674).

Participating in the research increased several Connectors' willingness to make changes. For example, one Connector described how his involvement in the study prompted him to let go of some old ideas. He noted that he had become "more observant," and less entrenched in "the traditional views that the notables have set forth before us."" Another Connector echoed these thoughts, "After the longitudinal study, I felt like I was an observer, a listener... And I felt that I learned a lot." Not only did participation in the research increase the meaning of what was being discovered, it also deepened commitment to the findings. "It gives you ownership to do the research itself," one Connector declared; another observed, "By answering questions, it gives you ownership of the research." With this sense of "ownership" many Connectors willingly assumed roles as change agents within their school communities.

Impediments to Change: Ways in Which Research and Action Become Uncoupled

The fate of school-wide changes that Connectors introduced as a result of their participation in the case study research was far from uniform. The depth and breadth of change that occurred was influenced by local context. Despite feelings of "ownership" of the research findings, individual Connectors' ability to effect change at the school level was limited unless a number of factors converged, including good timing, strong leadership and willing colleagues. At some schools change was deep and broad, but at others it was more superficial and piecemeal, and at still others little or no change occurred.[31]

Fragmentation, both between and among school stakeholders, and between and among schools, was the most significant barrier to change. The participatory evaluation surmounted some traditional boundaries, e.g. it successfully expanded the conceptualization of teachers' work and it created opportunities for teachers to visit

---

[31] Both before and during the years of The Gratz Connection other reform initiatives were being implemented at a number of The Gratz Connection schools. For example, at Gratz High School, Small Learning Communities were taking root simultaneously with The Gratz Connection. Competing demands for the attention of school staff by overlapping reform efforts also affected the impact of the research at the local school site.

children in schools other than their own and then meet to talk about what they saw in cross-school groups. Still, in many ways the evaluation did not bridge the gaps that seemed to threaten students. Established disconnections persisted.

The involvement of two stakeholder groups, principals and parents, was marginal. Principals were consulted about the research focus and about implementation, and they were an important audience for the findings. Although they were invited to all the sessions following visits with the students, they were unable to attend. Therefore, they neither took part in the data collection nor joined in the analytical and interpretive phases of the study. Principals' and teachers' roles in schools are sufficiently bifurcated that little ground exists for building a collaborative investigation. Nonetheless, Connectors pointed out repeatedly that for change to happen in their schools, principals needed to be brought into the ongoing process of discussion and reflection. Several attempts were made to lessen the impact of the absence of principals' ongoing involvement. Connectors periodically made presentations of the research findings at principals' regular monthly meetings, and Connectors talked to their principals informally and formally. But, with a few exceptions, the presentations fit the familiar "show and tell" model of school sharing and failed to capture the principals' imaginations. New ways of bringing principals into closer relationship with efforts such as this one need to be formulated.

Parents had even less ongoing involvement with the research than the principals. Despite Connectors' belief in the importance of having parents look at student experience with them and join in the interpretive analysis, the effort to bring parents into the research process was stymied because there were no ready channels through which to launch and sustain such participation. Traditional forms of parental involvement in schools are too thin and formal to be effective in an ongoing research endeavor. In an effort to adjust the research design to promote more parental input, Connectors invited parents to accompany them on one of their student visits. Only a few accepted. As we got deeper into the research, the Connectors grew increasingly convinced that to be effective, action addressing drop-out needed to occur across students' school *and* home worlds. Without parents' participation an important dimension was missing. They stressed the importance of parental participation in any future study.

I think if the research went further, parents should be brought in. We are spread apart. And nobody is having connection. I think it's more reasonable when parents can get involved. They start changing their views.

The long-standing separation of high schools from the lower grade levels also limited utilization of the research. Although a small number of high school teachers were active participants in the study, their presence could not counter the traditional multi-layered isolation of the high school from the lower grades. Administrative custom promoted fragmentation on several fronts.[32] The district's high school principals meet together as one unit, rather than each meeting individually with the principals of the middle and elementary schools that feed into their own high school. Because the dates and times of the meetings of these two groups--high school principals across the district and elementary and middle school principals within a local district--often overlapped, it was only sometimes possible for the Gratz High School principal to attend those meetings in which the study was being discussed with the elementary and middle school principals.[33]

Other factors also mitigated the impact of the participatory research at the high school level. The fact that the high school curriculum is divided into individual subject areas limited many high school teachers' interest and inclination to look at a child holistically, compared to their colleagues at the elementary and middle school levels, whose curricula are more child-centered. In addition, the high school teachers were following students in their own building, making the research less of a "discovery" process for them than for teachers who were entering new buildings at new levels of the system.[34] Finally, the district's array of post-middle school choices undercut the role of the neighborhood high school. When middle school teachers and parents encourage youngsters to seek opportunities in the magnet or vocational schools, rather than continuing in the feeder pattern, high school teachers are left feeling betrayed by their lower-school colleagues and in doubt about the value of their commitment to and work

---

[32] In 1995 a new district-wide reform plan, Children Achieving, began promoting the reorganization of the comprehensive high schools and their feeder schools into neighborhood school clusters. This new organization will address some of the administrative barriers identified in this paper.

[33] Delegating a high school vice principal to attend these meetings was not usually an alternative because often the vice principals needed to remain at the school site when the principal was away.

[34] The high school teachers could not be re-assigned to younger students. Because of rosters and orientation, they were reluctant to "reach back" and follow children in the lower grades.

for the education of children. This psychological distance, on top of the structural, organizational and curricular distance that exists between the high school and middle and elementary schools, limited the overall interaction of Gratz High School staff with the study. Future work needs to take into consideration the many dimensions in which neighborhood high schools are distanced from the middle and elementary schools that feed into them.

What Happened to the Students

Connectors who found their students easing successfully into their new schools were elated and tended to feel similarly positive about the research as a whole. Connectors who could not find ways to intervene on behalf of the children they were following, on the other hand, were often both frustrated and disillusioned. They witnessed how the complex process of children disconnecting often is invisible to school staff. Lynnette's high school teachers seemed completely unaware that in the middle school she had been a star student--they simply viewed her present work as unacceptable and treated her accordingly. The Connectors also saw the limits of bureaucratic approaches to identifying children who are absent frequently, late often and/or pose disciplinary problems. Often, such behaviors are symptomatic of long-standing problems, and by the time these symptoms are fully recognized, the youngsters have already disconnected. The pain of Connectors paired with such students was a poignant reminder of the need for better connections between school stakeholders and school levels, especially at points such as transitions where there are few if any bridging mechanisms--human or bureaucratic--for keeping track of youngsters *as individuals* as they move out of one level and into another. The work of The Gratz Connection to develop collective action seemed less a solution than a constant reminder of the yawning systemic gaps. One teacher expressed his frustration sharply at the end of the study:

> In the beginning ... it was exciting because she was so excited to see me. She was very open and told me more than I wanted to know. Maybe she thought that I was going to be able to help her. And as years went on, same old, same old. Toward the

end when I was there, she was still, 'It's nice to see you, but so what? You're not going to change my situation.' You could just tell, she'd still tell me whatever I wanted to know, and she'd still answer all the questions, but ... it's for *our* benefit, but it's not for *her* benefit.

Many youngsters' stories, whether they chronicled success or failure, caused us to reflect on the need to listen to students in order to reconceptualize the relationships among schools as institutions and between the individual members of one school community and another. For example, Lynnette's early school record made us wonder about the hole she seemed to have fallen through: If teachers and counselors across schools had communicated substantively about both her learning difficulties and home stresses, might she have avoided repeating twice and/or might she have been identified earlier as a youngster with learning disabilities? And in reviewing her first months of high school, we wondered if she were not again on the precipice, poised to fall through another gap in the system. Who was there at Gratz whose responsibilities specifically included communicating with the middle schools and monitoring students' experiences to identify an emerging pattern of isolation, discouragement and disaffection?

The difficulties a number of Connectors had in maintaining contact with students as they slipped between schools or out of school highlighted areas that traditionally fragmented school systems need to pay attention to as they, like the Philadelphia district, move toward smaller, connected educational units, such as Small Learning Communities and neighborhood clusters.

- What are the responsibilities of school personnel for communication with one another about individual children?

- Who should take responsibility for a child who slips between schools--public or parochial, in the feeder pattern or out--either by choice or because he/she is sent to another school?

- Where is the evidence, when youngsters are chronically absent and no one seems to know what is happening with them, that the system is invested in keeping students, as individuals, through graduation?

- What is the role of knowledge about students' social/community lives and whereabouts?

- What "safety nets" need to be put in place to close the holes that youngsters are falling through?

Building Connections Within, Between and Among Schools

In the early part of The Gratz Connection, many of the school "connections" that were made were on the level of exchanges and visits; in later years, the notion of making connections deepened. For example, a middle school and its feeder elementary schools began to explore ways to build a math curriculum that would span school levels. Counselors from feeder schools were exploring how they might better share information about children needing their support. Connectors were involved in re-examining pupil pockets as a means to improving teacher-to-teacher communication about youngsters both within and between schools. In retrospect, many of the Connectors realized that they had become the pivotal pieces bridging the spaces between people and schools.

> So, I think, we didn't know in the beginning how much the word connector would be a part of our lives. As it is, I see we're getting called on more and more to make connections in our schools, across schools, and with the [case] studies with lives, different lives that need us.

In thinking back on memorable moments within the participatory evaluation, many Connectors mentioned important human relationships. "...[W]hat was great was there's a warm connection that was made. Me going to the school, talking to the principal, it meant something. The articulation has opened us." Times when rapport between the Connector and her/his student reached beyond that of the usual teacher-student relationship were singled out.

> Well, for me, I was his teacher and he's always known me to be very strict and stern with him. And for me to visit him at the [disciplinary] school and to show compassion ... really talking to him heart to heart, I think it meant something to him, to see this. ... So I think I've learned that I have to be more accepting and more giving and responsive to their needs, whether they're my students, they'll always be my kids. They'll always be my kids whether they go to your class or your school. They'll always be my kids.

Collegial relationships also took on new dimensions. A counselor described how her participation in a Descriptive Review of her student helped her recognize the rich

possibilities for deepening her understanding of children by discussing them with her colleagues.

> I put flesh on her bones. ... Speaking with other [educators] and hearing their questions helped me to look at her in a little different way. And from that--the kinds of questions they [other teachers] asked me--I brought that back with me, and started asking teachers questions during SST [Student Support Team] that helped to give personality to an academic problem. ... The reflective thinking is what I benefited from. And we're going to use that a lot next year in my school. It helps you when you're looking at 30 faces ... to look at students as people.

Finally, the person-to-person links forged during the longitudinal case studies helped ease open relations between and among schools. As one Connector explained, "I can go to any school now, for various reasons, and find others I can connect to. It [The Gratz Connection] has opened a lot of communication." Ms. Rose observed that the initial human connection provided the foundation for institutional ties, as well.

> The experience the Connectors had in the case studies made other cross-school connections more possible, because they had been in other schools, because they were now familiar with their feeder school. Their familiarity contributed to the willingness of schools to plan trips together, invite one another to cultural events and science fairs, to have older students go down and tutor younger students. This kind of articulation between and among schools we believe is the groundwork for making students' transitions from one school level to the next easier.

Many Connectors found themselves growing increasingly uncomfortable as they learned with students about students' experiences as they made transitions from one school level to the next. Connectors' discomfort with the gap between what they believed ought to be and what they learned actually existed was an essential ingredient for change. The dynamic of looking together at what was happening to youngsters, bringing to bear a variety of perspectives, interests and agendas on the conversation, supported their being able to talk about the disconcerting phenomenon of students disconnecting from schools.

Working collaboratively, RFA and the Connectors identified places where schools and school personnel both make and miss opportunities to support students, and together we formulated notions about how to focus the collective attention of teachers, administrators, parents and others on creating schools that, in the words of Nel Noddings, are "caring" institutions (1992). Our work illuminated how stronger relationships within and among schools can offer greater educational and emotional continuity to students

throughout their school lives. Restructuring in ways that forefront such relationship building is an important step to creating learning environments where a greater number of students stay connected.

Appendix A

The Students in the Study

The first set of charts in this Appendix (1-6) describes the three categories of students in the study (students for whom teachers have high hopes [a], students for whom teachers have concerns [b] and students about whom teachers realize they know little [c]), across the following dimensions: transience, retention, lateness, attendance and suspensions, *prior* to the beginning of this study. The second set of charts (7-12) details what happened to the students during the years of the study, across the same set of dimensions. The data comes from two sources: the students' individual records, called pupil pockets, and the district's database. For purposes of comparability, the charts group regular education students separately, according to school level (elementary, middle and high school), while all special education students are examined together.

Several aspects of the charts are important to note.

- All of the students' names are pseudonyms; the school names have not been changed, except for Washington Middle School, which was altered to protect Lynnette's anonymity.

- Across all charts, Column 5 traces the path that the student took through various schools, in chronological order. The school name in bold is the school the student attended when the study began. The school name in italics (in charts 7-12) is the school the student was attending at the end of the study. School names not in bold or italic are other schools the student attended.

- The last column in each chart displays the number of times the student was suspended, followed in parentheses by the school grade in which the suspension occurred. This column does not count days of suspension, e.g. a three-day suspension is counted as one suspension.

- A dash (-) in any column indicates that there were no incidences of the designated event.

- A question mark (?) in any column means that this data was not available.

- A school grade followed by a (#1), (#2) or (#3) indicates the first, second or third year spent in that grade. Thus, for a student with two suspensions during her second year in 8th grade, the entry in the final column of the chart would be 2 (8 #2). Because the data did not always distinguish between the various years a student spent in a grade, the parenthetical notation is not used in every case in which a student was retained.

- The initials NG refer to a non-graded special education classroom.

  To facilitate reading the charts, we provide two examples taken from Chart 2.

  Ernest L. is an elementary school student representing category [b]. Ernest was born on August 15, 1980. When he was selected for the study, Ernest was in fifth grade at Kenderton Elementary School. He had been retained in second and fourth grades. He was not late more than 20 times in any grade. Ernest was absent between 10-20 times in two grades, kindergarten and in his first year in fourth grade, and more than 20 times during his second year in second grade. He was suspended once in fourth grade and once in fifth grade.

  Tyson L., also representing category [b], was born on July 7, 1981. Tyson was in fifth grade at Peirce Elementary School when he was selected for the study. Before attending Peirce, he was a student at Walton Elementary School. He had never been retained and he was not late more than 20 times in any grade. Due to a lack of data, we do not know if Tyson was ever absent between 10-20 times. However, we do know that he was absent more than 20 times in third grade. He had never been suspended.

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Ernest L.	b	8/15/80	5	**Kenderton**	2, 4	-	K, 4 (#1)	2 (#2)	1 (4) 1 (5)
Tyson L.	b	7/7/81	5	Walton (K-3) **Peirce** (4-5)	-	-	?	3	-

Turning to Chart 7, we see what happened to Ernest and Tyson during the study years. Their categories and birthdays remain the same but the other columns display updated information.

By the end of the study **Ernest** was in eighth grade at Gillespie Middle School. He was not retained during the years of the study. In both seventh and eighth grades he was late more than 20 times, and although in eighth grade he missed between 10-20 days of school, he was not absent more than 20 times in any grade during the years of the study, nor had he been suspended.

At the end of the study **Tyson** was in seventh grade at Gillespie Middle School. After leaving Peirce, he first went to FitzSimons Middle School for half a year and then he attended Miller Disciplinary school for the rest of sixth grade and seventh grade. He then repeated seventh grade at Gillespie, and during that year he was late more than 20 times, absent more than 20 times and suspended once.

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Ernest L.	b	8/15/80	8	**Kenderton** *Gillespie*	-	7, 8	8	-	-
Tyson L.	b	7/7/81	7	Walton (K-3) **Peirce** (4-5) Fitzs (1/2 of 6) Miller Disc. (6,7) *Gillespie* (7)	7	7 (#2)	?	7(#2)	1(7 #2)

The Students When We Met Them (Charts 1-6)

Chart 1, Chart 2 and Chart 3 present the students who were exiting elementary school at the beginning of the longitudinal study. Chart 1 contains category [a], Chart 2 contains category [b], and Chart 3 contains category [c] students. Chart 4 presents the students who were exiting middle school. Categories [a], [b] and [c] are all displayed in Chart 4. Chart 5 presents the students who were exiting the Ninth Grade Institute at Gratz High School, and Chart 6 includes all of the special education students in the study.

Chart 1: Regular Education Students, Elementary [a]
Students' School History Previous to the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Trudie W.	a	7/23/82	4[*]	**Allen**	-	-	-	-	-
Nekesha S.	a	8/30/81	5	**Bethune**		-	1, 2, 5	K	-
Hamid W.	a	3/1/81	5	**Cleveland**	-	-	-	-	-
Rubi S.	a	2/9/82	4[**]	**Dick**	-	-	-	-	-
Montel W.	a	5/27/81	5	**Duckrey**	-	-	-	-	-
Nora P.	a	1/27/81	5	**Kenderton**	-	-	K, 1, 2	-	-
Talisha M.	a	4/3/81	5	Dick (Pre-K, K) **Peirce**	-	-	K, 1, 4	5	-
Timbi J.	a	7/30/81	5	**Pratt**	-	-	1, 4, 5	2, 3	-
Stanley W.	a	7/13/81	5	**Stanton**	-	-	1	K	-
Veronica J.	a	7/28/81	5	**Steel**	-	-	K, 1, 3	-	1(3), 1(5)
Wanda D.	a	7/11/80	5	**Walton**	K	?	?	?	-
Wallace C.	a	12/24/82	4[*]	**Whittier**	-	-	-	-	-
Derek M.	a	4/20/82	5	**Wright**	-	-	2, 3	-	-

*   Trudie and Wallace attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4, while all the others attended elementary schools terminating at grade 5.

**   The Connectors at this school chose to follow two 4th graders and one 5th grader.

Chart 2: Regular Education Students, Elementary [b]
Students' School History Previous to the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Gary H.	b	5/3/81	4[*]	**Allen**	1	-	1 (#1)	K	-
Jared W.	b	3/9/80	5	**Bethune**	2	?	1, 2 (#1), 3	?	1(?)
Traci S.	b	1/22/81	5	**Cleveland**	2 (sum. sch.), 4	-	-	1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 5	-
Shawn J.	b	6/21/81	4[**]	Douglas (K-2) **Dick**	2	3	1	K, 2, 3, 4, 5	-
Tyrone R.	b	7/25/81	5	**Duckrey**	-	-	?	-	-
Ernest L.	b	8/15/80	5	**Kenderton**	2, 4	-	K, 4 (#1)	2 (#2)	1 (4) 1 (5)
Tyson L.	b	7/7/81	5	Walton (K-3) **Peirce** (4-5)	-	-	?	3	-
Vanessa H.	b	3/3/82	5	**Pratt**	-	4	?	-	-
Paul F.	b	8/26/81	5	Brooklyn, NY **Stanton**	-	-	5	4	-
Otis R.	b	9/29/80	5	Howe Finletter **Steel**	3	-	1, 3 (#2), 4	3 (#1)	2 (2),
Jackson W.	b	2/9/81	5	**Walton**	-	-	K, 1, 2, 4, 5	3	-
Roger G.	b	10/8/80	4[*]	Waring **Whittier**	K, 2	-	1, 2 (#1), 3	K (#1), K (#2)	1 (K), 1 (1), 1(2), 1 (2 #2)
Cecelia C.	b	6/22/80	5	**Wright**	1	-	4, 5	K, 1 (#1) 1(#2)	-

[*]   Gary and Roger attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4, while all the others attended elementary schools terminating at grade 5.

[**]   The Connectors at this school chose to follow two 4th graders and one 5th grader.

Chart 3: Regular Education Students, Elementary [c]
Students' School History Previous to the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Roland W.	c	1/24/81	4*	**Allen**	2	-	-	-	-
Justin B.	c	3/5/81	5	**Bethune**	1	-	1 (#1)	-	1 (3)
Antoinette R.	c	11/30/80	5	Cleveland Pastorius **Cleveland**	3	5	1, 3 (#1), 3 (#2)	K, 4, 5	-
Adam A.	c	2/17/81	5	**Dick**	-	-	K, 1, 2, 4, 5	3	-
Simone Y.	c	9/11/81	5	Meade (K-3) **Duckrey**	-	-	K, 1	-	-
Amber S.	c	9/14/80	5	**Kenderton** (2-5)	-	?	?	2, 3, 4, 5	?
Glenn D.	c	2/5/81	5	Allen (K) **Peirce**	-	-	-	K	-
Jerome W.	c	9/25/77	5	**Pratt**	1	-	?	1 (#1), 1 (#2), 2, 3, 4, 5	5 (3)
Barry H.	c	8/18/81	5	**Stanton**	-	-	-	1, 2, 3, 4, 5,	-
Sheila C.	c	6/22/80	5	Detroit, MI **Walton** (4-5)	4	5	4	-	-
Darleen B.	c	1/28/82	4*	**Whittier**	-	-	1, 4	2, 3	-
Sherita T.	c	3/15/79	5	**Wright**	1, 3	-	4	K, 1 (#1), 1 (#2), 2, 3 (#1), 5	-

*   Roland and Darleen attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4, while all the others attended elementary schools terminating at grade 5.

Chart 4: Regular Education Students, Middle School, All Categories[*]
Students' School History Previous to the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	Origin (bold), through current (italic)	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Nicole B.	a	6/24/78	8	**FitzSimons**	-	-	4, 6	K, 1, 7	-
Michelle F.	a	4/13/78	8	Duckrey **Gillespie**	-	-	K	-	-
Iris L.	a	3/13/79	8	North Carolina Cleveland (5) **Gillespie**	-	-	6	-	-
Sharon S.	a	11/24/78	8	Whittier **Rhodes**	-	-	1, 2, 3	K	-
Taylor S.	b	3/17/77	8	Walton Gideon **FitzSimons**	6	-	-	K, 6	1 (7) 1 (8)
Duane W.	b	6/11/77	8	Stanton **Gillespie**	drop in K, 7	-	2, 4	1, 5, 6, 7, 8	-
Kisha S.[**]	b	12/28/76	8	Barratt (6) **Rhodes**	1, 4	2, 4 (#2), 6, 7, 8	1 (#2), 2, 4 (#1), 4 (#2), 8	5, 6	2 (4), 3 (5), 5 (6), 2 (7)
Yvonne W.	c	2/21/78	8	Wilson Shaw (6) **Gillespie** (8)	3	-	-	K, 6, 8	-
Isaiah D.	c	4/24/77	8	McKinley Vaux (6-7) **Gillespie** (8)	1	-	3, 5, 6	1 (#1), 1 (#2), 4, 7	-
Adrian H.	c	10/5/76	8	**Rhodes**	4, 7	?	?	?	?

[*]   One student was selected for the study but parental consent was not given, so she was not included in this chart.
[**]   Kisha declined to be followed mid-way through the study.

**Chart 5: Regular Education Students, High School, All Categories
Students' School History Previous to the Study**

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	Origin (bold), through current (italic)	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Alvonia B.	a	1/17/78	9	Rhodes **Gratz**	?	?	?	?	?
Trina M.	b	2/20/76	9	Cleveland Gillespie **Gratz**	K, 1	-	K (#2), 1(#2), 9	K (#1), 1 (#1), 5	-
Pedro C.	c	6/18/77	9	Catholic sch. K-9 Roman Catholic **Gratz**	?	?	9	?	?

Chart 6: Special Education Students, All Levels and Categories[*]
Students' School History Previous to the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1992-93	Origin (bold), through current (italic)	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp (grade)
Arnold S.	a	10/25/82	5	**Cleveland**	K, 1	-	1	K, 2, 3	-
Monica F.	a	7/26/81	4	Blankenburg (K) Hanna (3) Ellwood (4) **Walton** (4)	-	-	K, 1, 4	3	-
Jawaad B.	b	3/26/82	5	**Kenderton**	?	?	?	?	?
LaVada K.	b	9/20/80	5	**Steel**	2	-	4	-	-
Odessa R.	c	2/25/82	NG	**Duckrey**	-	-	-	K, 1	-
Bobby H.	-	5/1/82	5	**Bethune**	?	?	?	-	-
Albert A.	-	4/28/82	NG	Pastorius (K-2) **Steel**	3	-	2, 3 (#2), 4	K, 1, 3 (#1)	
Jacinda R.	-	11/6/82	NG	**Peirce**	-	-	2, 3, 4, 5	K, 1	-
Tabitha P.	-	4/20/83	4	**Whittier**	-	-	K, 3	-	1 (4)
Lynnette R.	a	8/29/79	8	Hartranft Shaw (6) **Washington** **	1, 2	7	1 (#2), 2(#1) 2(#2), 6, 7	K, 1 (#1)	-
Perry B.	-	9/25/79	8	**FitzSimons**	-	1	1, 2, 6, 7	5	1 (1)
Duncan J. ***	-	10/9/79	8	**Rhodes**	-	3, 7	-	-	-
Louis L.	a	8/25/77	10	Gillespie **Gratz**	?	?	?	?	-
Clifford G.	b	10/28/77	11	Bartram **Gratz**	1, 2, 11	-	K	1 (#1), 1 (#2), 2 (#1), 2 (#2), 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	-

* One student was selected for the study but the Connector did not follow through with any interviews or observations, so she was not included in the sample

** The name of Lynnette's school is a pseudonym.

*** Duncan's mother asked that he be discontinued from the study.

Students' School Experience During the Years of the Study (Charts 7-12)

In Chart 7 we see how the original 13 Elementary [a] students, the students teachers believed were likely to succeed, did during the years of the study. In Chart 8 we see how the original 13 Elementary [b] students, the students teachers were worried about, fared during the study. In Chart 9 we follow the original 12 Elementary [c] students, the students teachers did not know much about, over the years of the study. Chart 10 tracks the middle school students, and Chart 11 the high school students, during the years of the study. Chart 12 depicts the special education students' data histories during the years of the study.

Chart 7: Regular Education Students, Elementary [a]
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Trudie W.	a	7/23/82	7[*]	**Allen** Rhodes *Connecticut*	-	-	-	6	2 (6)
Nekesha S.	a	8/30/81	8	**Bethune** *Gillespie*	-	-	6, 7, 8	-	-
Hamid W.	a	3/1/81	8	**Cleveland** *Conwell*	-	-	8	-	-
Rubi W.	a	2/9/82	7[**]	**Dick** *Conwell*	-	-	-	-	-
Montel W.	a	5/27/81	8	**Duckrey** *Strawb. Mansion*	-	-	6, 7	8	-
Nora P.	a	1/27/81	8	**Kenderton** Gillespie *Hopkinson*	-	-	8	-	2 (7)
Talisha M.	a	4/3/81	8	Dick **Peirce** *FitzSimons*	-	-	7	6	1 (7)
Timbi J.	a	7/30/81	8	**Pratt** *FitzSimons*	-	-	6, 8	-	-
Stanley W.	a	7/13/81	8	**Stanton** *Gillespie*	-	-	7	8	-
Veronica J.	a	7/28/81	8	**Steel** *Gillespie*	-	-	7, 8	-	2(6), 1 (7), 1 (8)
Wanda D.	a	7/11/80	8	**Walton** FitzSimons *Florida*	-	?	?	?	1 (7)
Wallace C.	a	12/24/82	7[*]	**Whittier** *Rhodes*	-	-	-	-	-
Derek M.	a	4/20/82	8	**Wright** *FitzSimons*	-	-	6, 8	-	-

*   Trudie and Wallace attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4. Therefore, they are a grade behind the other students in the study.

**   The Connectors at this school chose to follow two 4th graders and one 5th grader. Those chosen in 4th grade are a grade behind the others in the study.

Chart 8: Regular Education Students, Elementary [b]
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Gary H.	b	5/3/81	7*	**Allen** *Rhodes*	-	-	-	-	1 (5)
Jared W.	b	3/9/80	8	**Bethune** *Gillespie*	-	?	-	?	1(?)
Traci S.	b	1/22/81	8	**Cleveland** Pickett Taldin *Turner*	-	6, 7	-	6, 7, 8	-
Shawn J.	b	6/21/81	7**	Douglas (K-2) **Dick** (2-5) *FitzSimons*	-	6, 7	-	6, 7	2 (7)
Tyrone R.	b	7/25/81	8	**Duckrey** Gillespie *Gratz*	-	8	?	7, 8	3 (8)
Ernest L.	b	8/15/80	8	**Kenderton** *Gillespie*	-	7, 8	8	-	-
Tyson L.	b	7/7/81	7	Walton (K-3) **Peirce** (4-5) Fitzs (1/2 of 6) Miller Disc. (6,7) *Gillespie* (7)	7	7 (#2)	?	7 (#2)	2 (7 #2)
Vanessa H.	b	3/3/82	8	**Pratt** *Elverson*	-	7	?	8	3 (8)
Paul F.	b	8/26/81	8	Brooklyn, NY **Stanton** Gillespie *Strawberry Mansion*	-	6, 8	6, 7	8	3 (8)
Otis R.	b	9/29/80	8	Howe Finletter **Steel** Cooke *Gillespie*	-	6		6, 7, 8	2 (6), 5 (7) 4 (8)
Jackson W.	b	2/9/81	8	**Walton** FitzSimons Rhodes *Sayre*	-	-	K, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6	7, 8	1 (6) 1 (8)
Roger G.	b	10/8/80	7*	Waring **Whittier** *Rhodes*	-	-	6	7	6 (5), 7 (6), 2 (7)
Cecelia C.	b	6/22/80	8	**Wright** *FitzSimons*	-	-	7	6, 8	-

* Gary and Roger attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4. Therefore, they are a grade behind the other students in the study.

** The Connectors at this school chose to follow two 4th graders and one 5th grader. Therefore, the 4th graders are a grade behind the other students in the study.

Chart 9: Regular Education Students, Elementary [c]
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Roland W.	c	1/24/81	7*	**Allen** *Rhodes*	-	-	-	-	1 (7)
Justin B.	c	3/5/81	8	**Bethune** *Cooke*	-	6, 8	6	7, 8	7 (8)
Antoinette R.	c	11/30/80	8	Cleveland Pastorius **Cleveland** *Gillespie*	-	-	-	6, 7, 8	-
Adam A.	c	2/17/81	8	**Dick** *FitzSimons*	-	-	6, 7, 8	3	-
Simone Y.	c	9/11/81	8	Meade (K-3) **Duckrey** *Gillespie*	-	7, 8	8	7	-
Amber S.	c	9/14/80	8	**Kenderton** (2-5) *Gillespie*	-	?	?	7, 8	?
Glenn D.	c	2/5/81	8	Allen (K) **Peirce** *FitzSimons*	-	8	-	8	-
Jerome W.	c	9/25/77	-	**Pratt** (1-5) FitzSimons (8) Gratz DROP - 9	9	8, 9	?	8, 9	-
Barry H.	c	8/18/81	7	**Stanton** *Gillespie*	6	6, 7	-	6, 7	2 (7)
Sheila C.	c	6/22/80	8	Detroit, MI **Walton** (4-5) *FitzSimons*	-	8	7, 8	-	-
Darleen B.	c	1/28/82	7*	**Whittier** *Rhodes*	-	-	5, 6	-	-
Sherita T.	c	3/15/79	8	**Wright** *FitzSimons*	-	7	-	5, 6, 7, 8	-

*   Roland and Darleen attended elementary schools that terminate at grade 4. Therefore, they are a grade behind the other students in the study.

Chart 10: Regular Education Students, Middle School, All Categories[*]
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Nicole B.	a	6/24/78	11	**FitzSimons** *Bodine*	-	-	9, 10	11	1(11)
Michelle F.	a	4/13/78	11	Duckrey **Gillespie** *Dobbins*	-	9, 10	11	9, 10	-
Iris L.	a	3/13/79	10	North Carolina Cleveland (5) **Gillespie** *Gratz*	-	-	9, 10	-	-
Sharon S.	a	11/24/78	11	Whittier **Rhodes** Strawb. Man. (9) *Northeast*	-	-	11	-	-
Taylor S.	b	3/17/77	JAIL	Walton Gideon **FitzSimons** Dobbins (9) Gratz (2 days) DROP - 9	9, 9	9(#1) 9(#2)	-	9(#1), 9(#2)	7 (9)
Duane W.	b	6/11/77	9	Stanton **Gillespie** *Lincoln*	9, 9, 9	9(#1), 9(#2), 9(#3)	-	9(#1), 9(#2), 9(#3)	1 (9 #1) 1 (9#2) 7 (9#3)
Kisha S.[**]	b	12/28/76	11	Barratt (6) **Rhodes** *Dobbins*	9	-	9 (#1)	9(#2), 11	-
Yvonne W.	c	2/21/78	9	Wilson Shaw (6) **Gillespie** (8) *Gratz*	9	?	?	9	?
Isaiah D.	c	4/24/77	11	McKinley Vaux (6-7) **Gillespie** (8) *Gratz*	-	-	-	10, 11	3 (10)
Adrian H.	c	10/5/76	-	**Rhodes** Gratz de la Salle St. Gabriel's DROP -9	9	?	?	9	?

[*]   One student was selected for the study but parental consent was not given, so she was not included in the sample.
[**]   Kisha declined to be followed mid-way through the longitudinal study.

Chart 11: Regular Education Students, High School, All Categories
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Alvonia B.	a	1/17/78	12	Rhodes *Gratz*	?	?	?	?	?
Trina M.	b	2/20/76	-	Cleveland Gillespie *Gratz* DROP - 11	11	-	9, 10	11	1 (11)
Pedro C.	c	6/18/77	12	Catholic schools. (K-9) Roman Catholic High School *Gratz*	10, 12	?	9	10(#1), 10(#2), 12	?

Chart 12: Special Education Students, All Levels and Categories[*]
Students' School History During the Study

Student	Cat.	Birth-day	Grade 1994-95	School	Ret. in gr.	Gr. w/ >20 late	Gr. w/ 10-20 abs.	Gr. w/ >20 abs.	# of susp. (grade)
Arnold S.	a	10/25/82	7	**Cleveland** *Gillespie*	-	-	7	6	-
Monica F.	a	7/26/81	NG	Blankenburg (K) Hanna (3) Ellwood (4) **Walton** (4) Rhodes (5) Washington (NG) *Overbrook*	-	-	5	7, NG (93-94), NG (94-95)	-
Jawaad B.	b	3/26/82	7	**Kenderton** *Gillespie*	?	7	7	?	?
LaVada K.	b	9/20/80	9	**Steel** Gillespie *Gratz*	-	9	NG (#1)	NG (#2) 9	2 (9)
Odessa R.	c	2/25/82	Non-Graded	**Duckrey** *Wanamaker*	-	-	-	NG (94-95)	-
Bobby H.	-	5/1/82	7	**Bethune** *Gillespie*	?	?	?	6, 7	2 (7)
Albert A.	-	4/28/82	8 /Sp. Ed.	Pastorius (K-2) **Steel** *Gillespie*	-	6	-	6	
Jacinda R.	-	11/6/82	NG	**Peirce** *FitzSimons*	-	-	-	-	-
Tabitha P.	-	4/20/83	8	**Whittier** *Rhodes*	-	8	5	-	-
Lynnette R.	a	8/29/79	9	Hartranft Duckrey **Washington**[**] *Gratz*	-	-	-	9	-
Perry B.	-	9/25/79	10	**FitzSimons** *Ben Franklin*	-	-	-	9	-
Duncan J.[***]	-	10/9/79	10	**Rhodes** *Gratz*	-	-	10	-	-
Louis L.	a	8/25/77	11	Gillespie *Gratz*	?	?	?	11	2 (11)
Clifford G.	b	10/28/77	11	Bartram *Gratz*	11,11, 11	11 (#2)	-	9, 10, 11, 11	2 (11 #2)

[*]   One student was selected for the study but the Connector did not follow through with any interviews or observations, so she was not included in the chart.

[**]   The name of Lynnette's school has been changed to protect her anonymity.

[***] Mid-way through the longitudinal study, Duncan's mother asked that he not be followed.

Appendix B

Overview of Attendance, Promotion and Suspensions
in The Gratz Connection Cluster
During the 1991-1992 School Year

<u>Average Daily Attendance (ADA):</u>

Gratz High School:	62.9%
All three middle schools:	Between 80% and 89%
All elementary schools:	88% or greater
Ten elementary schools:	Between 90.0% and 91.7%

<u>Promotion Rate:</u>

Gratz High School:	53.9% of students accumulated enough credits to be considered in the next higher grade.

<u>Percent of Students *Not* Meeting Criteria for Promotion</u>
<u>(Either Retained or Promoted by Exception):</u>

Middle schools:	Between 6.1% and 19.8%
Nine elementary schools:	Between 2.3% and 8.6%
Four elementary schools:	Between 10.5% and 15.9%

<u>Percent of Students Suspended:</u>

Gratz High School:	42%
Two middle schools:	25%
One middle school:	50%
Six elementary schools:	Between 0% and 2%
Six elementary schools:	Between 2% and 8.6%
One elementary school:	18.8%

Source: School Profiles compiled by the Philadelphia School District.

Appendix C

Student Interview Protocol

SCHOOL

STUDENT NAME

INTERVIEWER NAME

I. What do you think you will remember most about this school? Why? Do you think this is something other students will remember too? Why or why not? Is there anything else that you will remember?

II. What is something that you have done well in at this school? In other words, what do you think you are pretty good at? (It doesn't have to be an academic subject. It could be something like singing in the chorus; being a class monitor or helper; whatever.) Why have you been successful at this? What or who helped you to be successful?

What do you think you will be good at in your new school?

III. How do you think your new school is going to be different than this school? (Try to get several responses.)

How do you think it is going to be the same as this school?

IV. What would you like to know about your new school before you go there? how do you think you might find these things out?

V. What are you looking forward to at your new school? Why? What else are you looking forward to?

Appendix D

Interview and Observation Guides

INTERVIEW GUIDE

DATE_____

STUDENT_____ CONNECTOR_____

SCHOOL OF ORIGIN_____

CURRENT SCHOOL_____ GRADE_____

1. An interview is a time to hear the student's experience in his or her own words--to hear from the student's perspective what is important about the school experience he/she is having this year. The interviewer needs to help the student begin to relive his/her school experience and feel comfortable talking about it. To do this it might be easiest to begin with the question:

Tell me about your school day.

Encourage the student to give you as many details as possible by beginning with waking up, proceeding to getting to school, and then to describe what he/she does once they arrive at school. encourage the student to follow through to when he/she arrives home at the end of the day.

2. When your student was interviewed last year he/she was asked about ways they expected their new school to be the same or different than the school they were then attending. To find out what their experience is in their new school, you could remind the student of that earlier question and ask him/her:

Now that you are at (put in name of school), how is this school the same or different than you thought it might be?

Encourage the student to include what is the same or different about the friends he/she has, about the classes he/she is taking. about the teachers and principal, about the lunchroom, gym, and other school activities.

3. Last year when we did interviews we learned that many students felt they were good at certain subjects, in sports, and at being helpers. Many felt their own efforts made them successful in school. Now that the students have been in their new school for several months we should see if this feeling of being successful continues by asking:

What feels good about your experience at (put in name of school)? What successes have you had so far?

Encourage the student to think of both academic areas and non-academic areas including relationships to teachers and to other students.

4. Last year's interviews indicated that many students felt their teachers and parents helped them out when they needed it. Several months into a new school we could see if they are developing supportive relationships by asking them:

Are you having any problems? Do you have any worries about school, your teachers or making friends? Is there someone who can help you if you do have a problem?

You might find out who the student feels free to talk to--other students, a teacher, advisor, relative, or parent.

5. Your student might just be learning about the activities and opportunities that exist at the school. You could ask him/her:

Are there things that will be happening at school in the future that you are looking forward to? Are there activities in which you would like to become involved?

In discussing the student's answer to this question you might try to get an idea about whether the student feels positively about the future he/se sees for himself/herself at (school name).

OBSERVATION GUIDE

DATE_____

STUDENT_____ CONNECTOR_____

SCHOOL OF ORIGIN_____

CURRENT SCHOOL_____ GRADE_____

This guide is designed to help you think about what to look for as you shadow your student. This is your chance to get out of your role as a teacher and view things from the student perspective. The more details about the student's experience that you notice and write down, the richer your data will be. Your suggestions included five main categories for observation.

I. Entering the school and re-encountering your student
Things you might focus on:
   - What does the school look like and feel like (inside and
   outside)?
   - What is the setting where you meet your student?
   - How are you treated by students and staff?
   - How is the student you are meeting treated?
   - How does the student negotiate his/her initial encounter
   with you?

II. The classroom setting (student-student and teacher-student interactions)
Things you might focus on:
   - How do students interact as they enter and leave the
   class?
   - What is the physical environment of the classroom?
   - How do students interact during the class?
   - How does your student relate to other students, the
   teacher, and the content of the lesson?

First class:

Second class:

Third class:

Fourth class:

III. Non-classroom settings
These include observations in hallways, lunchrooms, recess, assemblies, etc. Very often students' experiences in the halls and lunchroom are as important as their experiences within the classroom, so try to note as many details as you can about what happens in these situations.

Things you might focus on:
   - With whom (adults and students) does the student interact?
   - Whom does the student seem to avoid?
   - What is the physical environment of the setting?
   - what is the overall atmosphere of the setting?

IV. Overall impressions of the student
Things you might focus on:
   - Mood/personality/affect
   - Relationships with others
   - Physical appearance
   - Overall adjustment to the environment
   - Anything else you find especially striking

V. Reflections on your visit
What is your reaction to your visit? How did it feel to be an <u>observer</u> in a school? What do you feel you learned?

What do you think was the impact of your visit on your student? How do you think he/she perceived it? Felt about it?

What do you think was the impact of your visit on the school and staff?

Appendix E

Broken Connections

The following section depicts what is known of the school lives of seven students with whom Connectors had difficulty keeping connected. Their stories show the different points at which these student-Connector pairs disconnected. All seven student-Connector pairs were from Cohort I, and all were either students for whom Connectors had concerns or about whom they felt they knew little before the study began.

Adrian H. went from Rhodes Middle School to Gratz. His last year at Rhodes had been a difficult one in the opinion of those who chose him for the study.

5/92 Adrian told his Connector that at Rhodes they gave him too many chances to change his behavior when he acted up. He was excited by the chance to play on the Gratz basketball team, but was not interested in finding out anything else about his new school.

12/92 When his Connector first visited him at Gratz, she discovered that Adrian was often late to school and to his classes. He was finding that at the high school teachers "expect more of you [than in middle school]" and believed that "I don't do as well in my subjects as I could." He was worried about fights in school, and had not yet had any contact with his counselor.

5/93 At this point the connection between Adrian and his Connector was broken. Adrian's Connector missed seeing him because he was not in school the day of her visit, despite the fact that she knew his family and had called the night before to tell him to expect her.

5/93 The Connector could not connect with Adrian.

4/94 The Connector learned that Adrian was with some boys who stole a car and had an accident in it. He was sent to a vocational school and then to a correctional school. He ran away from the latter in March 1994. The Connector heard from Adrian's mother that he was trying to get back into Gratz, where his girlfriend was a student. Adrian's Connector was unable to make direct contact with him.

Taylor S. went from FitzSimons Middle School to Dobbins Vocational School to Gratz High School. In middle school he had had behavior problems and the teachers who selected him for the study characterized him as "a follower." They also noted, however, that he was a good athlete and had strong family support.

5/92 When his Connector first interviewed Taylor, he described himself as having fun in middle school and being good at math and running. He said his mother helped him to study.

12/92 Taylor told his Connector that he saw himself staying out of trouble this year. He believed that the discipline policy was better at Dobbins because "students' stories count." He was coming to like Dobbins over time.

5/93 Taylor's Connector noted problems that concerned her: Taylor was failing three major subjects, had quit track, and was cutting classes with friends. The Connector learned that the Vice Principal had talked to Taylor about cutting, and Taylor told him his goal was to go to class and not follow friends. The Connector noted, however, that he seemed uninvolved in his classes.

12/93 When Taylor's Connector went to Dobbins to visit, she found that he had been expelled and had enrolled at Gratz. When she went to Gratz, she found that he was not attending school. She called his mother, who told her Taylor was with a bad crowd, and might be involved with drugs and stealing. She had put him out of the house and as he had been rejected from several high schools, she was now considering the military or a disciplinary school for him. When the Connector went to a counselor to discuss Taylor's situation, she was told that he had to attend school in order to be followed by a Student Assistance Program (SAP) team.

5/94 The Connector could not connect with Taylor.

12/94 When the Connector last heard about Taylor he was in jail for murder.

Jerome W. started first grade at age nine. He was promoted by exception from Pratt Elementary School to eighth grade at Fitzsimons Middle School and then on to Gratz High School. He was selected for the study because his Connector was worried about him and thought the attention might help him "stay on track."

5/92 When Jerome first met with his Connector at Pratt elementary school, he expressed a desire to "[stay] in school to make [his] mother happy."

12/92 His Connector went to school to visit him but Jerome was absent, even though the Connector had called him the night before and he had promised to be there.

5/93 In an interview, the Connector learned that Jerome helps at home by caring for his older sister, who is ill, and that accounts for his many absences. His teachers agreed that Jerome has potential and does well when he is there. Despite 68 absences and 14 late arrivals, the school had not investigated his situation.

4/94 When the Connector checked with Gratz staff she was told that Jerome had been dropped from the rolls. His last year's record indicated that he had received all Fs and had been absent 136 times.

Duane W. went from Gillespie Middle School to Lincoln High School. His last year of middle school had been very difficult. He failed subjects, was homeless with his mom for a while, was on probation, was overweight and responded to teasing with aggression.

5/92 The Connector interviewed Duane before he left Gillespie.

12/92 When his Connector went to Lincoln High School to visit Duane he was not there. His school record indicated that Duane was chronically absent. The Connector met with his teachers and a counselor. They agreed to recommend him for the SAP program and to contact him. The Connector noted that Duane's teachers seemed interested in knowing more about his capacities as a student. They asked her about his reading level, learning disability, etc.

5/93 When his Connector returned to the school, Duane had been out of school for a month. His counselor, who had not made much progress since December in finding out about the boy's problems, explained that Duane's phone was disconnected. There was no record of a CEH14, an administrative trigger to alert the attendance office that a student had been absent more than three days, nor of an attempted home visit.[1] Duane's report card indicated that although he had been marked absent, he probably came to school for his midday classes. The school told the Connector that they would keep him on the rolls until he reached 17 years, then drop him.

12/93 Despite calls to the school, the Connector was never able to connect with Duane.

Trina M. started the study as a ninth grader at Gratz. She was selected because she was a quiet student whom her teachers felt they did not know well.

5/92 Trina told her Connector that Gratz was a bad school where "kids are cutting, hookying, and fighting." She was working on speaking up more and doing better academically, especially in science.

12/92 According to Trina, "This year students are setting fires and stabbing people. I'm mad because I have to go to a school where all this is happening. It messes up the good things."

5/93 Trina was attempting to talk less now, and to get better grades. Her career goal was to be a kindergarten teacher.

12/93 The Connector could not connect with Trina.

5/94 Trina's school records indicate that this school year she was suspended once and absent 103 times. Her grades were all Fs. It is likely that she dropped out of school, but it is hard to know for certain since her Connector did not connect with her.

Pedro C. was chosen for the study because his teachers at Gratz did not know him well when he was selected for the study. He had recently come to Gratz High School from a parochial high school where he had been asked to leave because of disciplinary problems.

5/92 When his Connector first interviewed Pedro, he said that he did not feel listened to, and he did not like class discussions, the art room, or the Charter he was in. He was trying to stay out of trouble and build a record that was not negative so that he could return to his parochial school. Teachers reported that his behavior in class was often inappropriate.

12/92 When his Connector next interviewed Pedro, he liked his Charter better and his tone was more positive overall.

5/93 In an interview at Gratz, Pedro said he hated school this year.

12/93 Pedro's Connector did not meet with him because he had returned to his parochial school.

5/94 Pedro was back at Gratz. His Connector re-connected and in an interview Pedro claimed that the staff at the parochial school was "out to get him," and that they expected him to "mess up."

11/95 The Connector tried, but could not connect with Pedro again.

Traci S., a student at Cleveland elementary school, was selected for the study because her teachers felt she had "a lot of potential" despite also having "a lot of difficulties" which made them worry about her. She was characterized as "a good student with a high absence rate and home problems" which have forced her and her mother to move from relative to relative.

5/92 When her Connector, a former classroom teacher of Traci's, first met with Traci, she was surprised to learn that Traci wanted to "be a cop... I don't want to see anyone get hurt. I can talk them out of it. There's too much hurt in the world already."

12/92 The Connector visited Traci at Pickett Middle School and found that she was "upbeat and positive." Traci said that she felt "special" because her Connector had come to see her.

---

[1] At the end of the 1992-93 school year, district-wide budget cuts resulted in the elimination of attendance officers

5/93 The Connector was unable to make contact with Traci because she had moved and school records did not have an accurate address for her. After looking in her pupil pocket, the Connector believed she might be at Tilden Middle School.

12/93 The Connector was able to make a brief contact with Traci.

5/94 Once again the Connector could not make contact with Traci. When she went to Turner Middle School where her Connector believed she now attended, Traci was absent. Her address had been changed in the school records, and when the Connector called the telephone number listed it had been disconnected. She then tried the emergency number and the man who answered "politely told me that he had no idea who Traci S. was."

12/94 Traci was absent again when the Connector went to visit her.

---

and brought a virtual halt to home visits.

Appendix F
The Descriptive Review Process

The following 1986 version of The Descriptive Review Process was used with The Gratz Connection. In 1993 The Prospect Center published a revised version. For more information on The Descriptive Review Process contact:

The Prospect Archive
P.O. Box 326
North Bennington, VT
05257

(802) 442-8333

Works Cited

Cousins, J.B. and L.M. Earl. 1992. The Case for Participatory Evaluation. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Evaluation Association, 22-25 May, Washington DC.

Darling-Hammond, L. 1994. Performance-based assessment and educational equity. *Harvard Educational Review* 64(1):5-29.

Darling-Hammond, L. 1993. Reframing the school reform agenda. *Phi Delta Kappan* 74(10):753-761.

Fine, M. 1991. *Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Albany: State University of New York.

Hess, A.G., Jr. 1992. Anthropology and school reform: To catalogue or critique? *Anthropology and Educational Quarterly* 23(3):175-184.

Kanevsky, R.D. 1992. The Descriptive Review of a Child: Teachers Learn About Values. In Traugh, C. et al. *Exploring Values and Standards: Implications for Assessment.* NY: NCREST.

Lieberman, A. and M.W. McLaughlin. 1992. Networks for educational change: powerful and problematic. *Phi Delta Kappan* 73(9):673-677.

Newberg, N.A. 1995. Clusters: organizational patterns for caring. *Phi Delta Kappan* 76(9): 713-717.

Noddings, N. 1992. *The Challenge to Care.* New York: Teachers College Press.

School District of Philadelphia. 1996. Persistence to graduation. (Data prepared by the Office of Accountability and Assessment.)