

The Journal of
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Cycles of Inquiry and Action

IN THIS ISSUE:

Inquiry and Action for Equity

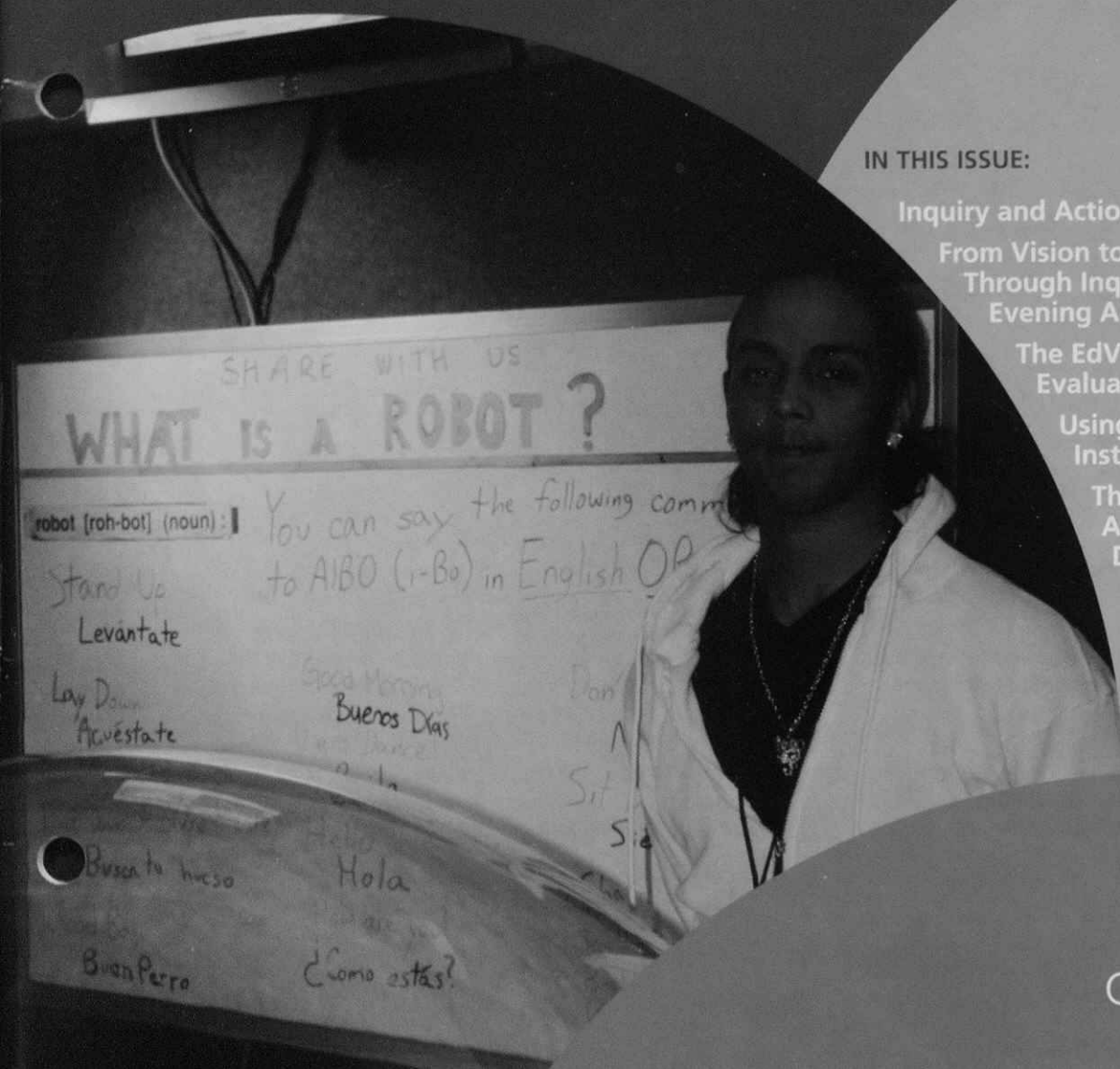
**From Vision to Action: Solving Problems
Through Inquiry at Boston Day and
Evening Academy**

**The EdVisions "Dreamscape"
Evaluation Plan**

**Using Data to Coach for
Instructional Improvement**

**The Dangerous Necessity of
Assessments: A Teacher's
Dilemma**

**Resources for Developing
Cycles of Inquiry and
Action
And More!**



CESPublications



respect to generating data that accurately reflect a unique set of students learning and advancing within individual cohorts. In the case of BDEA, student data collection had been hampered by an imperfect registration system which utilized several collection methods initiated by different departments in the school: the initial application, the registration form, the student support questionnaire, the health form, and the family center form. Several placement tests administered prior to enrollment were also factors.

As the painstaking process of culling sets of numbers from specific cohorts in specific years unfolded, patterns began to emerge which refined the vision even further. Our original quest to identify a graduation rate was marginalized by the data describing our attrition rate. Further examination of those numbers clarified several contributing factors, including attendance patterns and which students were meeting benchmarks, while also identifying common characteristics shared by students who were accepted to BDEA but who ultimately did not enroll.

As the DCI began to look at all of our recruitment and enrollment data with the goal of creating a system by which to measure graduation rate, she continued to include the director of post-graduate planning, the co-heads of school, and the instructional leadership team in the conversation. Pathways for communication were uncluttered, because the goal was clear and its importance unquestioned: to examine the process of application, enrollment, and assessment for the purpose of increasing student retention, enhancing learning, and determining rates of graduation.

The result of our data collection, as well as anecdotal evidence collected from students through a grant funded by an anonymous foundation and administered through the Project for School Innovation shows that students who do not feel "connected" with the school lose interest, or lose the inspiration to persevere through difficult circumstances and continue coming to school. Students who are frustrated as a result of reading at a lower level than the class material also tend to see themselves in yet another school environment that has set them up to fail. This frustration causes them to lose confidence in themselves as scholars, and in BDEA as a school that can give them another chance at success.

Taking all of the evidence and conditions into account, we developed the BDEA Seminar. The BDEA Seminar is, in effect, the entering students' only class for eleven weeks. It is preceded by a full week of orientation during which students get to know each other, their teachers and the school through experiential activities and assessments. The cohort moves out of orientation week with a better feel for the school, their goals, and their pathway to graduation and meets together from

nine a.m. to two p.m. Monday through Thursday, and from nine a.m. to noon on Friday. All classes take place with the same students, the same teachers, and the same support staff. Students are given a chance to assess mid-trimester, and those students who meet significant benchmarks and who show appropriate levels of maturity, have the choice of moving into general curriculum and out of Seminar at that time.

Three of the BDEA teachers most invested in the process of addressing the data findings through the development of Seminar were tapped to create the instructional cohort for a maximum of 50 students. One science, one math, and one English-Language Arts/Humanities teacher are supported by a Student Support community field coordinator and a literacy teacher.

Seminar students also have an opportunity to get a solid understanding of advisory before moving into the general culture of the school. If students come to BDEA from a school where advisory was used ineffectively, it is important to address those impressions and replace them with positive experiences and relevant practice. During Seminar, students have advisory each week with their primary Seminar teacher. The focus for the 11-week period is on identity, technology, and post-graduate planning. Students learn that advisory is an integral part of their education at

The goals for the BDEA Seminar

- Providing a sense of ownership for one's education
- Assessing academic ability levels
- Connecting new students with each other and with current students
- Teaching school-wide curricular expectations, including work on basic skills including writing across the curriculum
- Exploring student backgrounds, learning styles and specific academic challenges
- Boosting student confidence and ability to enter their classes "up to speed"
- Informing students of school policies and expectations
- Creating consistency for teachers in student transition to classrooms at the end of BDEA Seminar
- Monitoring and tracking student retention and attendance

BDEA, offering them a way to become part of a cohesive group and allowing them to see their teacher as a coach, as together they begin to construct the student's individual learning plan. Finally, advisory introduces the concept and practice of experiential education which begins in advisory and extends to work in the community on Fridays.

Identifying Challenges

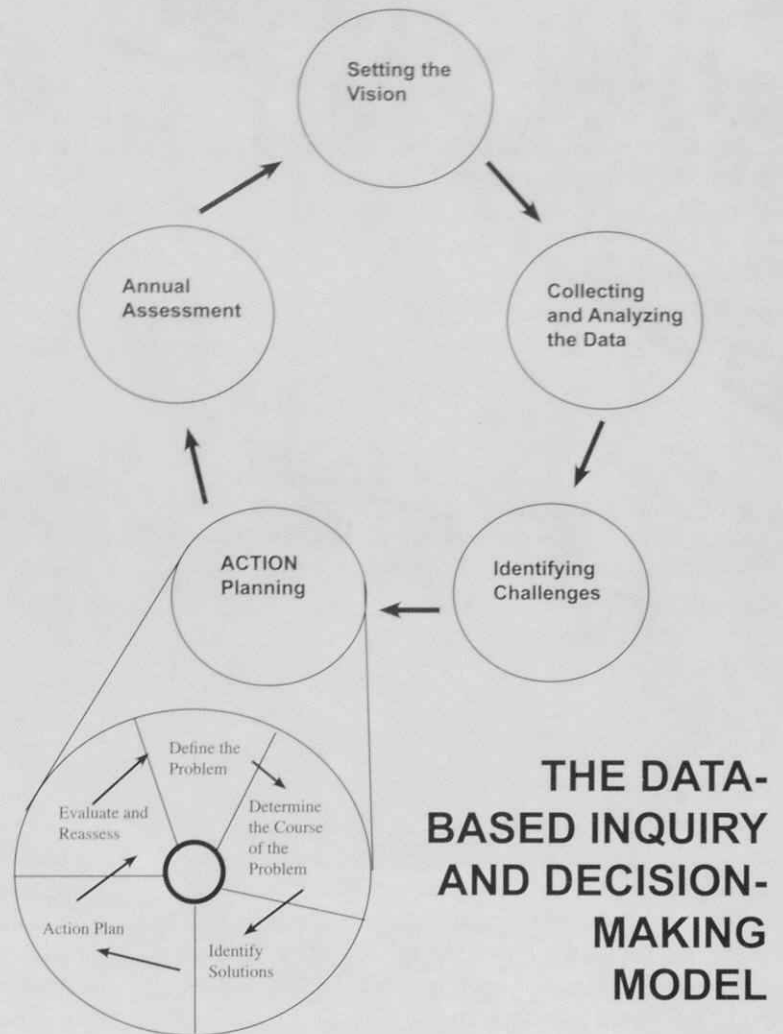
At the same time that the DCI was collecting sets of numbers and identifying patterns, the staff post-graduate planning workgroup was taking a hard look at how to better prepare our graduates for the worlds of college and fulltime employment. The work of this group connected to the others, identifying the need for post-graduate planning to be integrated into the advisory curriculum beginning in Seminar. It was clear to all staff that the school needs to impress upon students that while receiving a high school diploma is an important goal, graduating is really only the beginning of their journey, not the end.

When the attrition data emerged, it also became clear that our first challenge was to change the priority of work across all areas of the school in order to address the immediate problem of student retention. The success of any plan developed to meet this need would depend upon meeting the following challenges:

Whole staff buy-in. Any solution to the problem of attrition would be successful only if the entire staff was on-board with what would likely be schedule changes, personnel reassignment and redirection of funding.

Time. There is never enough time in the day to do the work that must be done in order to create and maintain success. Finding time to talk about program development and implications, let alone starting up such a program, could easily sway staff to postponing any new initiative. The impetus had been directed at post-graduate planning, and suddenly leadership was proposing a significant redirection of effort, so it was important that the work already done not be seen as time wasted, and that any new direction would be afforded enough time to succeed.

Personnel. In examining the strengths of staff in positions that would be crucial to creating and overseeing a retention program, it was clear that changes would need to be made. Ultimately, two



staff in the recruitment/assessment area left the school (by choice), one person was reassigned, one position was replaced internally, and a new position, that of recruitment manager, was hired.

Language. Before beginning discussions about how to address the data on attrition, the leadership team felt it important to create a common language which included all staff as part of the solution to a problem that belongs to all of us, and promoted a culture of ownership.

Reinventing systems. The process for collecting the data being analyzed was far from perfect. In fact, it had been inconsistent across programs and over the years. The inaccuracy of some data would eliminate some years from analysis, but the most recent data was recoverable in large part due to staff consistency. It was clear, however, that going forward, collection systems would need to be put in place and monitored for consistency.

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The overarching questions for leadership became “How does this become part of our work?” and “How do we create new structures based on shared decision-making?” The topic was moved to the agenda of the instructional leadership team and soon scheduled into the weekly professional development calendar.

Action Planning

Developing an action plan involves following a sub-cycle within the larger topic. When attrition data was presented to faculty, the reactions split along program lines, but each included elements of the following: an acknowledgement that attendance was a serious problem, agreement that a cohesive understanding of the culture of achievement was not being communicated effectively, and agreement that there was an inconsistent cross-program message of high expectations. The process of defining the problem merged into determining the course of the problem, and the faculty embraced the process wholeheartedly. Leadership had been advocating for a shift to shared decision-making and made it clear that they needed to hear different perspectives in order to build true consensus with any solutions. Once the problem had been identified and recognized, and a structure for a solution had been described, the staff was able to respond to the data together and to methodically create a solution that would engage new students more quickly in the life of the school while delivering to them an accelerated vision of their life as students and their path to success.

Each of the four work groups had also outlined specific concerns that needed to be addressed over the academic year, including:

How do we establish new students in the culture of the school from day one?

How do we advance our student assessment so that we are addressing students’ needs?

How do we strengthen our advisories so that there is a common vision including rigor, relevance, relationships and results?

How do we make post-graduate planning part of each student’s daily work at the school?

How do we address the needs of students who have been at the school for four years and seem reluctant to move on?

Because the questions had been generated by faculty in work groups in response to the needs they perceived in the school, the identified issues were received as authentic and open for collective action planning. Work groups continued to meet during

the trimester and staff created action plans, which addressed each of the individual questions. All plans were presented and discussed at an all-school retreat, and action plans further refined in response to comments.

Annual Assessment

At the same time that faculty and the DCI were identifying needs and creating school-wide plans to address them, the leadership team, assisted by a coach from the Center for Collaborative Education, began to address what would become the annual assessment process for the new initiatives through rewriting the school’s Accountability Plan. With significant support and guidance from the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), BDEA’s leadership team answered the three questions posed by the accountability structure of the DESE—“Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter,” “Is the academic program a success,” and “Is the school a viable organization?”—by creating objectives which would answer those questions and annually measure our progress towards meeting those objectives. The leadership team also structured department and program mid-year reports around the accountability measurements so that staff would have its own benchmarks to signal progress towards end-of-year goals.

Setting the Vision

At the end of March 2009, a new group of students will be eating Chinese food in room 209, catching up with each other, talking about their new classes, and giving us their impressions of Seminar and the school in general. The number of students who show up to take part in that process is our first indicator that the program is meeting its goals—or not. Their reflections on their first trimester, what they have learned about themselves and their goals, the ways that they plan to achieve those goals, and their levels of academic and personal accomplishment will also inform the cycle of inquiry for next year and set the vision for 2009-2010.

Andrea Kunst joined BDEA as Director of Institutional Advancement and Alumni in 2007 after a career that afforded extensive opportunities for learning in the fields of teaching, journalism, live music, nutrition, dialysis therapy, public relations, development, and finally charter school administration. As part of a remarkable team working to improve education for overage students, she has found her mission.

The EdVisions "Dreamscape" Evaluation Plan

by Ron Newell

This article describes the "dreamscape" as EdVisions Schools moves forward as an education development organization. "Dreamscape" refers to the goals we have developed for the network of more than 40 Edvisions schools nationwide. Here, we describe the evolution of objectives for EdVisions school sites, the development of assessment tools to measure schools' status and progress, and EdVisions Schools is an education development organization and CES affiliate center that provides a program model and staff development for charter school creators. Based upon its flagship school, the Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minnesota, EdVisions helps create small learning environments that meet adolescent developmental needs, engage previously disengaged students, and provide an experience that designed to help develop productive citizens. Our organization has two divisions: the EdVisions Cooperative, which focuses on school development, including ongoing school coaching, and the EdVisions leader center, which supports school development through best practice dissemination, institutes, research, and a variety of technical assessment tools.

EdVisions' approach to teaching and learning focuses on highly personalized learning in full-time advisories. Students have the opportunity to learn in different ways to achieve curriculum standards and earn graduation credits through rigorous, engaging projects that are driven by student interest and connected to the real world. Educators experience a new level of professionalism, putting them on par with other vocations. Results for schools in operation for three years or more show conclusively that the EdVisions model can have a powerful impact on students' long-term success.

The intention of an EdVisions School is to create a personalized culture with strong relationships to support adolescent developmental growth. This is done through a multi-age advisory system whereby each student is well known personally and academically. Each student will feel a sense of belongingness. As well, EdVisions schools support adolescent needs by creating a self-directed, project-based learning program that allows autonomy, thereby creating relevance. Academic needs are supported by creating learning environments that give the students what they need when they need it. Each student is treated as an individual and has a personal learning plan, creating an atmosphere of mastery goal orientation rather than of performance goal orientation. Our prevailing philosophy is that the development of hope is the end result of our work with adolescents.

The Hope Study

In 2003, Dr. Mark Van Ryzin, a researcher from the University of Minnesota, came to EdVisions with a plan to measure relationships and relevance via a set of student self-perception surveys called the Hope Study. The Hope Study is made up of a series of surveys that ask students for their perceptions of the learning environment in regard to autonomy (more choices, voices are heard, opinions are valued), belongingness

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More on the Hope Study

The elements of that the Hope Study assesses are:

Autonomy: Student choice

- Choose what to study and when
- Personalize goals with flexible timeframes
- Learn what is relevant to them and why
- Use creativity and various learning styles
- Various points of view accepted and encouraged

Belongingness: Perceived support of advisors and peers

- Advisors have ongoing interaction with students
- Advisors show care and concern for each student
- Advisors advocate for students and support their learning
- Peers accept and demonstrate respect for one another
- Peers support one another in their learning

Goal Orientation: Approach to learning

- Intrinsically motivated
- Willing to risk
- Positive attitude
- Choose effective strategies for learning

Engagement: Approach to tasks

- Strong work ethic
- Pay attention and concentrate
- Sustained effort
- Use time wisely
- High level of cognitive engagement in learning tasks

Hope: Level of optimism toward ones' ability to be successful

- Conceptualize challenging goals and pathways to obtain them
- Develop various strategies to achieve goals
- Initiate and sustain motivation toward goals
- Demonstrate resilience in achieving their goals

(personal and academic support from both adults and students), mastery goal orientation (intrinsically motivated, not learning for external rewards), academic press (high expectations, reach for understanding), engagement, and hope. EdVisions Schools utilize the surveys to measure the ability of a newly created or enhanced environment to provide an engaging atmosphere that supports adolescent needs in the above mentioned learning environment variables. As autonomy, belongingness, and mastery goal orientation have a strong correlative affects on engagement, the analysis of the data from the surveys gives EdVisions coaches and management an early indicator of whether the schools are re-engaging previously disengaged adolescents.

The study thus far has shown that students in EdVisions Schools do perceive higher levels of autonomy, belongingness, mastery goal orientation, and academic press, and therefore higher emotional and behavioral engagement than is found in traditional school settings. When it can be shown that engagement is rising, the Hope Study shows that hope will also rise correlatively. Hope is an indicator of an internal disposition toward resilience, persistence and goal setting in which individuals see pathways to success and feel they can be the agents of their own success. This dispositional growth provides adolescents the internal means to become successful and productive adults.

The EdVisions Design Essentials

The Hope Study will provide EdVisions coaches the ability to provide data and coaching around a set of EdVisions Design Essentials developed to support the relationships, relevance, and rigor necessary for the school to become an exemplary environment for adolescent development. The Design Essentials are incorporated into four major categories:

Academics: A personalized, project-based learning program that values the self-directed student

Learning Community: A democratic culture that values student voice and supports them with full-time, multi-age advisories and other structures

Evidence of Learning: An assessment system that values performance, application, and "using one's mind well"

Teacher Professional Practice: A democratic system that empowers teachers to make most of the decisions in managing the school

In the first five years, by design, EdVisions allowed a large degree of autonomy for founders to create the kind of school they believed would engage adolescents and to help them acquire skills necessary for the future. EdVisions school founders had to use a project process to meet state course requirements, use authentic assessments, organize students and teachers into advisories, and manage their own schools, but we rarely imposed upon them exactly how to do these things. Consequently, some of the schools we helped create developed into what we would call "hybrids," incorporating elements of the EdVisions model with other influences.

Some of these hybrids did not implement some of the key elements that were fundamental to the EdVisions Design Essentials, such as personal work stations and full-time advisories, and were dropped from further grants and from our network of schools. Other schools adapted the model in ways they believed

EdVisions Design Elements

Academics Design Essentials

Generative self-directed project-based learning: Self-directed project-based learning, driven by constructivist pedagogy, where each student has a personalized workspace with Internet access is the leading and most visible expression of the small school.

In-depth learning: Significant student-led interdisciplinary projects, senior and/or capstone projects, internships, or field study projects that allow for in-depth, original learning over time. Project reflection is built into design of in-depth learning.

Facility designed for decentralized learning: Facility design supports the advisory structure, student generated curriculum, and decentralized lab/work areas.

Personal Learning Plan (PLP): PLP emphasizing each student's aspirations and academic interests, including post-secondary planning beginning in ninth grade. PLP is reviewed each quarter.

Reading: Students and staff engage in quiet reading every day. Reading development is part of each student's PLP and often a key component of projects. Strong advisory-based community of readers. Strong literacy ethic permeates pedagogy.

Learning Community Design Essentials

Small school with multi-age advisories in a personalized climate: Small school constructed from autonomous, full-time, multi-age advisories. School is less than 160 students; if larger than 160 students then organized by autonomous "houses" of no more than 80 students. Personalized climate; personal responsibility, belongingness, task completion, and peer support are evident in highly functioning advisories.

Democratic student learning and leadership: Student voice/consultation is vital. The balance of individual and community is informed by a substantive climate of student voice, consultation, and decision-making and leadership development.

Community connections with experts/elders: Mentoring available to all students from a wide range of community experts and elders. The school is known as a place where learning is enhanced by these community connections.

Extended day, year and variable scheduling design: Innovation around time and scheduling is often a design feature of the school.

Evidence of Learning Design Essentials

Project proposals and assessments: Project proposals articulate state, school, and self-developed standards. Multiple adults assess projects.

21st century skills are priority outcomes: Students are assessed for 21st century skills in interdisciplinary problem solving, lifelong learning styles, communication, collaboration, and information systems.

Electronic project/portfolio management: Electronic system (Project Foundry) for projects and student portfolios.

Growth model of assessment: Hope Study: Academic test results shape PLP. Hope Study results inform school improvement plans.

Teacher Professional Practice Design Essentials

Autonomy: Autonomous school management with control over budget and staffing; individual responsibility and accountability for school finance and educational success.

Teachers and staff full partners: Teachers and staff members are full partners in the school vision and implementation and meet on a frequent basis.

Staff evaluation and professional development: Teacher evaluations by peers, students, and parents; coaching/mentoring plan aligned with each teacher's PLP.

they could reach the student populations that they were serving: students of color, credit deficient urban students, high levels of special education students, etc. EdVisions encouraged some of these adaptations because we believed in autonomy and empowerment of educators. It would appear to be rather suspicious behavior to attempt self-sufficiency for students and not allow the same for teachers.

We also knew that sites developed a wide variety of ways to assess life skills, and that the life skill data were utilized primarily as a method of personal assessment; the data rarely went beyond advisor and student. In other words, life skill data was used neither as a school improvement tool nor as a professional development tool. If data cannot be aggregated beyond a student's personal learning plan, it does not inform the staff about how effectively the school is

building those skills. EdVisions knew that we needed to place more emphasis on aggregating that data for schools to become stronger.

Consequently, the Design Essentials Rubric was created to provide coaches and school staff a means by which they can see correlations between the Hope Study variables and the Design Essentials. School improvement plans can then be created from the results of that inquiry. Data on each of the variables provide school staff members and coaches the means by which they can drill down to aspects of their environments and react to those particular relational factors. For example, if a school exhibits a low mastery goal orientation, staff members may reflect on whether or not grades are emphasized over and

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above understanding. If autonomy is low, they may conceive of ways to allow for more student voice or choice within the framework of the classes, projects, or school culture.

EdVisions Evaluation Plan: Additional Elements

In addition to discovering the ways that the environment affects engagement and hope, the Hope Study data will be longitudinally correlated with retention rates, high school graduation rates, college matriculation, college persistence, and ultimately college graduation rates. EdVisions eventually plans to have in place a College Transition Coordinator who will track students after high school graduation. Engagement and hope scores of individual students while in high school will be utilized in an ongoing study of students as they matriculate in post-secondary institutions. With this data, EdVisions intends to prove that high school environments that provide high levels of relationships and relevance also provide rigor and adequate internal assets for adolescent success in college and work.

The Hope Study data also will be correlated with student achievement data while students are still in the high school setting. Each EdVisions school will keep a database of engagement and hope scores alongside of reading and math scores on standardized tests, preferably the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests. This will provide EdVisions sites the ability to verify that rising engagement and hope does indeed affect basic skill acquisition. It will also provide EdVisions School staff the ability to personalize and customize each student's learning and post-secondary plans.

We do not wish to have the school climate build engagement and hope so as to obtain good test scores. Rather engagement and hope are ends in themselves. We know that adherence to the testing culture, which often begets the teacher-led, course-driven, and time-based methodology, does limit development of hope. The correlation to test scores is more a need to provide proper academic support not for test prep, but to provide a means by which personal learning plans lead to dispositional hope.

In addition, the EdVisions Evaluation Plan calls for utilizing the College and Work Readiness Assessment (CWRA) to assess higher order thinking skills (critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and communication skills). Success in the CWRA is highly correlative to success on the ACT and SAT tests. This assessment will be given three times from the freshman year to the senior year to gauge the ability of students to tackle the higher level tasks needed for success in college and work in the 21st century.

In review, the EdVisions Evaluation Plan calls for each EdVisions School to:

Collect core demographic data on each student to be utilized in personal learning plans and post-secondary planning as well as providing data for individual school success rates with particular demographics;

Collect and track standardized test data on reading and math from induction to graduation, correlated with CWRA data and Hope Study data on engagement and hope, so as to provide personal planning and value-added data for determining school success;

Utilize the Hope Study annually to provide feedback on development of the environment to provide engagement and hope, correlated with success in raising reading and math levels and higher order thinking skills;

Utilize the CWRA to provide students and staff the data needed for personal post-secondary planning and value-added data for school success.

Carrying out the Plan

In order to successfully provide the services necessary to carry out this ambitious evaluation plan, EdVisions coaches will be trained in each of the evaluative factors and how to coach staff members at each site on administering the Hope Study, the CWRA, the MAP, and in the School Improvement Plan. A method for collecting data will be created within a project management tool called Project Foundry. Project Foundry was developed to aid advisors and students propose projects, track project processes, allow for reflection and journaling, track assessments of projects and other assessments, and create a student portfolio and transcript. Project Foundry is being upgrade to include in a Personal Learning Plan template that will be updated periodically by advisors in each site. This forms the basis for the Post-Secondary Plan as well. As data is gathered from standardized tests, the Hope Study, and the CWRA, it is embedded in the Project Foundry assessment data tracking mechanism and utilized to continually update the PLP. Data then can also be gathered from each EdVisions site by management for school improvement planning and for EdVisions evaluation of site development toward becoming an exemplary site.

Portions of EdVisions professional development time will be given over to teaching about the evaluative measures, the methodology for instituting them, and their analysis. Each EdVisions coach and staff member at individual sites shall be immersed in the measures, the variables, the analysis, the data, and their uses so that evaluative processes are inculcated at each school. With the use of the online capabilities of Project Foundry, EdVisions will have the ability to gather the data needed for analysis of each site, analysis of coach-

ing, and evaluation our entire program for investors and foundation grantors. Coaches will refer to evaluative data when they coach at sites. A number of days of coaching will allow for evaluation personnel to interact directly with each site.

Where We Are at this Point: Site Reviews

As a result of an ambitious business plan and aggressive fund raising aimed at continuing to create and sustain great small schools, EdVisions Schools identified the need to assess where present sites are in regard to the "dreamscape" describe above. Hence, we are in the midst of a large-scale site review process. The review process is based upon the tools already in place, and takes in to account some of the tools and processes we believe would strengthen already existing sites.

In order to carry out the site reviews, EdVisions staff members are visiting 35 sites that have received subgrant funds to create an EdVisions School. Site reviewers observe the school in action, interview students and staff, and collect certain data. One of the tools used to collect data is the Design Essentials Rubric, which incorporates the Design Essentials in the four categories. The Design Essentials Rubric is scored on a nine-point Likert scale, with 1-3 considered emerging, 4-6 sustaining, and 7-9 exemplary. We already know from the Hope Study and from site visit observations that the Design Essentials, when fully utilized, lead to greater engagement and achievement from students. When sites stray from the Design Essentials, various problems can emerge and schools take steps backward toward the old model of schooling.

Other data gathered by site reviewers includes how the school site uses data-driven decision-making, and which data are used to create personal learning plans, professional development plans, and school-improvement plans. Site reviewers are looking for schools to utilize not only standardized tests and state AYP criteria, but also data about how students are progressing in life skills and life-long learning skills. Each EdVisions site has been encouraged to create rubrics to score student development in process skills, higher order thinking skills, and life skills.

Additional data that site reviewers are asking for are graduation rates (always a difficult set of data to track in charter and innovative schools that don't use seat-time), the number of graduates accepted into post-secondary degree programs, ACT and/or SAT composite scores, and student growth in measure of hope as assessed by the Hope Stoy. The first, graduation rates, are collected because funders and politicians want to know. The other categories represent information that EdVisions would like to have sites collect in order to create a future focus for students and for school improvement.

After eight years of school creation and replication, we believe that having strong personal learning plans that incorporate a wide variety of data about students, and incorporating post-secondary planning early in the enrollment process, schools will have higher retention rates and higher graduation rates. By utilizing the personalized, student/advisor co-generative curriculum, and project-based processes embedded in the Design Essentials, schools will develop strong life skills and post-secondary success. We know from the Hope Study that schools that embed the Design Essentials increase engagement, and thus build hope and achievement, both in basic skills and in life skills. The site review process was designed to collect data to prove that hypothesis.

The reason the CWRA was built into our future assessment dreamscape was to utilize a means by which higher order thinking skills could be assessed by other than subjective rubrics; especially given the fact that the rubrics devised by our schools were tremendously diverse, and were used in many different ways. The CWRA is an authentic task-driven assessment of a student's ability to do problem-solving, use critical thinking, do analytical reasoning, and utilize good writing skills. Although there are other kinds of skills that could be assessed, these kinds of skills will serve young people well in any future endeavor. EdVisions hopes to have the CWRA piloted in the exemplary schools this spring to see if it indeed could be used to replace life skill rubrics.

Although the Hope Study has been in operation for four years, not all EdVisions sites have been using it. The review process allows us to give feedback on whether or not stronger results are coming from sites utilizing the surveys, and how well sites that are using it are using the data for school improvement. We at EdVisions are certain that if schools use the surveys as a school improvement tool, they will develop stronger advisories, stronger academic support systems, and students will have greater success in future endeavors. But schools have to use the data well. This requires not only buying into it, but also utilizing staff development and school improvement time devoted to enhancing the variables that create strong climates for engagement and hope.

Likewise the senior staff at EdVisions Schools knew that many of the early schools had not emphasized the future focus well; most of our schools were quite content to see previously disengaged students graduate from high school. Whether or not they had skills to complete college or were work ready was not a high consideration. Because of greater emphasis by funders, researchers and by the media on future success, we as an organization also need to prepare schools to look

For more on . . .

- the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests, visit www.nwea.org/system.asp.
- the College and Work Readiness Assessment (CWRA), developed by the Council for Aid to Education, visit www.cae.org/content/pro_collegework.htm.
- the online project based learning management system Project Foundry, visit www.projectfoundry.org.

beyond high school graduation. The site reviews and assessment of school results are designed to refocus schools on long range student results. We will be asking schools to attempt tracking senior acceptances into degree programs and to undertake alumni tracking processes and surveys to determine alumni success; then for the schools to use that data for school improvement and staff development.

The site review process is in its early stages, and it is too early to discuss results. Suffice to say that we are finding that many sites could develop stronger and more formal personal learning plans, especially in how they incorporate strong post-secondary planning. Also, as we knew going in, the schools could do more to use life skill data for school improvement. We also knew that some sites using the Hope Study were not using the data to the maximum affect. And schools could improve their programs if they would find how

well their students are doing after graduation. But we are also finding that the bulk of the schools we helped develop and for which we provided staff development are adhering to the model to a high degree and are doing some very positive things for students via developing strong relationships and providing relevant learning experiences.

The student interviews are the most enlightening. The student population in these schools is overwhelmingly enthusiastic and positive about their experiences. Many students say they previously hated school and ditched whenever possible. Now they are interested in what they are doing and want to talk about their projects. Their attendance is up. Most say they feel cared for and safe. EdVisions students tell us that their schools are successful in transforming them from passive to active learners who have taken responsibility for their own standards of success. As a measure of student perceptions of their environment, the Hope Study demonstrates that students are engaged and building hope, which translates into success by all measures. As we continue with this review process, we at EdVisions believe we will see strong data from strong schools, and that will enable us to help more schools get those positive results in the future.

Dr. Ron Newell is the Evaluation Director of EdVisions Schools. He was one of the founders of the Minnesota New Country School and has worked for nine years with EdVision Schools to replicate the model school nationwide. He is author or co-author of four books on the reform efforts of EdVisions: *Passion for Learning*; *Democratic Learning and Leading*; *The Coolest School in America*; and recently, *Assessing What Really Matters in Schools*, all from Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Winter 2008 Sizer Scholar Announced!

University of Wisconsin-Madison doctoral student Matthew Knoester has been selected as the Winter 2008 recipient of the Theodore R. Sizer Dissertation Scholars Award for work on his dissertation, "The Power of Democratic Education: Mission Hill School and its Graduates."

Presented by the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and named for its founder and chair emeritus, the Sizer Dissertation Scholar Awards encourage a new generation of scholars to conduct research on CES schools and further an understanding of the effectiveness of innovative school practices. Award recipients receive a grant to conduct research or complete their dissertation, as well as a stipend to present their research at the CES annual conference.

For more information on the Sizer Scholars program, including details about the current and past award winners, program requirements, and upcoming deadlines, please click on www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/about/org/DSP_cfp.html or contact Jay Feldman, Director of Research, CES National, at 510-433-1914 or jfeldman@essentialschools.org.

Beyond Looking: Using Data To Coach for Instructional Improvement

by Michael N. Martin and
Katherine L. Taylor

For several years, Judy (a special education teacher who works with students in math and science) sat through staff meetings at which the PowerPoint slides containing the results of our statewide assessment data confirmed what she already knew about her students: they were not meeting state standards in math. Since all of the students in Judy's class were on Individualized Educational Plans for math, it was a disheartening experience to see large bar graphs continually broadcasting her students' lack of success. "I know what the data are saying, but what they aren't saying is what I need to do," she remarked. We met a few times after that to discern which data she needed to help her make instructional moves to promote student achievement. In my role as a job-embedded instructional coach in the building, I began with her questions regarding her dilemma. I then accessed quantitative data in the form of statewide standardized assessment scores and data from a district-wide assessment, and recruited help from the district assessment office to compile a portfolio of data about her students.

When Judy and I met again, we reviewed the quantitative data about her students' achievement in math. After building the assessment picture, we were easily able to move from data to practice by using probing questions centered around individual students, such as, "Given that you now know that this student struggles with number sense, how will you help him increase his understanding in this area? What curricular and instruction choices will you make that might help him?" Judy left the meeting with a deeper understanding of what the quantitative data conveyed, and was able to turn what she learned into specific instructional techniques intended to help her students. After

our collaboration and reflective conversation using data, Judy began more intentional, flexible grouping for students to deepen their work in a particular math strand. She also incorporated more self-reflection and assessment using language from the standards as part of her routine classroom practice.

As a team of job-embedded instructional coaches in an ethnically and economically diverse learning environment, we are dedicated to thinking through and troubleshooting the improvement of teaching and learning in the three learning communities that make up Clover Park High School. We agree with commentator Laurie Olsen who writes, "Data provide both a stark picture of how we're doing and a wonderful tool for stimulating dialogue about how a school community is faring and what it considers important." We make use of qualitative and quantitative data to form the basis for the professional development—and the goal of improved student achievement—that we create and facilitate. We use a number of quantitative data sets, disaggregated for factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, content, and grade levels. These include state standardized tests, building-administered assessments, building graduation rates, and grade reports. We use multiple assessments to give us a more complete picture of teaching and learning in the building. Our conversations around improvement

Continued on next page



The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles



The Coalition of Essential Schools

Imagine schools where intellectual excitement animates every student's face, teachers work together to improve their craft, and all students thrive and excel. For more than 20 years, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) has been at the forefront of making this vision a reality. Guided by a set of Common Principles, CES strives to create and sustain personalize, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

The CES network includes hundreds of schools and 26 Affiliate Centers. Diverse in size, population, and programmatic emphasis, Essential schools serve students from kindergarten through high school in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Essential schools share the Common Principles, a set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling. Reflecting the wisdom of thousands of educators, the ten Common Principles inspire schools to examine their priorities and design effective structures and instructional practices.

CES was founded in 1984 by Theodore R.Sizer and is headquartered in Oakland, California. Please visit our website at www.essentialschools.org for more about CES's programs, services, and resources.

Horace

CES publishes its journal *Horace* quarterly. Combining research with hands-on resources, *Horace* showcases Essential schools that implement the ten Common Principles in their structures, practices, and habits. Within four focus areas—school design, classroom practice, leadership, and community connections—*Horace* explores specific questions and challenges that face all schools in the CES network.

Subscriptions to *Horace* are a benefit of affiliating with CES National as a regional center, school, or network friend. We invite you to visit the CES website at www.essentialschools.org for information on affiliation and to read *Horace* issues from 1988 through the present.

Jill Davidson, editor of *Horace*, welcomes your comments, issue theme and story ideas, and other feedback via email at j davidson@essentialschools.org.

Lewis Cohen
Executive Director

Jill Davidson
Publications Director

According to researchers Joellen Killion and Cynthia Harrison, job-embedded coaching stresses an on-site presence of coaches who work with teachers directly, assisting in learning and applying the new knowledge and skills necessary to improve the academic performance of all students. In the Clover Park District, each elementary, middle, and high school has at least one coach. The job-embedded coach works in and reports to the school, not to the district's central office or an outside agency. Clover Park's instructional coaches don't just have an office where they hold office hours, hang their coat, and plug in their laptop—they have a central location in the building, a kind of “research and development” center where they work and learn in the same places where the teachers they serve work and learn. They are a visible part of the school culture and are available for spontaneous opportunities for reflective conversations and professional learning with the educators in the building.

often begin with our interpretations of and concerns about the data.

In addition, we spend time in classrooms on a regular basis to collect a variety of real-time, qualitative data. These include artifacts such as observation notes and video. From here, we begin to build professional development that bridges the gaps between the research-based best practices that are supported by our district, the capacities and belief systems of our teachers, the real quantitative and qualitative indicators of achievement by our students, and the overall context in which teaching and learning occur.

Our ability to respond is key to this strategy: because of the embedded nature of our roles as onsite coaches that teachers see on a daily basis, once we are looking at data indicative of student achievement in the learning communities, we are able to act accordingly. While we sometimes put pieces of data in front of teachers, paired with essential questions designed to deepen understanding as inquiry based learning, as a coaching team, we use data as a crucial tool in directing our work with teachers. This takes us beyond merely looking at evidence to collaboratively creating the ongoing professional development that truly sustains the change suggested in our observations. Knowing is one thing; being able to act on that knowledge in a timely and coordinated fashion is of paramount importance.

One-On-One Coaching: Complex Questions, Thinking and Reflecting

In terms of coaching processes, the two main modes of interaction with our teachers for coaching for

instructional improvement are the one-on-one meeting and meeting in a group composed either of the faculty or one of Clover Park's three small school faculties or a group of educators in job-alike roles. One-on-one collaboration occurs in a number of ways: on a by-appointment basis, on a drop-in basis, or it can be as simple as running into someone in the hallway and asking them how things are going. The single most important concern for us when dealing with teachers around data inquiry is asking the right questions. In the vignette at the outset of this article, the coach uses questions—“Given this student's problems with number sense, what particular instructional choices can you make to help him?”—to connect the raw numbers from the data with the lived experience of the teacher working with her students.

In the act of looking at data with teachers, this “Socratic” or dialogical approach to knowledge is important because it takes into account the notion that teachers need to create their own solutions. When looking at evidence of student achievement, we don't give out “right” answers precisely because in teaching the right answers are often a product of the teacher's own experience, combined with shared experiences in a classroom as a teacher with students. The complex nature of teaching is centrally important: in something as intricate as teaching, solutions are sometimes unclear, and simple, general answers are sometimes elusive. We use questions to activate teachers' own judgment in matters that require clear decisions. A key word here then is “judgment:” it is teachers' professional judgment that must be the source of problem solving in the classroom. Though it is tempting on our part to say, “Just do this,” the solution offered is often what we would do in a particular situation. But we aren't the ones who must make the subject matter come alive in the classroom. It is the teacher who makes meaning on his or her own based on the reality of his or her classroom context. Just as the notion of student-as-worker has powerful implications for our students, it is the teacher that has to do the work. We can facilitate that work, but it is up to each teacher to fashion appropriate solutions, reflect on their effectiveness, and proceed accordingly.

This does not mean that teachers—or, for that matter, coaches—always possess the expert knowledge needed to tackle the problems at hand. This is where good resources become relevant: sometimes it is crucial to bring in an outside article or video to inform the conversation. Teachers as a whole have limited time to research materials that might actually inform their practice; it is part of our role to scan the latest research. Let's say that a teacher identifies a problem connected to student motivation in the classroom. We might find some relevant passages from Deborah Stipek's *Motivation to Learn* to help that teacher

Clover Park High School, a CES Member School and public high school in Lakewood, Washington, serves a diverse population with significant needs. One mile in one direction from the school are multi-million dollar lake-front homes, and one mile in the other direction, the school bus picks up children from motels and apartments that serve a transient population. District-wide, slightly more than 39 percent of the students are from military connected families stationed at the Fort Lewis Army and McChord Air Force Bases. Clover Park High School enrolls approximately 1,300 students in grades 9-12 housed in three smaller learning communities on the same campus. The student population is: 54.4 percent male and 45.6 percent female with a free and reduced lunch rate that fluctuates from 54.4 percent on up during the year, depending on enrollment. 37.9 percent of students are Caucasian, 25.6 percent black, 17.9 percent Hispanic, 13.7 percent Asian, 2.6 percent Pacific Islander, and 1.6 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. 12.3 percent of students receive special education services, and 9.8 percent are transitional bilingual.

understand the problem and identify possible solutions. A teacher concerned about issues of equity and thinking about the diversity of language and dialects in her classroom might find "Language Diversity and Learning," the chapter from Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* helpful. Our Instructional Facilitation office has an extensive professional development library where teachers can check out books on numerous content and pedagogy topics. This also gives us the ability to pull a resource off the shelves and put it into the hands of a teacher at just the right moment, rather than waiting until the designated professional development session.

Collaborative Learning Communities: Learning from a Public Exchange of Ideas

Elizabeth, the teacher leader for one of our small learning communities, is a rare young teacher, as talented at teaching her colleagues as she is at teaching her students. With a half-day for professional development approaching, she came to the Instructional Facilitation office for help in planning out the agenda for her small learning community's professional development time. While she was certainly capable of planning engaging and useful activities for her staff on her own, she recognized that she wanted to use the time to connect to a larger conversation the administrators were having around student failure rates derived from building grade reports. Elizabeth sought our help in sifting through the plethora of qualitative and quanti-

tative data and using that data to inform her decision-making process to plan the upcoming half-day professional development.

We examined staff surveys on thinking about and practice with standards-based assessment along with Elizabeth's previous observations of and conversations with her colleagues to create a picture of where people were on the path toward the state goal of learning and implementing standards-based assessment. From that data, we were able to tease out several key outcomes needed for the half-day session to be successful. Asking Elizabeth questions about such factors as the purpose of various activities, the ways the activities aligned with her expectations, and her read of her colleagues' current level of understanding, we were able to provide some new tools that would help solidify the group's understanding of the concept. As we moved through brainstorming what the agenda might look like, we continued to ask Elizabeth to reflect on the ways the activity would meet the expectations conveyed by the data we had reviewed. Three tiers of activities emerged for the half-day: activities designed to develop collective understanding, to promote trust and conversation, and to model an effective instructional strategy that teachers could use in their classrooms the next day.

The Clover Park District carves out professional development time during teachers' day once or twice a month with a regular schedule of early-release half-days mixed with several full-release days, giving our teachers the opportunity to meet in groups. In this instance, the district itself has taken on the mantle of change agent and has empowered coaches—in conjunction with educators themselves—to provide in-house professional development in an ongoing and coherent fashion. Our role is to plan and facilitate meetings. Each school or learning community has its own set of requirements for these meetings. The district gives its coaches (formally known as "instructional facilitators") a general framework for teaching and learning and a general set of principles. For example, there should always be some kind of "looking at work" activity or there should always be some kind of "new learning" through an article or video. As a building, we have several teams consisting of one or two instructional facilitators combined with one or two learning community administrators and teacher leaders. Each team collaboratively plans the professional development sessions.

We aim to model the kind of collaboration we would like to see from teachers, including incorporating data-based inquiry as regular habit of our practice. As a facilitation team, we each bring ideas to planning sessions. Some ideas resonate and are incor-

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porated into agendas. Others are discarded or, as is more frequently the case, modified through the input of others. This kind of planning has the advantage of putting several minds together to create learning experiences and solve potential content and process problems.

While the impetus for the content of collaborative learning sessions is in some cases defined by macro-level district change initiatives, much of the content is derived from our readings of the quantitative and qualitative data available to us. For example, a useful tool for us are quarterly grade reports—spreadsheets that detail the letter grades that students receive from teachers across the school, disaggregated by such factors as gender, ethnicity and subject matter—that give us a practical and immediate picture of student learning in the building. Combining this with the qualitative information derived from our classroom observations, and direct responses to immediate problems in the classroom that one or more of the teachers might be experiencing, we try to be as responsive to the needs of teachers (and by extension, students) as possible. In fact, the planning session depicted in the above vignette with Elizabeth occurred amidst a larger conversation about our concern about failure rates represented in our data, especially among ninth grade students of color, who, we had learned from looking at research, have a high risk of dropping out if they have failed a class in their first year in high school. Over the course of the last year and continuing into this year an ongoing series of collaborative professional development sessions worked on the problems around teacher grading practices by focusing on an interconnected set of best practice initiatives that looked comprehensively at the practice of grading.

Talking about teacher grading practices can be a tough conversation, because when looked at in the form of school-wide reports, the letter grades that teachers assign to students can reveal variances and inconsistencies in the ways that teachers report student progress and achievement across and within content areas and learning communities. This grade data can also reveal previously unexamined inequities in terms of ethnicity and gender if particular subgroups have a higher failure rate than others. Another problem is that until now, this is information has been in many ways the private domain of the individual teacher. As Robert Marzano and others have noted, the way teachers grade is part of the great pantheon of “the way things have always been done” in schools and thus resistant to change. From all of this, logical but potentially uncomfortable questions arise: what do grades measure? Should grades take into account effort and attendance, or should they reflect the actual achievement (based on performance standards) of the student? Are grades an effective form of motivation (or coercion) for students?

For us, the answers to these big questions have required ample time to talk: in regularly scheduled professional development sessions the administrators, teachers and instructional coaches in all three of our learning communities examined these questions closely. The stylistic approach of each group differed somewhat, but in each case the learning community was presented with a problem represented by the data: grading is inconsistent and perhaps not as effective in its communication as we assume it to be, and in fact may be prematurely branding our youngest students as failures. To expand understanding of the problem, the three learning communities (one following the lead of another and so on), asked us to help conduct and make focus-group videos of students talking about their experiences with grading. In this, the quantitative abstract information of the grade reports was given a qualitative human face. After viewing one of these videos in a session, one teacher remarked, “they’re as confused about grades as we are.”

As with our work with individual teachers, this knowledge was then paired with resources in the form of articles and research on best practices. The introduction of these texts is crucial: we don’t want to put problems posed by the data in front of teachers and simply ask “what do we do about this?” Our goal is to use new learning to both activate and enlarge the expertise in the room. We want to provide avenues for action that illuminate the issues but also provide thoughtful solutions based on research. Groups did close readings and held in-depth discussions of articles and research. Articles such as Douglas Reeves’ “The Case Against the Zero,” which explores the illogic around 100 point grading scales in favor of a more equitable 4 point scale, or Ken O’Connor’s *How to Grade For Learning*, which illustrates important links between grades, clear performance standards, and the ways formative feedback assists teachers to focus on achievement and the quality of students’ thinking and learning. Many of these resources suggest practices that can be implemented immediately with little planning—“that we can do Monday”—as well as techniques that require more preparation. Dialogue and risk-taking have been key as teachers might try new techniques and report new learning in subsequent sessions, sharing their experiences (both good and bad, and sometimes on video), getting feedback from colleagues and enlarging their understanding and skill in the classroom.

The logical end of this work has been a move to standards-based grading that gives students clear criteria for excellent performance, based on authentic discipline-centered outcomes. We should note that this work is ongoing: do all of our teachers have a consistent and logical approach to standards-based grading? Not yet. But many are adopting standards-based prac-

tice and we're intentionally, steadily, and methodically building the capacity of all the teachers in the building to follow accordingly. The process is lengthy and requires a lot of talk—even the occasional argument. But for us this capacity building is the *raison d'être* of our work, and when we ask ourselves, "How does change occur?" we can give reasonable answers based on our experiences with the work detailed above.

While our main goal is to solve problems, our focus is also to create a community of learners. We engage teachers in the processes we would like to see them engage with their own students: we place thought-provoking issues in front of them and then ask them to reflect, respond, and act on what they've learned in the form of the crucial changes in practice that are suggested. Looking at data is a crucial first step in the process of making meaningful changes in instructional practice. But the real challenge is to create the space for honest and trustful discourse both one-on-one and in groups about what actions those data actually suggest. We are lucky to have a team of people that can put their collective minds together to focus on these issues. We are also fortunate to work with educators and administrators that have the capacity and willingness to talk constructively with each other about data, theories about best practice, and actual teacher practices. The data tell us that the hard work with which the people in our building have been engaged has produced real results: a steady gain in state standardized test scores over the last seven years and a significant and much publicized boost in the graduation rate from 38 percent of students graduating on time in 2001 to 77 percent by 2006. Those data tell us that we are on the right track, but they also show that there is ample room for improvement and that our quest for educational excellence for each member of our student population is ongoing.

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Michael N. Martin is currently an instructional coach and video documentarian and works with Clover Park High School as well as several other school districts in the Seattle area.

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The Dangerous Necessity of Assessment: A Teacher's Dilemma

by Cara Furman

During my first year of teaching, Lily was a confident and verbal first grader in my first and second grade class. She wrote a story about a dragon the first week of school and easily sounded out every word. She held her own with the older children in the class. The trouble began when I administered the first "spelling" assessment of the year. I didn't call it an assessment. I didn't call it anything, for that matter. I told the kids I was going to go over their spelling and, unlike with most of our activities, I wanted them to work independently. I told them that I only wanted to see how they were doing and they didn't have to worry. I read the words as kindly as possible. I tried not to be too scary when I asked kids to move to a separate desk if they seemed to be looking on with someone else. Midway through the assessment, Lily put her head down and started to sob. I was new. It was my first formal assessment. I had no idea what to do. I told everyone to disregard Lily. I told her it was okay and not to worry. I continued droning on, and I then pretended nothing had happened.

The next upset came with first grader Sebastian. Quick Sebastian. Verbal Sebastian. Inventive Sebastian. Sebastian who could craft all kinds of stories and write poems that still run through my head. Sebastian who compared the ways that time passes in *Where the Wild Things Are* to *Wrinkle in Time* on the first day of first grade. Sebastian who remembered every book I ever read. I read the oral portion of the city-wide assessment aloud. I said to write everything you remembered. Sebastian started to shake. "I can't. I can't remember anything." I was horrified. Everyone was uneasy, and I was annoyed because he was the only kid who I was sure would succeed on this task. "You can, come on. Just write about the story."

"I can't." Sebastian started to sob. I lost my temper. "Come on, you can. Just try. You need to try to remember." I released him to go to the bathroom so



he could calm down and I could continue the assessment. A few minutes later the principal showed up in my room with a sobbing small child. "He's fine," I muttered. "He says that you said he had to write," The principal replied. I panicked. "He didn't have to write. It's just that he knew it and he . . . Sebastian, you could do it." After a lecture on not pushing small children too hard, the principal forgave me. Sebastian forgave me. After school, I told his parents about how he froze up and cried. They ultimately forgave me too.

Neither Lily nor Sebastian had the same breakdown again. In fact, the next year, they consoled the first graders through their first assessments. Yet, I learned from them. I coach the assessments better now. "It's not about testing you. It's about me seeing what I've taught you. I'm testing myself, really." I watch kids to see if they need to stop and put their heads down. Sometimes, I send kids out during the assessment if I know it will be too stressful or frustrating for them. I have learned these things, and I tell this story because, for me, any discussion of assessments, despite their crucial importance in teaching, must begin with the sense of danger and judgment that looms over them in the education world and, contrary to my efforts, in my classroom.

As a first and second grade teacher at a public, progressive, East Village school, the word assessment is a daily part of my life. Formally, twice a year,

I write narrative reports that describe my students in detail as well as assess specific skill development. Three times a year, I administer the Teachers College Literacy Assessment for my principal and literacy coach. I also do these assessments to inform my own teaching every few months. At the end of each unit, I administer formal math assessments to students as well as check their growth more individually on a weekly basis. I serve on the Do-Your-Own-Assessment committee at Long Island University where I work with teachers from other schools in my network, to develop and implement the "Descriptive Inquiry Document Sheet" (DYO Sheet) used to describe children's work and identify their next steps. The DYO Sheet is the primary means of assessment at my school. The primary goal of assessment at my school in and our network is to know students well by using multiple sources to understand them.

To illustrate how this works, I will closely describe assessments done and the teaching that resulted from them during one particular day. After a whole class lesson on reading and responding to story problems, I begin working with Mia on applying her understanding of combinations of 10 to combinations of 20. I have determined she needs help in this area from looking over word problems in which she uses pictures when adding numbers greater than 10 and from an oral assessment where she struggled to connect that if $7 + 3$ is 10 then $17 + 3$ is 20 and then $27 + 3$ is 30. These two varied assessments suggest that not only does she struggle with higher numbers, but also she needs more work on place value to see that numbers are identical except larger by 10. Two years of experience with Mia have shown me that she struggles to memorize math facts and new words, so I focus on strategies that rely almost exclusively on comprehension, not memorization. I tell Mia all this information, explaining to her that she will do some problems working with base-10 blocks, and I want her to look for patterns. It is important that she hears the connections between her confusion and the lessons she receives so that she can learn based on her own strengths and limitations as opposed to a series of random activities. Further, by solving the problem with materials that help her to break the numbers into 10s, she will ultimately be able to see and verbalize the patterns needed to understand adding 10s quickly.

Next, I begin writing workshop with storytelling. Students are instructed to tell a "just-so-story," a type of story we have been reading as a class in which myth is used to explain a natural phenomenon such as how the sun came to be. Students raise their hand to share a story. This helps their ideas flow and allows kids to learn story structure from each other. I focus on myths and oral story-telling because my students often have great ideas for stories but have trouble

following them through to a clear and coherent end. Hearing and questioning each other's stories helps them develop plot, as well. I began using this strategy after I noticed a major gap between what children could articulate and then get on paper. I found that stories improved when children had the opportunity to express them verbally first.

I then dismiss the students to write independently. Having looked over students' writing the night before, I know which children I want to meet with individually. Heidi is struggling with spelling despite her success during word study activities. While she understands the concept of long vowel sounds, she still is confusing short vowel sounds regularly. She is also using incorrect formations for long vowel sounds, relying on "ea" for every long e sound. During writing workshop, I have Heidi take a break to do "sorts." She is given a collection of long e words and a sheet with headings such as "ee," "ea" "y." She then matches her words to each category. Heidi's writing is strong but her spelling is starting to interfere with its readability. Because in many cases, she has some understanding of sounds, but is struggling with incorrect formations (ea when it should be ee etc.), Heidi sifts through books to find spelling patterns during word study instead of relying exclusively on sorts. She also keeps a spelling journal for reference. This combination of sorts and keeping track of new words helps spelling patterns to become more automatic. Building her sorts on the struggles I see during her writing, and explaining this to her, makes the activity more meaningful because it is directly connected to writing.

Alana is writing in complete sentences but isn't adding punctuation. Many of my students are at this stage, so I plan a mini-unit on punctuation. Because the children seem to be having trouble hearing where the periods go and are adding periods in places that seem random, I build the lesson around listening to sentences. I give them paper with a familiar story typed out without the periods so that they already understand the meaning. When they hear a period I ask that they indicate by pounding one fist on top of the other. Then I read the book with exaggerated pauses. Between my oral cues and their classmate's visual illustration, I hope that they will not only hear the periods in my voice but also notice them from other children. The pounding emphasizes the stop and particularly helps students like Jason, who always use their hands to speak in class discussion.

For reading, I listen to them read and also watch their behavior. Lars is a fluent reader but often does not read when asked (a fact confirmed by his mother). He is very engaged during our shorter partner reading periods. He takes partner work very seriously and

Continued on next page

is happiest when working with other people. Our conferences and his participation in read-alouds suggest fluency. To develop stamina and further reading enjoyment, I assign him to partner-read a chapter book with a classmate with similar struggles and strengths. Within a week, reading together, they are able to complete the book.

Assessment means watching and knowing the children in all areas. It is figuring out, as effectively as possible, how their minds and personalities work. It's knowing the students that do better with other people and those that are more productive on their own. It's knowing who leans towards memorization and picks up facts quickly and who has high comprehension but may learn the skills more slowly. In trying to understand my students, assessment means keeping my eyes open at every moment of the day, drawing from enough sources and knowing students well enough that when one lesson doesn't work (as is often the case), I am prepared to figure out a new angle.

Though I have found a place in my teaching for assessment to be meaningful and productive, a place from which I can describe every student as gifted because I see and understand the areas in which they are, assessment still looms over us. Lily and Sebastian are now in third grade. I have not had a child cry during assessments for two years. Nevertheless, it seems that the pain and fear that led to those breakdowns has not disappeared. It emerges more subtly now.

For example, this fall, a murmur of horror spread through my classroom after I had given three second-graders the "third-grade spelling" book. Two second-graders, Alex and Jose, were particularly alarmed. I called a whole class meeting to openly acknowledge that after reviewing students' spelling assessments, I had assigned not only differentiated books but also different lessons within the books. I frankly told them that yes, some kids did know more spelling patterns than others and that this was neither a big deal nor a sign of intelligence. Instead of pretending everyone was good at everything, we would highlight what everyone was actually good at. We went around the circle and each kid was to point out another "classmate's special talent." I was impressed—every child received honest and thoughtful comments such as, "Nicky always shares his toys once he's finished with them," and "Alex has the most interesting ideas of what to do. He has the best imagination." Everyone looked happy and there seemed to be a warm friendly vibe as the children left the meeting area to get their coats and backpacks for dismissal.

I was feeling confident and happy about the day until Alex approached me again, saying, "It's just that, it's just that I feel sad about my talent."

"Why?" I asked, befuddled.

"Well, it's not a useful one like spelling. Mine is the most useless one of all. I mean, what good does anyone have for imagination?"

"Oh no, Alex" I exclaimed, "Yours, yours, that's a good one. I mean everyone's going to learn how to spell but an imagination, now that doesn't come easy. That one will really help you out in life." He wandered away half-smiling but didn't seem to fully believe me.

I was left heartbroken. Here was a child with a great and useful skill feeling worthless. Furthermore, and more significantly, here was a child whose special skill didn't feel like enough to him. I worried: in my response to him that his talent was particularly special, was I also undermining all the other talents in the class and suggesting that some may be better than others? This highlights for me the continued tension I feel around assessment: it is crucial in understanding, valuing, and teaching my students. Every decision I make each, every moment of the day—from how long we stay in the morning meeting to the afternoon book we read together—comes from some form of assessment. In its many forms, assessment is absolutely essential to successful teaching. And yet, the underlying messages of success and failure are dangerous and deeply connected to even the most well-intentioned assessments.

The students in my class go through cycles. Often they seem happy, confident in their abilities, able to recognize various strengths in themselves and others. Yet it seems that whenever I feel confident that we've truly made progress, something happens that shows me how deeply the underlying concern about assessment is imbedded in them, and in me. This ranges from individual feelings of failure after struggling to master an easily assessed skill like spelling to a general consensus that a certain child is the "smartest" in the class. I keep struggling to make my class a safe and honest environment, to make it a place where my assessments are clear to kids and parents, where we value children's progression and movement, and not only their abilities. I have no definitive answers. All I have is the underlying sense that at its core, assessment must be about looking for ways to help children learn more by about finding the ways and places in which they shine.

Cara Furman is a first and second grade teacher at a progressive public school in New York City. She fell for progressive teaching styles and learning as a child at the Atrium School in Boston. Her secondary years at Boston Latin School, convinced her that she wanted to work in urban public education. Furman received her masters in Elementary Education at Columbia University's Teachers College.

Contribute to Horace!

Horace readers: become *Horace* writers! The themes for this year are:



Horace 25.1 - Technology Integration - May 2009

Please suggest your own ideas about integrating technology into Essential schools and Common Principle-driven education. Topics may include:

- Equity focus on class issues/access
- Focus on digital portfolios and other uses of technology in assessment
- Professional development practices for tech integration
- Examples and analysis of the ways technology is used in CES classrooms for critical thinking
- Applications of communication and social networking for personalized teaching and learning

Horace 25.2 - Voices of Educators of Color - September 2009

This issue will feature voices of CES educators of color in "open forum" to discuss their racial, cultural, and class identity in relation to their practice. Topics will come from your experience and lives.

Horace 25.3 and 25.4 (double issue) - "Changing Schools, Changing Lives" - November/December 2009

This issue features a looking forward/looking back theme in commemoration of CES's 25th anniversary. Some of the themes may include:

- Looking forward: What is "21st century education" as our network sees it from an equity/social justice perspective?
- Looking forward: With a new presidential administration and the other emergencies that we're experiencing, it's a new era in American education and society. What comes next for CES, for education, for the future of the next generations? Are we at the cusp of transformation and what does that mean for education and our work?
- Looking back: CES history, achievements, and significance
- Looking back: writing that takes a critical stance about missed opportunities
- Looking both ways: the generation of students that were the first to experience CES schools are now adults. How have their lives been transformed, and how are they contributing to social transformation now?

Guidelines for Writers

If you're interested in contributing original writing to *Horace*, or if you believe your school community or one with which you're familiar has a story to tell, please contact *Horace* editor Jill Davidson to discuss next steps. We can determine the form your contribution can take.

Writing for *Horace* is a collaborative process, with coaching and support. We invite both experienced and novice writers. If you have something to contribute, don't hesitate to be in touch to explore your ideas and work with us to develop a writing and editing process that will allow you to achieve your writing goals. If you know your school or schools that you work with have a contribution to make but you are not sure you or others want to take on the joy and challenges of writing, don't hesitate to be in touch with your ideas. We will find a way to make them work!

Be prepared to:

- Produce multiple versions of your writing.
- Discuss your ideas with your school community, interviewing others as needed and getting the critical feedback you need from your colleagues.
- Provide photos to illustrate your article.
- Work hard and take risks.
- Be a thought leader in the CES network following publication. Many *Horace* authors use their *Horace* contributions as springboard for Summer Institute and Fall Forum workshops, as well as presentations and workshops at their schools and at other conferences.

Be in touch with *Horace* editor Jill Davidson at jldavidson@essentialschools.org or 510-433-4142 to contribute to Volume 25. For past issues of *Horace* and an online version of this call for submissions, please visit our website: <http://www.essentialschools.org/horace>.

Where to Go for More

Teacher Action Research for Equity and Multicultural Education

Though brief, this section of the EdChange website is worth noting as a resource that focuses particularly on inquiry and teacher action research in the service of social justice and equity. The presentation of teacher action research through an equity lens provides useful material for initiating or reenergizing a school-based teacher action research effort. The site includes a process description, tips, and an example of teacher action research aimed at dealing with sexual harassment, accompanied by this insight: "Many problems related to diversity and equity are already present. We should not wait for a horrendous occurrence to address them."

EdChange
10602 Kitty Pozer Drive #L
Fairfax, Virginia 22030
telephone: 703-593-9353
www.edchange.org/multicultural/tar.html

Exploratorium's Institute for Inquiry

The Institute for Inquiry is a center for online and real-time investigation into the teaching and learning of science. This elegantly designed site goes far beyond the boundaries of science education, providing a thoughtfully edited selection of resources that describe the intersection between teaching based on inquiry and the application of inquiry on that teaching to determine what's working in a classroom and school setting. Particularly useful are the "Assessing for Learning" workshops, based on the work of British science educator Wynne Harlen.

Institute for Inquiry
Exploratorium
3601 Lyon Street
San Francisco, California 94123-1099
telephone: 415-561-0397
www.exploratorium.edu/IFI/index.html

Making Learning Visible

As its website points out, Making Learning Visible seems to be a project about documentation, but it's much more: it's about the ways that gatherings of educators can utilize "the power of the group as a learning environment and documentation as a way to see how and what children are learning." Making Learning Visible's work provides a great deal to groups of educators dedicated to inquiry for equity: clear definitions of "learning groups;" a strong set of examples of documented learning with educators' assessment of student work, analysis of challenges, and descriptions of next steps drawn from a range of

schools that includes several CES schools. Making Learning Visible's materials are a productive starting point for any school serious about creating educator-led and student-centered cycles of inquiry and action.

Project Zero
Harvard Graduate School of Education
124 Mount Auburn Street, Fifth Floor
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
telephone: 617-495-4342
www.pz.harvard.edu/mlv/index.cfm

Going Public with Our Teaching

A companion to Going Public with Our Teaching: An Anthology of Practice, edited by Thomas Hatch, Dilruba Ahmed, Ann Lieberman, Deborah Faigenbaum, Melissa Eiler White, and Desiree H. Pointer Mace and published in 2005 by Teachers College Press, this website presents a collection of completed teacher inquiry projects. *Going Public with Our Teaching* grew out of the work of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching (CASTL), which accomplished much to advance understanding of the methods and effectiveness of teacher research and inquiry. Though the CASTL K-12 project is no longer active, links to its work and other Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching resources are accessible through the Going Public with Our Teaching site.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
51 Vista Lane
Stanford, California 94305
telephone: 650-566-5100
www.goingpublicwithteaching.org

National School Reform Faculty's Looking at Student Work

A project of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), the Looking at Student Work web site focuses on looking at student work collaboratively, a practice that many CES educators believe is at the heart of collaboration and improvement. It offers a strong collection of protocols, books and other research materials, teacher-generated research based on student work, and links to other organizations that focus on the practice of student work. NSRF is the central source for much of the school-based professional development that happens in Essential schools. NSRF coordinates Critical Friends Groups (CFG) training, focusing on training facilitators and coaches to galvanize and sustain CFG work at school sites and within school districts. Since its founding in 1995, NSRF coaches have worked with educators and principals from many CES schools to develop the CFG protocols that structure educators' interactions as they

collaborate to improve their practice to make a positive impact on student learning. NSRF hosts an extensive web site that serves as a guide to its programs and services, a calendar of CFG training, descriptions of protocols, and links to many other assets.

National School Reform Faculty
PO Box 1787
Bloomington Indiana 47402
telephone: 812-330-2702
www.nsrffharmony.org

Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning

Published by Harvard Education Press in 2005 and edited by Kathryn Parker Boudett, Elizabeth A. City and Richard J. Murnane, *Data Wise* is a powerful asset to data driven inquiry and improvement. Guiding schools and school systems through the growth of comprehensive data systems that encompass classroom work samples as well as standardized tests, *Data Wise* describes an eight-step system for using assessment outcomes in a collaborative professional learning community to improve a school's pedagogy and learning results, providing a concrete action plan that schools can adopt from the start or at various entry points. The scenarios that illustrate each chapter come from two case studies, one based on a K-8th grade scenario and the other in a 9th-12th grade setting. *Data Wise* grounds its discussion in examples from those contexts, keeping the material accessible and focused on realistic problems and solutions. *Data Wise's* process depends on collaboration and full faculty participation. The *Data Wise* process trusts teachers, relying not just what the data says but on what teachers know and can say about student performance. A companion volume, *Data Wise in Action*, edited by Boudett and Jennifer L. Steele and published in 2007, provides a more extensive set of examples from a variety of settings.

Teaching as Inquiry: Asking Hard Questions to Improve Practice and Student Achievement

Teaching as Inquiry, by Alexandra Weinbaum, David Allen, Tina Blythe, Katherine Simon, Steve Seidel and Catherine Rubin and published by Teachers College Press in 2004, offers a solid foundation in the theory and practice of looking at evidence, particularly student work, through collaborative inquiry. Most likely of greatest value to learning communities committed to a deep, multi-year cycle of inquiry, *Teaching as Inquiry* opens with two chapters on the theory and practice of collaborative inquiry. The first reviews the research on school-based collaborative inquiry. For professional learning communities seeking to weave inquiry into their work, this background is essential, as is the second chapter's discus-

sion of defining and communicating the purpose of inquiry, matching subject to method, and determining who should participate. The four middle chapters represent collaborative inquiry in various forms and stages at four schools. These chapters vividly demonstrate the multi-year process of group examination of teacher and student work in pursuit of better learning and teaching. Each of these chapters were written by school coaches or other such facilitators, and a vivid subtext throughout *Teaching as Inquiry* is the crucial role of consistent "outsiders" who know the school well and can push, listen, support, challenge, guide, and analyze as the situation warrants. The final chapters illustrate milestones in a learning community's inquiry process and list key questions that a group willing to devote hours to group inquiry should use as provocations to refine their efforts.

CES Resources for Equity-Focused Cycles of Inquiry and Action

A selection of past *Horace* issues offer perspectives on collaborative inquiry from CES schools:

"Demonstrating Whole School Change in Essential Schools," *Horace* Volume 12, Issue 3, January 1996, available online at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/72

"Looking Collaboratively at Student Work: An Essential Toolkit," *Horace* Volume 13, Issue 2, November 1996, available online at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/57

"The Cycle of Inquiry and Action: Essential Learning Communities," *Horace* Volume 15, Issue 4, April 1999, available online at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/74

"Mentoring and Collaboration among Essential Schools," *Horace* Volume 20, Issue 1, Fall 2003, available online at www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/horace/20_1/20_1_toc.html

24.4 SPRING 2009

Cycles of Inquiry and Action

- 02 Cycles of Inquiry and Action for Equity: CES's Ongoing Commitment, by Jill Davidson, Coalition of Essential Schools
- 06 From Vision to Action: Solving Problems through Inquiry at Boston Day and Evening Academy, by Andrea Kunst, Boston Day and Evening Academy
- 11 The EdVisions "Dreamscape" Evaluation Plan, by Ron Newell, EdVisions
- 17 Beyond Looking: Using Data to Coach for Instructional Improvement, Michael N. Martin and Katherine L. Taylor, Clover Park High School
- 22 The Dangerous Necessity of Assessments: A Teacher's Dilemma, by Cara Furman
- 26 Where to Go for More: Resources for Cycles of Inquiry and Action
- 28 Book review: *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*, edited by Mica Pollock, reviewed by Kyle Meador
- 28 Book review: *Choices for the High School Graduate: A Survival Guide for the Information Age, Fourth Edition*, by Bryna Fireside, reviewed by Dave Lehman
- 29 Go to the Source: More about the Schools and Organizations Featured in this Issue

Notes on This Issue

Happy birthday, CES! We turn 25 in 2009, and it's a year of celebration and looking forward for the CES network. *Horace* will continue to feature the writing and first-hand experiences of Essential school educators. Yes, this means you! See page 25 for a list of upcoming issue themes, and be in touch soon with your ideas for contributions. Summer Institute, July 13-17, brings us back to CES's birthplace in Providence, Rhode Island for a powerful week of networking, coaching, and learning for small school design teams and the CES Small School Network. And Fall Forum, November 5-7, will take place in New Orleans, gathering the diverse CES network around the theme of "Changing Schools, Changing Lives" to learn, connect, and support our collective efforts to create and sustain equitable and personalized schools. Visit www.essentialschools.org for information on registering for Summer Institute, submitting proposals for Fall Forum and much more. Find out about May's National Exhibition Month, explore the new CES Benchmarks, and get a sneak peak at our new book, *Small Schools, Big Ideas*, to be released in fall 2009 by Jossey-Bass. It's going to be a great year of celebrating your work and achievements as educators and citizens dedicated to the belief that together, we can create the right conditions for all children to learn and transform their lives.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*
jdavidson@essentialschools.org

Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School, edited by Mica Pollock (New Press, 416 pages, \$24.95), reviewed by Kyle Meador



Educators dealing with race in schools encounter a quandary rooted in systemic oppression. If we want schools to be vehicles for achieving racial equality, when and how should we be “colorblind,” and when and how should we be “race conscious?” Which of our everyday actions in our schools move students closer to or further from educational opportunities?

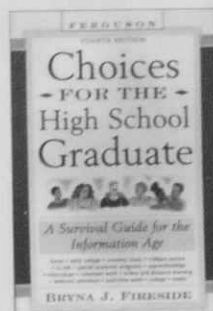
Mica Pollock compiles the experience and wisdom of over 60 leading educators and scholars into a volume aimed at counteracting and interrupting racial inequality and racism in schools and society. *Everyday Antiracism* proposes core “principles” of everyday antiracism: rejecting false notions of human difference, acknowledging lived experiences shaped along racial lines, learning from diverse forms of knowledge and experience, and challenging systems of racial inequality. Our “everyday race consciousness” is strengthened in the course of daily life as educators inquire about the relevance of race in schools and come to see that these four principles are complementary; each can be emphasized in particular situations.

Antiracism requires not treating people as racial group members when that is harmful, and recognizing experiences along racial lines when that helps people to analyze life events and equalize opportunity. Deciding which antiracist move to make and when to make it requires hard thinking about life in educational settings. *Everyday Antiracism* serves as a powerful tool to support educators to open up and stay in conversations about race, engage promptly in analysis of the ways students experience school and classrooms, and initiate action towards equitable schools.

Everyday Antiracism’s essays include discussion questions useful in formal professional development settings, inquiry groups, team meetings, or more informal conversations and personal reflection. These questions can push educators to think deeply about and take action toward infusing the CES Common Principle of democracy and equity in their interactions. *Everyday Antiracism* prompts analysis of everyday actions in schools that are complex, anxiety-ridden, and deeply consequential to help educators consider how their own actions can help dismantle racial inequity.

Kyle Meador is a School Development Program Associate at CES.

Choices for the High School Graduate: A Survival Guide for the Information Age, Fourth Edition, by Bryna Fireside (Ferguson Publishing Company, \$14.95)



“College ready” is the mantra of high school reform. And clearly that is a laudable goal. Educators should make it a priority to prepare these students to have the academic skills, self-confidence, and personal motivation to seek a higher education. But college is not always the right path for everyone. Many high school

graduates do not feel ready or do not want to embark on another four years of studying right away. With the increasing costs of higher education, they may need to earn money for college immediately after high school, or do not want to be saddled with heavy college loan payments afterward. *Choices for the High School Graduate* discusses a wide range of options available to students looking for alternatives to college immediately following high school graduation. Travel overseas, military service, special academic programs, apprenticeships, internships, volunteer work, online and distance learning, deferred admission, part-time work, training and employment in a trade—this is but a partial list of what is available in this excellent resource, which is based extensively on interviews with young people, college administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parent/caregivers, demographers, and career specialists.

“The truth is, there is no one right way to grow up. And there is no way anyone can predict what the future holds for you. You are lucky to be on the cutting edge of the most exciting century ever. But you have to be prepared to try more things and take more risks than others who have come before you,” Fireside writes in the introduction, which is followed by chapters aimed at helping students think about who they are and what they want to do, supported by a two-part self-assessment aimed at both “general academic skills” and “personal and interpersonal attitudes and qualities,” as well as a section on resume writing. This handy guide also includes chapters on such topics as: “Stopping Out: Is It Right for You?,” “No More Pencils, No More Books: Work After School, or All That Glitters Is Hard to Get,” “Internships and Other Adventures: Unusual Opportunities, Unique Experiences,” “Can I Become a Real Man or Woman by Joining the Military?,” and “What If College Isn’t for Me? The Uncollege Option.” The chapter entitled: “Am I Having Fun Yet? Nuts and Bolts of Making the Most of Your Time Out,” offers numerous ideas on “how to rent

Continued on next page

Go To The Source: More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools
1720 Broadway, Fourth Floor
Oakland, California 94612
telephone: 510-208-0160
www.bayces.org

Boston Day and Evening Academy
20 Kearsarge Avenue
Roxbury, Massachusetts 02119
telephone: 617-635-6789
www.bacademy.org

Clover Park High School
11023 Gravelly Lake Drive SW
Lakewood, Washington 98499
telephone: 253-583-5500
www.cloverpark.k12.wa.us/Schools/HighSchools/CPHS/index.htm

EdVisions Schools
501 Main Street
PO Box 601
Henderson, Minnesota 56044
telephone: 507-248-3738
www.edvisions.com

Minnesota New Country School
210 Main Street
PO Box 488
Henderson, Minnesota 56044
telephone: 507-248-3353
www.newcountryschool.com

National Writing Project
University of California
2105 Bancroft Way #1042
Berkeley, California 94720-1042
telephone: 510-642-0963
www.nwp.org

Book review

Continued from previous page

an apartment," "using credit cards," "putting money aside," "tips on banking," as well as practical suggestions on how to make a budget. *Choices for the High School Graduate* also offers help for those planning to go directly to college that covers how to read college guidebooks and catalogs, and guidelines for college transfer, an increasingly common practice.

Every chapter features mini-case studies with interviews of students involved, and finishes with a "Final Note—For Parents Only," which is an open letter to parents/caretakers that concludes with, "I hope this modest book will help your son or daughter

make some important decisions about his or her future—and that you will find it within yourselves to support his or her choices." The book does just that by helping young people to learn not only ways to approach college after high school, but also ways to learn about other options.

Dave Lehman is the former principal and namesake of Lehman Alternative Community School, a CES school in Ithaca, New York.

Affiliate with CES National

If CES stands for what you believe in—personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools—we invite you to affiliate with CES National. Affiliating with the CES network as a school, organization, or individual gives you a number of benefits, including subscriptions to *Horace* and our newsletter *In Common*, discounted fees and waivers to our annual Fall Forum, and eligibility to apply for research and professional development grants, and more. For more information about CES National Affiliation, visit www.essentialschools.org



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Donate Now to Celebrate 25 Years of CES

CES
'84 25 '09

CES has launched an Individual Giving Campaign to raise \$25,000 to honor and celebrate the 25 years that CES has given collective voice to educators working for personalized, equitable, and academically challenging schools. Your contribution will allow CES to expand our charge of developing innovative teaching and learning strategies and tools that bring the Common Principles to life, continue to publish *Horace* to tell your stories, and sponsor the gatherings that help you grow as an educator, such as Fall Forum and Summer Institute.

CES needs your help, in whatever amount you can afford, to spark the next 25 years of innovative, student-centered, teacher-powered education. Please visit the CES website to click on the Donate Now button at the top of every page, and encourage your colleagues and others who care about creating and sustaining great schools everywhere for everyone to do the same.

Visit www.essentialschools.org to Donate Now. Thank you.

Cover photo: Boston Day and Evening Academy student and Boston Museum of Science volunteer Paolo Barbosa stands in front of a robotics exhibit where he answers questions for visitors as part of an experiential learning partnership.

The national office of the Coalition of Essential Schools gratefully acknowledges support from the following foundations:

the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

Cycles of Inquiry And Action For Equity: CES's Ongoing Commitment

by Jill Davidson

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is entering its 25th year as an organization and a network of schools dedicated to transforming the experience of schools and education for young people, their teachers, and their communities nationwide. The practice of educators to engage in cycles of inquiry and actions that address challenges and improve outcomes evolved directly from the "conversation among friends" that began 25 years ago. The first wave of Essential schools, and early gatherings of CES educators, placed a premium on the collective reflection, data-gathering, and decision-making that has come to be a defining characteristic of the CES network.

Definitions

In *Working toward Equity*, Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) researcher Tom Malarkey describes inquiry as "a process through which teachers study their own practice in order to change and strengthen their teaching." *Working toward Equity*, published in 2006 by the National Writing Project (NWP), resulted from the Teacher Research Collaborative, a joint project of CES, BayCES, NWP, and the Bay Area Writing Project. Inquiry of this sort is also known as action research, defined by Laura Stokes, research associate at Inverness Research Associates, as "a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out." Many longtime participants in the CES network are experienced in inquiry and action research. Indeed, many Essential schools employ scheduling structures that allow adults to convene regularly and relatively unhurriedly so that they can utilize inquiry groups (often in the form of Critical Friends Groups, or other structures such as grade-level or subject-specific gatherings). These

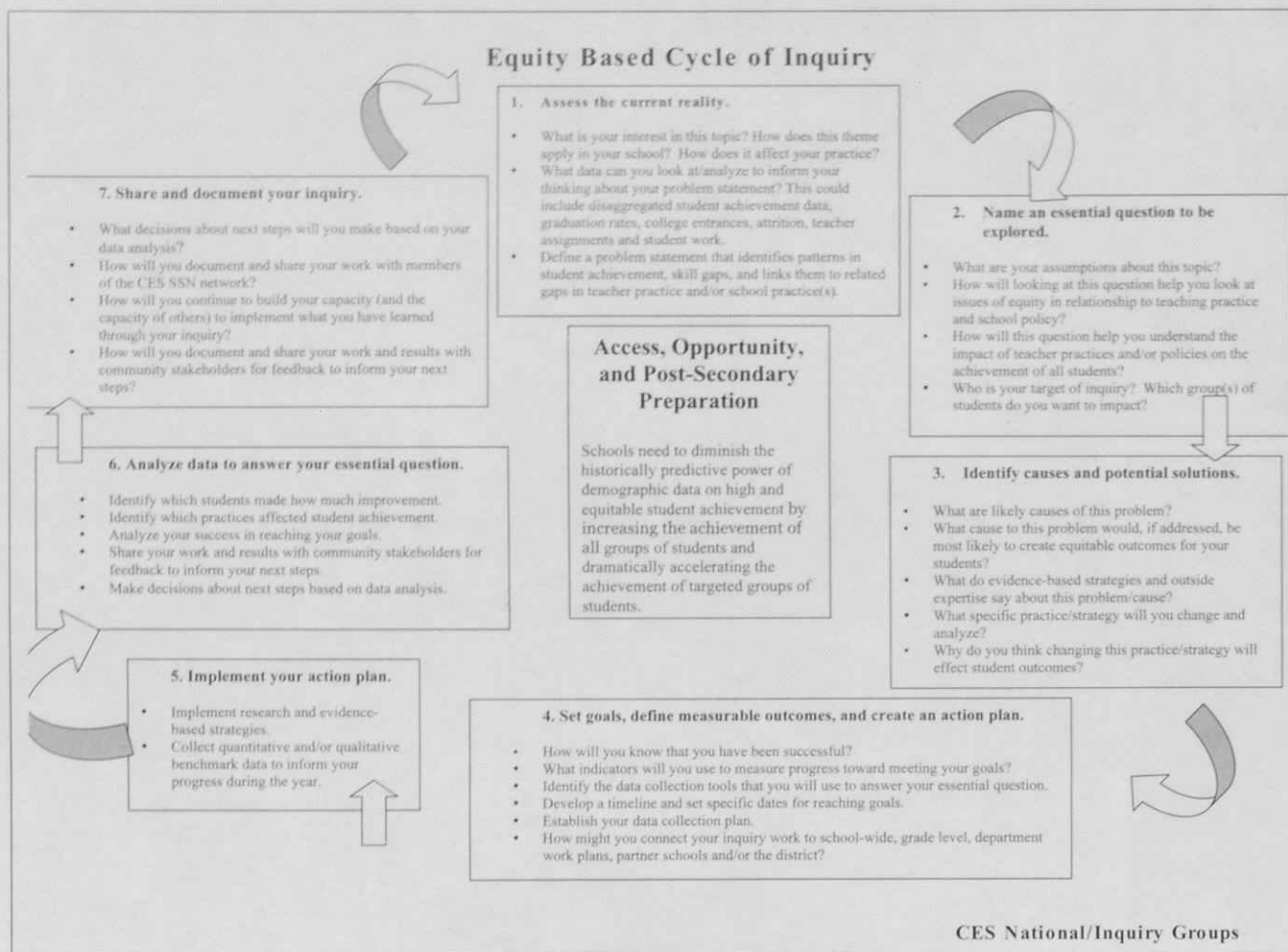
inquiry groups provide empowerment and support to in order to comprehend, confront, and address the challenges impeding effective teaching and meaningful learning that often result from the conditions of schooling and society, particularly institutionalized racism and other forms of oppression.

"Inquiry can help teachers to spiral more deeply into the most difficult dilemmas they face—to ask questions, to face the discomfort of not knowing the answers to those questions, and then to find ways to move forward to address them," writes Malarkey. This confrontational quality of inquiry makes it a particularly powerful tool to surface issues and challenges that a school community faces around creating and sustaining equitable ways of teaching and learning.

Current Emphasis on Inquiry for Equity

During the cycle of 2008-2009 CES year, the CES Small Schools Network (CES SSN) has made the work of establishing inquiry groups for equity its top priority. The CES SSN has focused on establishing an equity lens through which practitioners within and supporters of small, personalized, and academically challenging schools see their students, their families and communities, and the larger systems in which schools are located. CES National staff members built on efforts that included the Teacher Research Collaborative to

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and founded in 2003, the CES Small Schools Network (CES SSN) is dedicated to creating and supporting small schools throughout the country that are instructionally powerful and sustainable and that offer challenging curricula to students who have been denied a meaningful education. The CES SSN is committed to effecting broader change within the public education system and meeting the needs of young people and communities who traditionally and systemically have been underserved—students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. The CES SSN is the professional learning community that includes these exemplary CES small schools in various stages of development. Through quarterly meetings (including an intensive week-long Summer Institute) visits to each other's schools, and various forms of ongoing informal contact, the CES SSN brings together the best thinkers, practitioners, and innovators in education today to learn from the lessons, challenges, and best practices of their peers. The CES SSN contains a total of 57 schools and four CES affiliate centers. Twenty-five of the schools are Mentor Schools, experienced at implementing the CES Common Principles, and the rest are the new generation of CES schools, new small schools in various stages of the start-up process.



develop inquiry groups for equity across the CES SSN. Centered around the “democracy and equity” CES Common Principle, which declares “that schools should model democratic practices, honor diversity, and deliberately and explicitly challenge all forms of inequity,” CES’s senior director of school development Mara Benitez describes the impetus for adding inquiry to the network’s deepening sense of equitable schools and school systems, observing “Inquiry is an important way for teachers to push themselves to do better work, to question their own assumptions and biases, and to check that the work that they’re doing is achieving certain ends that they expect.”

Working toward Equity, Writings and Resources from the Teacher Research Collaborative, edited by Linda Friedrich, Tom Malarkey, Carol Tateishi, Elizabeth Radin Simons, and Marty Williams is available online at www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/books/workingtoward. The National Writing Project also offers print copies for sale.

Working with educators from CES SSN schools, Benitez and other CES staff members developed a focusing essential question: “How can our professional community of learners collaboratively investigate, implement and share best practices that grow and sustain equitable schools?” At the autumn 2008 CES SSN meeting, 120 network members chose a topic from a long list of possibilities, settling into 18 groups of three to six people, each with an experienced small school educator trained in an equity-based Critical Friends Group approach serving as coach throughout the year-long process. At that meeting, inquiry group members came together around a shared interest in topics relating to educational equity—they were bound together by interest, rather than geography.

Gathering at three SSN meetings and communicating in the interim by telephone and email, group members embarked on the Equity Based Cycle of Inquiry (see illustration above) by generating problem statements, developing essential questions, making an action research plan in consultation with coaches, collecting data through winter, presenting data to group members, and receiving feedback during the CES SSN’s spring meeting. CES’s July 2009 Summer

Continued on next page

Selected problem statements and corresponding essential questions from the CES SSN inquiry groups for equity:

Science Inquiry Group

Problem statement: Interest in particular topics crucial for science, especially mathematics, is underrepresented in most of the students at our school other than our Asian international students and a small clique of white males.

Essential question: How can we better identify the barriers to pursuit and achievement in science, and how can we make topics necessary to the study of science more attractive to students?

Problem statement: There is not a large enough number of our students ready to be successful in science-related fields.

Essential question: How can we prepare more students for rigorous college level science and math courses? How are biology and chemistry giving students the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and work in science related fields?

Project Based Learning Group

Problem statement: There is a gap between the cognitive ability and communicative ability of English language learners; challenges to teachers in inclusive classrooms, and [state test] scores demonstrate drastically higher results in critical thinking than in comprehension.

Essential question: How can project based learning increase literacy attainment in a multicultural inclusive setting?

Problem statement: The skills in literacy and communication of African American and Hispanic students and students in lower socioeconomic status groups need to be increased considerably in order to produce a higher quality of performance based work.

Essential question: How does project based learning affect literacy in traditionally lower achieving students?

Integrating Technology

Problem statement: While we have a wealth of varied technology, we are not sure how it is being used. How can we be sure it is more than a prop and that our students are having similar experiences?

Essential question: How can we make sure technology is being used effectively so that all students have the same access, skills, and experiences?

Problem statement: Students value technology for games and social networking, but we have to be sure they see the real-life, real-world value in technology.

Essential question: How can we develop assignments that are relevant to the real world and develop student skills for the 21st century?

For the entire list of inquiry group for equity topics and additional problem statements and questions, visit www.es-sentialschools.org/horace. The online version of this issue also contains the CES SSN Inquiry Group Work plan template, a downloadable Equity Based Cycle of Inquiry, and additional supporting material.

Institute will allow group members the opportunity to finalize their research, which will be shared with the larger CES network in workshops and poster sessions at November 2009's Fall Forum and in future issues of *Horace* and other publications. In addition, Summer Institute and Fall Forum will feature Inquiry Round Tables for discussion of ongoing inquiry for equity projects. The essential question that each group member selects holds the connection between inquiry and equity, as Benitez notes in her observation that "the question that you are asking should lead to greater access." CES director of research Jay Feldman agrees, noting the accompanying challenge, "How do you get people to create a question that they're passionate about and that is manageable?" Making sure that the question is both equity-driven and of appropriate scope is the coach's role.

CES intends for inquiry groups for equity to flourish at school sites as well as within the larger CES SSN network, and in fact, the regular contact and collegiality that coworkers have will allow more efficient cycles of inquiry and action and the potential for powerful and meaningful interactions. "Not having people in same location is a problem because they aren't there to challenge each other," Benitez says,

referring to the ability and obligation for colleagues to push each other to surface and acknowledge their own biases. The necessity for outside perspective is an essential quality of an inquiry group, rather than the alternative of a single practitioner pursuing a line of inquiry. Research that has emerged from the Making Learning Visible initiative of Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero confirms this. Making Learning Visible's website offers this observation: "Learning in groups not only helps us learn about content, it helps us learn about learning in a way that fits with the kind of people we want to become and the world we want to create. Learning in groups develops critical human capacities for participating in a democratic society—the ability to share our views and listen to those of others, to entertain multiple perspectives, to seek connections, to change our ideas, and to negotiate conflict." This comment, geared toward student group inquiry, is equally applicable to and valid for cohorts of adult educators gathered in the pursuit of improving their practice by pursuing answers to essential questions around common themes.

Jay Feldman notes that building the capacity of teachers to be researchers is a key strategy to increase instructional effectiveness. "School communities need

to know how to do inquiry," says Feldman. "They need to ask questions to assess how effectively they are meeting the needs of their students. As an educator, the bottom line is that you and your colleagues need to help your students learn. To do that, you need to develop the habit of checking yourself, and the school's collective work, to see how well you're doing and further refine your practice by creating and perpetuating cycles of collecting data, analyzing results, and changing what you're doing in strategic ways to improve learning."

The four articles that follow illustrate a range of approaches to instituting cycles of inquiry for equity. Stories from Boston Day and Evening Academy and Clover Park High School reflect whole-school efforts to observe problems, ask questions, gather and analyze data, and develop solutions. Cara Furman's

account of dealing with the dilemmas of assessment in her classroom mark the struggles and insights of individual classroom teachers who are, even in progressive Essential school environments, often on their own and required to draw from their individual resources for answers. From a network perspective, Ron Newell discusses developing cycles of inquiry and assessment for groups of schools, shedding light on the challenges of identifying which data are worth noting and analyzing. In each of these cases, and for the inquiry for equity work under way at other CES schools, Tom Malarkey's words from *Working toward Equity* ring true: "The key arbiter of inquiry for equity is *progress*—a movement deeper into our particular challenges and an ongoing transformation of our capacities as educators."

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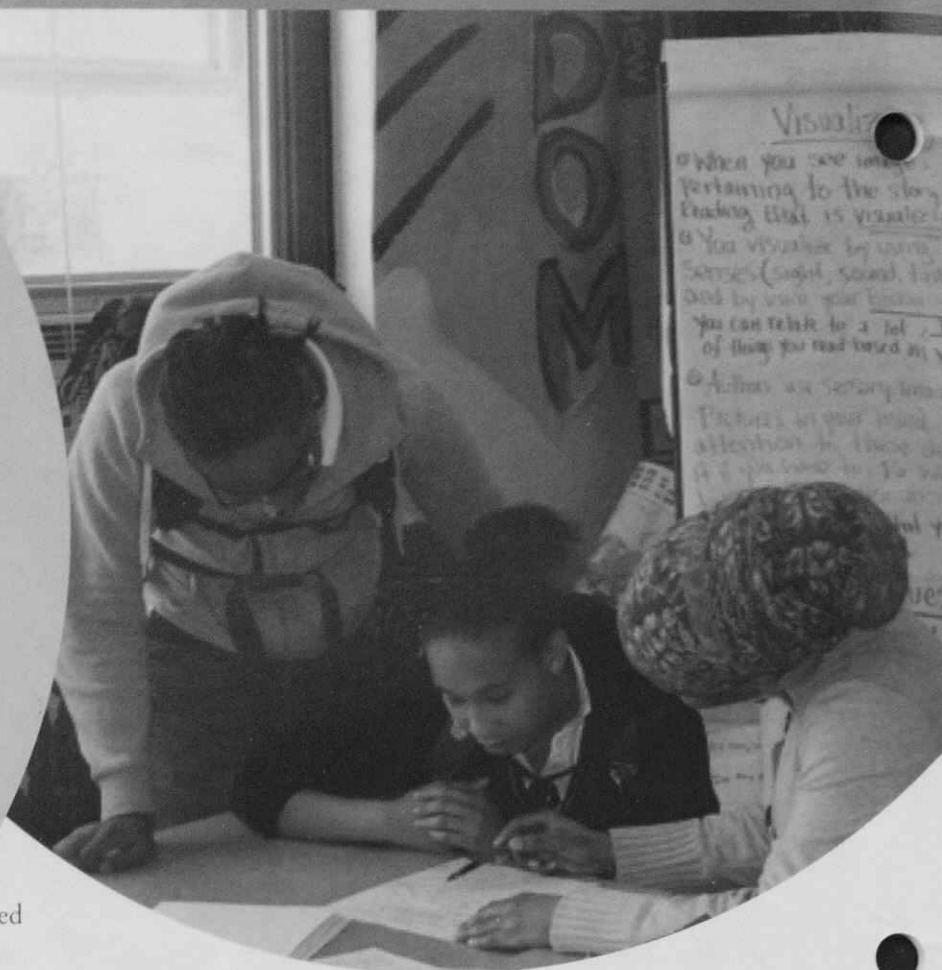
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From Vision to Action: Solving Problems through Inquiry at Boston Day and Evening Academy

by Andrea Kunst

On a mid-week day in mid-December 2008, Boston Day and Evening Academy's room 209, usually used for board meetings, student assessments, awards dinners, and other occasions requiring an intimate atmosphere, smelled like Chinese food. Thirty-eight students gathered around large conference tables, chatting with teachers and each other and eating lunch. Some drifted between tables, catching up and laughing. These second-trimester students at Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) were having a reunion after just a few weeks apart. That these students—all overage for high school with combinations of attendance, learning, and disciplinary issues—were in school at all is significant. But the remarkable thing about this particular gathering was the number of students. Of the 40 students who enrolled at BDEA in the first trimester of 2008, 38 were still in school, using words like “inspired,” “motivational,” and “cool” to describe how they felt about their experience—and, in effect, themselves.

This had not always been the case. Typically, the end of the first trimester found Student Support staff shifting into overdrive trying to track down students who hadn't been in school for weeks or months, and recruitment went into a kind of perpetual orbit, trying to recruit and enroll new students to take the place of those who had slipped away. When the syndrome landed on the agenda of the school's leadership team (head of school, assistant heads for day and evening, director of curriculum and instruction, dean of student support, director of advancement), the ensuing process of discovery and remediation brought to bear a cycle of inquiry fueled by the following discoveries born of data analysis:



Among students who enroll at BDEA, most attrition occurs in the first year;

The majority of first-year attrition occurs within the first six months; and

The majority of students who withdraw from BDEA read below a seventh grade level and many below a fifth grade level.

As the team expanded its cycle of inquiry to include faculty, test assumptions, and identify challenges, we began to recognize the need for additional services for new students which would get students to “buy in” to BDEA's culture as soon as they enrolled in order to prevent the disconnect that leads to withdrawal. The outcome was the creation of BDEA Seminar, a program that acquaints students with school culture, allows them time and guidance to transition to a new curriculum and new school culture, provides extra support in literacy, and offers individualized wrap-around services to help the student to feel ownership in the school.

At BDEA, an alternative Horace Mann charter public high school in Boston, the cycle of inquiry is practiced on a daily basis in every part of the school. Our faculty members use the process in weekly professional development and faculty meetings, and daily in their classrooms; our students hone their skills of

inquiry while involving “essential questions” in their daily work; and school administration includes the whole school community in the process of examining any potential changes to curriculum, methods of instruction, growth, support, and advancement. But while the general cycle of inquiry influences our daily work as a school, there are instances when the more specific data-based inquiry and decision-making model becomes the fulcrum of whole-school change, and results in a process and a result that not only creates a better learning environment, but also encourages whole-staff buy-in and better chances for success.

Setting the Vision

The impetus to get hold of our slippery enrollment, attrition, and graduation numbers came from several sources simultaneously. BDEA enrolls students year-round, making tracking difficult enough without the added challenge of fluctuation due to attrition. Perhaps the most mundane point of inspiration was the school’s Office of Institutional Advancement and Alumni (OIAA), which is regularly asked by potential funders for the schools graduation “success” rate. It seemed to the OIAA staff that the manner in which we were calculating the number did not represent a true or complete story of graduation success, so they deflected by explaining that the school ran three programs (Day, Evening and Distance Learning); that the school enrolls students as they are accepted from July through April; and that due to the multiple challenges faced by our students (homelessness, victims of violence and abuse, non-existent habits of learning, no familiarity with success), their attendance is often spotty. As a result, it was nearly impossible to establish valid baseline attendance and graduation rates.

Instead, OIAA focused on the numbers of students who did graduate—a number that grows each year—and the subset of those graduates who go on to college, vocational training, and jobs. At the same time, the school’s leadership team sought to draw BDEA’s staff members together during weekly professional development sessions to address specific areas of programming that needed direction, added substance, or improvement. Those areas included post-graduate planning, assessment, advisory, and retention. Finally, the school’s acting co-heads charged Alison Hramiec, the new director of curriculum and instruction (DCI) with the task of finding a way to adapt and streamline data collection systems and analysis to better represent student enrollment and retention. (Hramiec became immersed in inquiry training through her work at the Principal Residency Network at the Institute for Professional Development and Graduate Studies in Education at Northeastern University in Boston. Prior to enrolling in PRN and conducting her residency at the school in 2007–2008, she had been a science teacher at BDEA for four years).

Boston Day and Evening Academy

Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) is a year-round public high school with a unique mission: serving 350 students who are over-age for grade level and who are either at high risk for dropping out or have already dropped out of high school. BDEA began serving students in September 1995 as the Downtown Evening Academy, Boston’s first evening, diploma-granting, public high school. In 1998, the school became a Horace Mann Charter School and was renamed the Boston Evening Academy. In 2001, a Distance Learning Program was added and now operates at full capacity with 50 students. In 2003, the Day program was added, strengthening our ability to serve at-risk, over-age, and academically under-prepared eighth grade students who are as old as eighteen but have not yet reached eighth grade benchmarks. During the same year, BDEA became a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES).

All three of BDEA’s programs use a competency-based curriculum, and progress is assessed through a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, including written and oral exams, research projects, meeting over 300 benchmarks, internships, capstone projects, and field work. The 200 students enrolled in the Day program come directly from eighth grade, the majority at the age of 16 or 17. The 100 evening program students have already attended high school, and are either transferring or returning after having dropped out of other high schools. Distance Learning students have family and job responsibilities or health issues that prevent them from attending school on a regular basis, and through project-based holistic learning, demonstrate competency and stay connected with their teachers through appointments, blogs, and emails. BDEA’s curriculum and assessment does not include traditional grade levels or Carnegie units for grading, but meets all students “wherever they are” in their education using a combination of individual learning plans and differentiated instruction to meet and surpass graduation requirements.

In a sense, it was the perfect storm of inquiry. As a CES school and a member of the Center for Collaborative Education, the school’s leadership was thoroughly familiar with the concept and practices of data-based inquiry and decision-making, and discovered that by identifying these particular needs, they had begun a new cycle.

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

Following the mission and improving the practice of alternative education creates its own challenge with

Continued on next page