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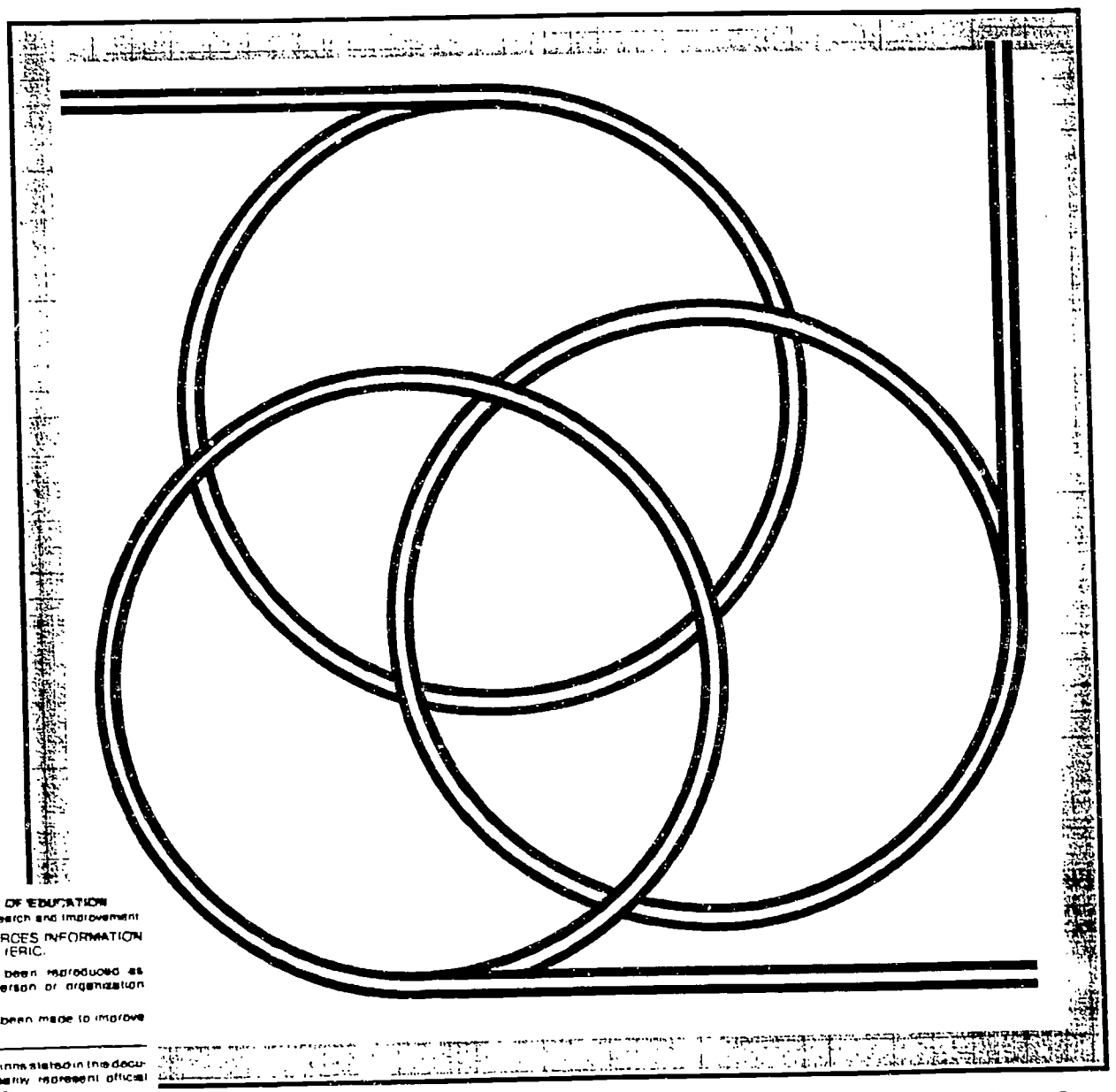
ABSTRACT

The activities in this booklet bring together research and practice in formats that enable communities to define and implement strategies for meeting their educational goals. The seven training activities will help teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and community members transform their schools into places where learning is paramount and where teachers inspire students to be problem solvers, communicators, knowledgeable and productive citizens, and life-long learners. They help the school community develop a shared vision of what they want the school to be. The activities, which can be used in any order, are: (1) "A Walk through a Learning-Centered School"; (2) "Powerful Learning Experience"; (3) "Becoming a Better Learner"; (4) "Four Corners Activity" (belief clarification); (5) "The Journey"; (6) "Changes in My Community"; and (7) "Designing a Personal Portfolio." A user survey is included. (Contains eight references.) (SLD)

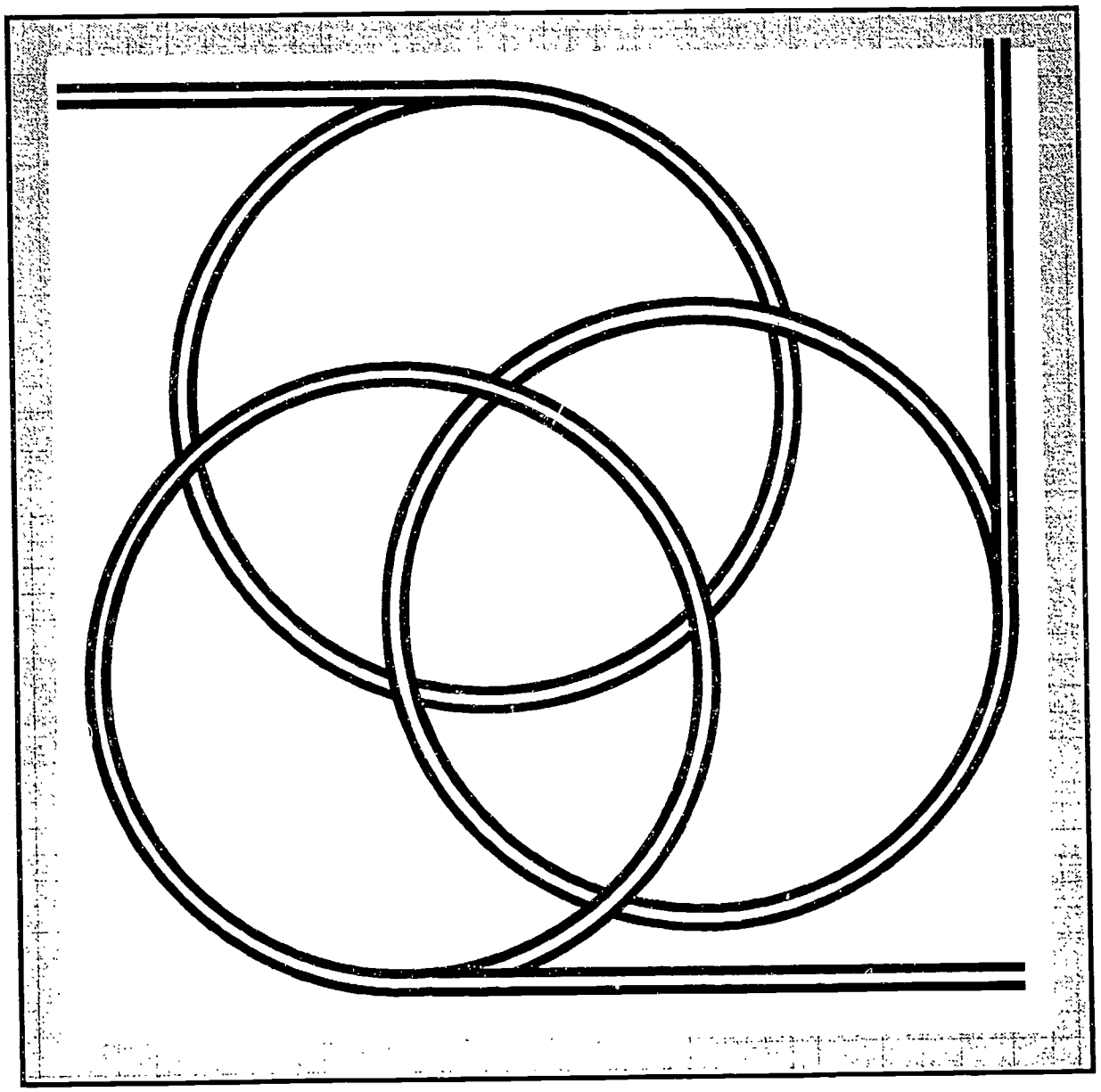
Creating New Visions for Schools



Activities for Educators, Parents, and Community Members

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands

Creating New Visions for Schools



Activities for
Educators, Parents, and
Community Members

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands

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Preface

This collection of tools and activities has evolved in part from the Designing Schools for Enhanced Learning initiative at The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. This initiative involves a partnership with schools, districts, institutions of higher education, and state education agencies, and the individuals within them, all of whom commit to transforming school communities to center on learning for all. We acknowledge all participants in Designing Schools for Enhanced Learning as partners in the development of these activities.

The activities in this booklet represent a fundamental principle of the Laboratory—encouraging educators to capitalize on existing knowledge in order to avoid reinventing the wheel. The activities presented here are an amalgam of training designs and approaches. Some have been developed by our staff and are relatively new; others have existed in some form for many years. Many have come from work with our Partner Schools. Together they represent a package designed to promote a school's use of inquiry and reflection so that it may become a better place for students and for the adults who work in it. We acknowledge the following Laboratory staff and associates for their role in originating or evolving these activities:

> Janet Angelis, Carol Anthony, Denise Blumenthal, Carolyn Burke, Linda Clark, Pat Cox, David Crandall, Jane deFrees, Douglas Fleming, Efrain Fuentes, Betty Hastings, Leslie Hergert, Jon Kaiser, Roxanne Kapitan, Joyce Kaser, Kerri Lorrigan, Susan Loucks-Horsley, Sue Martin, Anne Newton, Jill Mirman Owen, Marla Perez-Selles, Jan Phlegar, Paula Preller, Sharon Rallis, Sue Rice, Wyllys Terry, Sally Uhl, Ginny Warn, John Watkins, and Cheryl Williams.

A special acknowledgment goes to Ruth Anne Shepard of the Laboratory staff, who compiled the tools into a format that will be easy to use for many school community members.

We also would like to acknowledge the support of the following staff in the production of this document: Lori Mitchell, Dorys Popovich-Brennan, Mary Stenson, Eileen Stevens, Priscille Shepard, Clif Lund-Rollins, and Stephanie Wallace.

Where possible, we have identified an original source for individual activities or their first publication by the Laboratory.

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Introduction

Success for all students is the goal of The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. We have developed and tested the seven training activities in this booklet to help teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and community members transform their schools into places where learning is paramount and where teachers inspire students to be problem solvers, communicators, knowledgeable and productive citizens, and life-long learners.

Using these activities, educators and community members can develop or refine their vision of a school that centers on learners and learning. Some activities encourage using questions and reflection as a way to guide change. Others focus on the importance of shifting more responsibility for learning onto students, with consideration of changes that teachers can make to facilitate this shift. Each is based on the principle that all children can learn.

Across the United States, educators and policymakers are searching for and trying out different approaches to improving schools. Teachers, community and business people, researchers, policymakers, and others are developing standards and defining what they want our students to know and be able to do. Many schools have altered their structures; others have adopted programs that promote cooperation and encourage students to develop a broader and deeper range of competencies. Some schools have made significant progress toward these goals, but others are finding more frustration than progress or results.

We believe that one way to ease this frustration is for a school community to develop a shared vision of what they want their students to become and of what kind of school they think will accomplish that. Their discussions should take place within the broader context of state and national goals and standards, and both the discussions and the plans they produce should be informed by knowledge of research and best practice.

The activities contained in this booklet bring together research* and practice in formats that enable communities to define and implement strategies for meeting their goals. Laboratory staff and our colleagues in schools, districts, and state education agencies throughout our service region (New England, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) have tested these activities with a variety of audiences for several years. Shaped and refined by these educators and community members, the activities are now ready to be shared with a broader audience.

The activities help participants answer such fundamental questions as:

- What does a learning-centered school look like, and how will we know if we have created one?

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* Anyone interested in the background and research base for these activities can find them in *Genuine Reward: Community Inquiry into Connecting Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*, which looks at assessment in new and creative ways and offers insights into how communities can become active partners in redesigning their schools.

- What is true understanding, and how can we assess it in ways that are meaningful for students, parents, and educators?
- How can we create conditions that ensure that adults continue to learn and model powerful learning for the young?
- How can a group that has diverse agendas work effectively toward a common goal?
- How can we turn talk into action?
- How can we turn mistakes into opportunities for growth?

Though the activities in this booklet help participants form concrete images of a learning-centered school, they are not recipes. They are not meant to be simply followed, nor do they lead to preconceived ideals. Rather, they can help participants form their own visions and action plans for making schools places where all students experience success.

Hints for Using These Activities

- These activities are intended for use by and for staff developers, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and community members. They can be used within one school or, ideally, district-wide. Examples of where they might be used are:

  - The mayor's office has commissioned a blue-ribbon panel made up of local community members to investigate options for improving the effectiveness of schools.

  - The superintendent has asked her administrative team to develop a plan for restructuring the system.

  - In response to concerns about local youth, a group of parents from local churches has joined with the Chamber of Commerce to explore ways to better meet the needs of children in the community.

  - Local colleges and businesses have formed a task force to identify ways to increase student readiness for higher education and the workplace.

  - Concerned parents and educators have formed a group to explore ways to combat the rising dropout rate.

- The activities can be used in any order; there is no predetermined design.

- They can be used if you are beginning a change effort, if you are midway through an existing initiative, or if you have completed one phase of a redesign effort.

- There are no right or wrong answers. The emphasis should be on using questions and inquiry, reflecting, and making sense of past events and using them to inform the future.

- Above all, we ask that you challenge the ways you are doing things now—don't assume it has to be done one way because it has *always* been done that way. Have the courage to ask questions for which you do not have answers.

A Walk Through a Learning-Centered School

Introduction: We would all like to be part of the ideal school. This activity asks participants to suspend the day-to-day reality of their lives and think seriously about what the ideal school looks like. The outcomes of the activity can inform teams as they work to create a school that is truly learning centered.

Too often educators limit their possibilities, assuming change will never be possible. This activity is an excellent way to break that cycle and to bring diverse perspectives together, especially if the team is working to achieve a shared vision.

Purpose: The Walk builds a vision of how schools could be. Participants are taken on an imaginary guided tour of a successful and innovative school and asked to describe what they see. Through the process, individuals pool their images to create a composite or shared vision of this new school.

Materials: Enough copies of the Baker's Dozen and the Walk for all participants (see pages 7 through 9), newsprint, easels, markers, masking tape, blank paper, and pens or pencils.

Leader's Notes: The Walk is designed with the Baker's Dozen in mind. The staff at Riverview Elementary, where the tour takes place, have spent several years redesigning the school with a focus on learning. They have made outstanding progress. The 13 steps along the tour are meant to illustrate and stimulate an image of one or more of the Baker's Dozen principles in action.

Once each participant describes his or her vision, groups pool their ideas and develop a composite, which can be revisited often as the redesign work and planning continues.

This activity is best used to develop a shared vision that explores new and creative ways to think about a learning-centered school. It is appropriate for a school leadership design team, an entire faculty, or a gathering of educators and community members.

Process/Steps:

1. Briefly describe the purpose of the activity, explaining that it will involve thinking in a creative and imaginative way. Do not hand out the Walk until after the imaginary tour (you want participants to imagine in their minds, not use others' ideas).

Source: Adapted with permission of The NETWORK, Inc. from An Equitable School by Raymond M. Rose, Frances A. Kolb, and Nancy Barra-Zuman. ©1991.

2. Ask participant, to number a blank piece of paper from 1 to 13, leaving a few spaces between numbers. Read the introduction to Riverview School, then #1. Ask participants to write answers to the question on their numbered paper. Give them a few minutes. Read #2, pause while they write, and continue through #13.

3. Hand out the Walk and the Baker's Dozen. Ask participants to work in teams of two to four. Assign each team one or more of the Baker's Dozen principles to discuss. Give them one piece of newsprint for each of the Baker's Dozen principles they are assigned. Their task is to talk about their notes from the tour stops related to each of their assigned principles and to make a bulleted list on the newsprint of what they saw or learned in this "new" school. The major question is: What does this principle look like in action?

4. Have each group report out and give others the opportunity to add bullets to the newsprint. This should result in 13 pieces of newsprint, one for each of The Baker's Dozen principles.

5. There probably will not be unanimous support for all of the images. That's OK. The goal is to begin to identify alternative images, build a common vision, and develop a common language about how participants imagine their school of the future.

6. The newsprint can be posted and referred to in subsequent meetings and used as an ongoing record of how the vision for the school develops over time.

Time Required: 1-1/2 hours—2 hours

The Baker's Dozen: Common Characteristics of a Learning-Centered School

1. The school focuses on successful learning for children and adults.

2. The school works to turn all of its students into successful learners.

3. The school affirms the value and uniqueness of each person, recognizing differences—culture, gender, learning style, age, language, and role—and drawing on different perceptions and contributions to design a shared future that works for all.

4. The school uses systems thinking as its conceptual framework for design, looking at the whole system of education and society and their mutual influence.

5. The school monitors learners' progress via assessment, evaluation, and reflection activities that are integral to the process of learning by design.

6. The school challenges conventional structures of schooling and explores new organizational structures and arrangements that enhance learning.

7. The school functions as a learning organization as well as an organization of learning.

8. The school works to build a sense of community among children and adults (both professional educators and community members) that ensures a continuity of values and cohesion between the school and the community it serves.

9. The school uses collaborative critical inquiry as the engine of design for learning.

10. The school manages the process of ongoing change effectively, thoughtfully, and sensitively.

11. The school uses what is known from its own history, from research and experience, and from demographic and other community information.

12. The school redefines the roles and relationships of those who provide assistance and those who are assisted, from student and teacher to localities and the state.

13. The school seeks to help people move beyond conceptions of power as control to that of enabling power that mobilizes everyone's capability to bring about a shared future that works for all.

The Walk

Welcome to Riverview Elementary School! It's 1997 and you've been invited to join in the annual site visit to this school. Of all the schools in the region working toward school redesign, Riverview has had one of the most successful transformations into a learner- and learning-centered environment.

1. You come in the front door and are greeted by a bulletin board which says, Welcome to Riverview, Where Everybody Learns. The display illustrates learning outcomes that are valued in the school. What do you see?

2. Your first appointment is with the east-wing teaching team, which meets for the first hour each morning. The team tells you that much has changed since the old days when each teacher had 28 kids in a self-contained, one-grade-level classroom. What do they tell you about what things have changed?

3. They say the changes have made an incredible difference in learning for the students and in the staff's ability to focus on each student as an individual. They give you some examples, but also encourage you to observe for yourself, since school is officially beginning in five minutes. As you move out into the learning environment, what do you observe?

4. In your meeting with the team, the members made a special point of their new perspectives on assessing student learning. They used to test and grade, but now assessment is much more integral to their work with kids. What do you observe that confirms that?

5. Your next appointment is with a member of the school council, a cross-role group charged with accountability for learning and coordination of programs for students. Derek says that when they first began the council seemed hung up on management issues and rarely thought beyond their four walls. Now, he says, with a combination of staff development and team development, they have learned to think systemically about their charge. What examples does he give to convince you that this is a special place?

6. Derek points out another unique feature of the school: all new structures for scheduling and for student assignments. What are some of these?

7. You ask Derek how all this came about in a few short years. He replies that they focused on two things rigorously: *what* they needed to change and *how* they needed to change. You've already seen examples of the "what." He shares with you a list that all council members keep on their walls: Principles of Initiating and Managing Change. What are some of the items?

8. One of the statements on the list suggests that the view of power needs to be changed from power as control to power as mobilizing everyone's capabilities to move toward a shared vision of the future. What does Derek tell you about the school and what have you seen that illustrates this point?

9. Next you meet with Katie, another member of the school council who coordinates professional development. In the past two years, numerous changes have occurred. Now staff learning is integrated into the daily life of the school, and staff are continuously searching for new

knowledge, information, and approaches that will help them work better with the kids. What are some of the examples she gives of how this happens, and what makes it work?

10. The school day is now officially over. You notice much activity, as you did when you arrived before it officially started. On this part of the tour, you are guided by another member of the school council, the community liaison. Sonya tells you that the school is really a community with permeable walls As you walk through, she points out several things that illustrate what she means. What do you observe?

11. You leave the school and find a coffee shop where you debrief your day. You recall that one of the school's special goals last year was to respect differences (in culture, gender, learning style, age, language, role) and build on them. As you reflect on all you observed, what do you remember that indicates that they made progress toward this goal?

12. As you reflect on your visit, you realize that one thing that characterized all of the classrooms and all of the meetings you observed was the constant asking of questions. What are some examples that you remember, and what seemed to be the effect of such a norm?

13. Before ending your debrief, a topic of keen interest is how outside staff working as change agents have worked with the school. You recall a comment from one of the school staff that they have never worked with outsiders like those now helping them to become a learning-centered school. What did he tell you, and what did you observe about the relationship between these outside "experts" and school staff?

Powerful Learning Experience

Introduction: Whether you call it an "aha" experience or the moment when "the light goes on," everyone has had learning experiences that are memorable. They are significant because they represent true understanding or learning. Often these experiences occur when new information connects to something we already know and understand. The Powerful Learning Experience guides participants in an activity that helps them understand what a true learning experience is. The results should spark ideas for rethinking how students learn.

Understanding how and when learning takes place is at the core of improving education for all students. This activity calls on both adults and students to explore their own personal attitudes about learning, and inspires insights about new possibilities for learning inside the classroom as well as at home and at play. It conveys the message that we must all take responsibility for our own learning.

Purpose: To challenge teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members to think about learning in new and different ways. This activity and the Suggested Next Steps (see page 13) asks participants to explore their own conceptions of learning and urges them to think freely and creatively about how schools can deepen understanding for all students.

Materials: Enough copies of Learning Principles (see page 15) for each participant, newsprint, easels, markers, masking tape, blank paper, and pens or pencils.

Leader's Notes: You may want to follow this activity with Becoming a Better Learner to provide a deeper understanding of what increased learning looks like.

This is a two-step activity with both individual and group work.

[Note: Wherever we've used the Powerful Learning Experience, only about 25 percent of the experiences have been school-related.]

Process/Steps:

Working Individually . . .

1. Ask participants to think of a learning experience in their life that was powerful and had some impact on them. It could be an experience from school or any aspect of life. It could be something that happened recently or many years ago. It could be positive or negative. Each participant should identify an experience that was powerful for them.

Source: Genuine Reward: Community Inquiry into Connecting Learning, Teaching, and Assessing by Jill Mirman Owen, Pat L. Cox, and John M. Watkins. The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. ©1994.

2. Now, ask them to try to recall the experience vividly. You might say, "Relax. Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Remember . . . what does the experience feel like? . . . look like? What do you smell? . . . taste? What sounds do you hear? Where are you now? Who's with you?" Have them think of as much detail as possible to truly bring the experience back into focus.

3. Once they have recalled the experience vividly, ask them to describe it on paper. These notes are not to be shared. Have them answer the following questions: What was the experience? Who and what was involved? Why do you consider it a powerful learning experience?

Working with a Partner . . .

1. Ask participants to take turns sharing their experience and some of their thoughts about it.

2. Ask each pair to reflect on the experiences and discussion. How do they compare to each other? Have them find some characteristics that seem common to both experiences, or characteristics that they think may be somewhat generic to the learning experiences that people feel have a powerful impact on their lives. Have them jot these down together.

3. As a whole group, talk briefly about the settings or contexts of the powerful learning experiences. Make a quick list of the settings on newsprint—don't tell the individual stories. How many happened in school? How many happened elsewhere?

4. Ask participants to share the characteristics of learning they found when working in pairs by having one person list them on newsprint and then both take turns contributing characteristics. Be specific, listing the connections, conditions, the environment, and resources available.

5. Discuss how school promotes learning with these characteristics. Do all children experience this kind of learning on a regular basis? Do the adults who work with them experience this kind of learning on a regular basis?

Time Required: 30 minutes

Powerful Learning Experience: Suggested Next Steps for Faculty and Staff, Students, and Parents

For Faculty and Staff:

Purpose: The goal is to have teachers and administrators think about learning in new and expanded ways and to identify strategies that will promote increased student learning.

Suggested Activities:

1. After completing the Powerful Learning Experience, have individuals concentrate on personal experiences, and ask them to keep a log of these experiences to reflect on over the next few months.

2. Research supports the idea that student learning increases in schools and classrooms where students feel safe, where they are free to experiment and make mistakes without fear of ridicule or failure, where there is a sense of predictability (they know what is expected of them, where materials and resources are, etc.), and where they know how to get what they need to get their work done. Consider how your school and classroom rates now and make suggestions for improvements.

3. Using the Learning Principles (see page 15), consider each characteristic and develop strategies for including them in the curriculum, climate, and policies of the school. One way to begin might be to have all staff watch the video *Stand and Deliver* or the Peabody Award-winning film, *Good Morning, Miss Toliver [available from Fase Productions, 4801 Willshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90010 for $19.95 (800-888-0600)]* and analyze the learning strategies used by Jaime Escalante and Kay Toliver. Consider other stories from literature, historical or present, where characters had powerful learning experiences or where significant learning took place and analyze them.

4. Involve faculty in workshops on multiple intelligences and/or learning styles and discuss ways these learning principles intersect with the Powerful Learning Experience.

For Students:

Purpose: The goal is to encourage students to develop responsibility for their own learning. The Powerful Learning Experience is one way to begin this process.

Suggested Activities:

1. *Self-Evaluation:*

   - Have students think about when they learn best, for example, "What did I learn today from the science experiment? Why didn't I learn much?" (Watch for gender differences: Boys tend to attribute low performance to lack of effort or to an unfair

test; girls tend to think it's because "I'm just not good at science.") Have students keep a journal or log of times they learn best. After completing an assignment or project, ask them to reflect on these questions: What would you do differently next time? Did you use resources wisely? Did you seek help? and Did you use feedback effectively?

2. *Thinking Skills:*

   - Ask students to analyze how they conceived a project or assignment. Did they take the first idea or try out a few ideas first? What did they do that made the project easy or difficult? Did they establish goals for themselves? Did they ask if they didn't understand? Did they stand up for what they believed?

3. *Creativity:*

   - Ask students to analyze the amount of creativity that went into a project or assignment. Did they challenge themselves or hang in there when it was hard? Did they look for new ways to do things? How involved did they get? Did they get excited about the work? If not, why? How many different intelligences did they use?

For Parents:

Purpose: The goal is to have parents understand their own concept of learning and identify ways to support their children's learning.

Suggested Activities:

1. After completing the Powerful Learning Experience, ask participants to focus on personal experiences. What do you consider learning? Some people think of learning as the memorization of facts; others think of it as self-discovery. Ask parents to reflect on how our experiences help or hinder our children. What do they want for their child? What are their expectations from the school?

   - When did your children begin to learn? What did they learn from play? . . . from school? . . . from family? What messages do you communicate to your children about learning? Do you make it sound easy? . . . difficult? Is it limited to school or does it happen throughout your child's day?

   - If you had to predict what your child would report as a powerful learning experience, what would it be?

   - How can you create experiences at home that are powerful learning experiences? Think of a few examples.

   - How can you turn a bad experience into something positive? If your child has a negative powerful learning experience, what can you do about it?

Learning Principles

Much is known about how we learn, from research, practice, and common sense. In an attempt to translate the extensive body of knowledge on the topic into a useful format for educators, parents, community members, and students, the Laboratory has developed 12 Learning Principles. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, rather it is our attempt to articulate the critical aspects of learning based on our understanding of the research, our extensive experience in schools and classrooms, and our own personal experiences.

For an expanded explanation of these principles, see Chapter 2 in *Genuine Reward: Community Inquiry into Connecting Learning, Teaching, and Assessing.*

1. People are born learners.
2. People seek to understand new information and experiences by connecting them to what they already know.
3. People learn in different ways.
4. Thinking about one's own thinking improves performance and the ability to work independently.
5. Individuals' stages of development affect learning.
6. Although people may naturally make connections as they learn, they often need help to transfer knowledge to different contexts.
7. A repertoire of strategies enhances learning.
8. Certain dispositions, attitudes, and habits of mind facilitate learning.
9. Working with others of different styles and perspectives enhances learning.
10. Those who do the work do the learning.
11. A resource-rich environment facilitates learning.
12. Developing shared understandings about what constitutes quality work fosters learning.

Source: Genuine Reward: Community Inquiry into Connecting Learning, Teaching, and Assessing by Jill Mirman Owen, Pat L. Cox, and John M. Watkins. The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. ©1994.

Becoming a Better Learner

Introduction: Learning is highly personal. Like a fingerprint, we all have different and unique modes of learning, or ways we take in and process information. Honoring individual styles of learning is important, but it's only the first step. A second step is to understand the elements of successful learning. This activity guides participants to concrete images of the successful learner.

Purpose: This activity orients parents, teachers, and other groups thinking about schools to the skills and attitudes that characterize the successful learner. It helps people turn their personal experiences with and observations of children into concrete goals for learning. It is excellent as a follow-up to the Powerful Learning Experience and/or as a pre-activity to introducing the Learning Principles (see page 15).

Materials: Enough copies of Learning Principles for each participant, newsprint, easels, markers, and masking tape.

Leader's Notes: This activity begins by asking participants to call up the "negative" behaviors that get in the way of student learning. After identifying seven or eight of these behaviors, show how these "negatives" can be turned into learning goals. By beginning with the negative, you can demonstrate how irritating behaviors may be indications that the classroom environment may not be as conducive to learning as it should be.

The activity can lead to a subsequent discussion of the learning principles and the correlations between the two. For example, the behavior "they don't apply what they learn in one place to another" relates to Principle 6, which holds that most children have to be taught to transfer knowledge among different contexts. Or, "they don't listen" could relate to Principles 2, 10, and 11. Perhaps the student isn't listening because the resources in the classroom are not stimulating or they don't understand the context of the lesson. If the example is based on a knowledge of baseball and the student has never played, it may be difficult for them to make the connection. If you choose to discuss the Learning Principles, that is a separate activity.

Process/Steps:

1. Ask participants what their students or their own children do that leads them to think these children could be better thinkers and learners.

2. Divide the newsprint into two columns. Make a list of what people offer in the left column so everyone can see. The list may look something like the one on page 17.

Source: Adapted with permission of the author from "Restructuring Lesson Plans to Enhance Thinking" by Arthur L. Costa. Presentation at California State University, Sacramento, Summer 1991.

3. Ask participants to turn th undesirable behaviors into desirable ones, or goals, as illustrated in the right column of the sample.

4. Ask participants to review the learning goals. Facilitate a discussion around what is behind these kinds of behaviors and attitudes in children and how learning environments can be designed that teach the behaviors necessary to achieve deep understanding.

Time Required: 30 minutes

WHAT CHILDREN DO THAT MAKES US THINK THEY NEED TO BE THINKERS AND LEARNERS		LEARNING GOALS FOR BECOMING A BETTER LEARNER
1. They look to me for too much guidance. When I give directions that have many steps, they do one, then come up and ask for help, then do another, ask for help, etc.		Students can follow complex directions. They see the task as a whole and understand what the standards are for the task's completion. They ask questions about the instructions before beginning the task and try to solve their own problems during the task.
2. They don't take initiative about their own learning. They wait for me to suggest things to do.		
3. They are too "right answer" oriented or teacher oriented.		
4. They don't like to take risks or experiment with new things.		
5. They don't communicate interesting thoughts very well or clearly.		
6. They don't apply what they've learned in one situation to other situations where it could be used.		
7. They don't think about the consequences of their actions.		
8. They don't listen.		
9. They are in too much of a rush to finish. They don't check their work and are overeager to get to the answer.		
10. They think their way of thinking is the only way.		

Four Corners Activity

Introduction: "Do I mean what I say?" "Do I say what I mean?" For many people, the answer is "not always." The objective of this activity is to get underneath what participants are saying about learning and help them articulate for themselves their own strongly held beliefs. Only when we confront our beliefs about learning and education can we work toward a shared vision for change in our schools.

Purpose: This activity helps participants clarify their beliefs and assumptions about issues their group is confronting. This is not a consensus-building activity; rather, it is a provocative way to get people to think about what they believe in, articulate those beliefs, and discuss them. The result should be a stimulating and lively debate on a topic of mutual interest and concern.

Materials: Newsprint, easel, markers, masking tape, and signs that indicate level of agreement (see Step 2 below).

Leader's Notes: The key to designing this activity is to develop statements that focus on one topic or set of issues that is "provocative" enough to force participants to take a stand. It should also be as ambiguous as possible, allowing for different interpretations.

Examples of statements are:

- Standardized tests have no redeeming value.
- Students should not be placed in homogeneous groups.
- Teachers do not have the training or knowledge to use authentic assessment methods.
- All students are capable of assessing their work.
- Different assessment methods should be used with different students.

Sometimes people are persuaded to change their views upon hearing the arguments of others. Often people are frustrated by having to choose a single corner because their actual belief may be that sometimes the statement is true and sometimes not. Nevertheless, the activity gives people a chance to talk about how they feel and why, and to challenge the beliefs of others. Another strength of the activity is that people physically stand where their beliefs are.

Source: Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide by Margaret A. Arbuckle and Lynn B. Murray. The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands and the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services. ©1989.

Process/Steps:

1. Write the statement on a piece of newsprint. Then hang it in the front of the room with the paper folded up so the statement cannot be seen until you are ready to begin.

2. Set the room up with signs in each of the four corners as follows: Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

3. Show the statement to the group. Ask everyone to stand in the corner that represents how they feel about the statement. Instruct them to base their choice on their interpretation of what the statement means.

4. Ask those in each corner to talk among themselves about how they feel.

5. Next, have a spokesperson from each corner report to the whole group the different reasons why everyone in their group chose that corner. At any time during the process (even during report out), participants may change their minds and move to a different corner.

Time Required: 1 hour

The Journey

Introduction: An oral history is an excellent way to capture a valuable perspective about the past. Often, important information is lost because it is not officially recorded. In a school system, for instance, the only records may be notes of meetings sanitized for the official record. The Journey is a way for teams to record events of the past in a visual or graphic way. In addition to being a creative way to track past activities and events, it is a valuable planning tool, especially for anyone who wants to avoid "reinventing the wheel."

Purpose: A journey can be developed for several purposes, among them to:

- identify key events, milestones, factors, and influences that have been important over time;
- develop a shared sense of history among a group of people;
- honor how far a person, group, or organization has come and serve as a basis for celebration;
- orient new staff among their colleagues;
- foster an awareness of developments over time in newcomers and outsiders;
- activate prior knowledge and experience in order to begin making connections to new work and next steps—to set current activities into context;
- allow a person, group, or organization to explain to others what has happened;
- use a more "right-brained" approach to complement the "left-brained" production of text; and
- document and reflect on change, development, and learning.

Both the process and the product of journey development foster reflection.

Materials: Enough copies of the Narragansett Elementary School journey (see page 27) for each participant, newsprint, easels, markers, masking tape, clear tape, Post-Its, and pens or pencils.

Source: Work in Progress: Restructuring in Ten Maine Schools by Pat L. Cox and Jane deFrees. The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands and the Maine Department of Education. ©1991.

Leader's Notes: A "journey" is a drawing, map, or other representation that answers the question, How have you gotten where you are today? The focus of the journey may be at any level—community, organization, or individual. Every journey has a framing question: it may be about the development of a program, the changes in a school, the work that has been undertaken to become a learner- and learning-centered district, etc. For an individual, an example of a framing question might be, How have you developed as a teacher using authentic assessment?

The journey technique is loosely based on "casual mapping" methodology developed by qualitative researchers to depict and explain the relationships among key variables in a study (Miles and Huberman 1984).

Use the following questions to guide the participants through a journey:

Process/Steps:

1. **What is your purpose?** Decide the purpose(s) you have for the journey and how developing the journey fits into ongoing work. For example, if you want to learn about a particular program, do you want to focus on the program's journey, or how the program fits into the overall journey of your organization? For example, in telling the story of the Maine State Restructuring Program participants focused on the journeys of ten schools over time where the restructuring effort fit into the development of the schools (see the journey from the Narragansett Elementary School in Maine on pages 27-29). When staff from schools in Vermont reviewed the journeys, they said that it was the first time they felt that schools had been honored for their own history rather than being viewed piecemeal through program-centered documentation.

   Think ahead about what should happen with the journeys—that is, is this a "one-shot deal" just to try it out? Do you foresee needing to reproduce it in some way? Do you want to disseminate it in some way, e.g., hang it up, etc.? We have found that people are often initially reluctant to engage in a "drawing" activity but later discover that what they have created is special and that they want to do further work on it.

2. **Who creates the journey?** Journeys have been developed by individuals, pairs, small and large teams, and whole organizations. In developing journeys with others, participants find that no one person has all the information about what has happened over time. Having newcomers helps those who have been around for a while "tell the story" that many may take for granted.

3. **How do people create journeys?** People can create journeys on any size sheet of paper, but if a group is doing the work and the journey is to be displayed, working on one or more sheets of newsprint is helpful. To help people overcome the tyranny of a blank sheet of paper, we have found that using different sized Post-Its helps them write down important events, influences, etc., while still enabling them to rearrange the pattern and flow as new ideas come to mind. Post-Its also allow several people to contribute at the same time. Remember to tape the Post-Its down with clear tape when you're done so they don't flutter away when displayed or moved.

One of the trade-offs of using newsprint, which is usually about 2' x 3' rather than 8-1/2" x 11" or 11" x 14", is that reproducing the journey for distribution becomes a hassle. The choices are transcription, copying the journey onto smaller pieces of paper, or using a blueprint copier, which is currently available at many copying outlets. We found one machine that would create an 11" x 14" copy from a couple of newsprint sheets!

Journeys can also be created through interviews, in which a person not involved in the effort of focus asks one or more participants to tell the story. The rough draft created by the interviewer can then be revised and/or elaborated by the interviewees. A rough draft journey can also be created from a review of documents.

4. **What questions should be asked to shape the journey?** First, set the stage for the activity: Determine the framing question for the journey. Given the frame, acknowledge that individuals (or teams, organizations, programs, state) have been around for a while and that many things have happened over time. Even if individuals are new, there have been many activities, decisions, and events that have occurred.

   Invite participants to begin their journeys, asking them to consider some or all of the following questions: When did the journey begin? What are the key events or milestones that have brought us to where we are now? Remember to include the good, the bad, and the ugly. What obstacles have we overcome? What support have we had? What influences, positive and negative, have there been? What have been accomplishments and setbacks? You can use symbols to demarcate different aspects of the journey, for example:

   ▲ = Changes, ◯ = Processes, and □ = Events.

   Encourage the journey developers to note where they lack information or have questions to ask others. The journey may be a work-in-progress that people may want to update occasionally. When a team develops a journey away from the rest of the school or the organization, members often want to return home and make an opportunity for colleagues to create a whole-organization journey, rather than bring home a product created by a few individuals.

5. **What questions should be asked to reflect on during the journey?** We have used a variety of "lenses" or questions to reflect on during journeys. Here are a few options:

   - First, look over the journey and recognize how much you have accomplished and handled over time. People who are in the thick of things and focused on how much there is yet to do rarely give themselves or one another credit for all the hard work.

   - Stand back and ask yourselves if there have been major areas or stages that the journey divides itself into. For example, staff from one city school district realized that their journey of 25 years could be divided into three areas: 1) when the district was highly reactive (not to mention defensive), 2) when the district set about becoming proactive and self-determining, and 3) when the self-determination that had resulted in high centralization was being spread throughout the district.

- Look at the journey and ask, What have we learned as a result of all this? What does that mean for our future?

- Review the journey by asking these questions: What's different for clients (students and others) as a result of all this? What's different for staff? What's different about the structure and operation of the organization? What connections have been made—with the community and other organizations? What questions are we asking now?

- You can also use one of a number of conceptual frameworks to reflect on or analyze your journey. For example, the CaMaPe framework of models of school organization may be appropriate or the CBAM change frameworks (see bibliography).

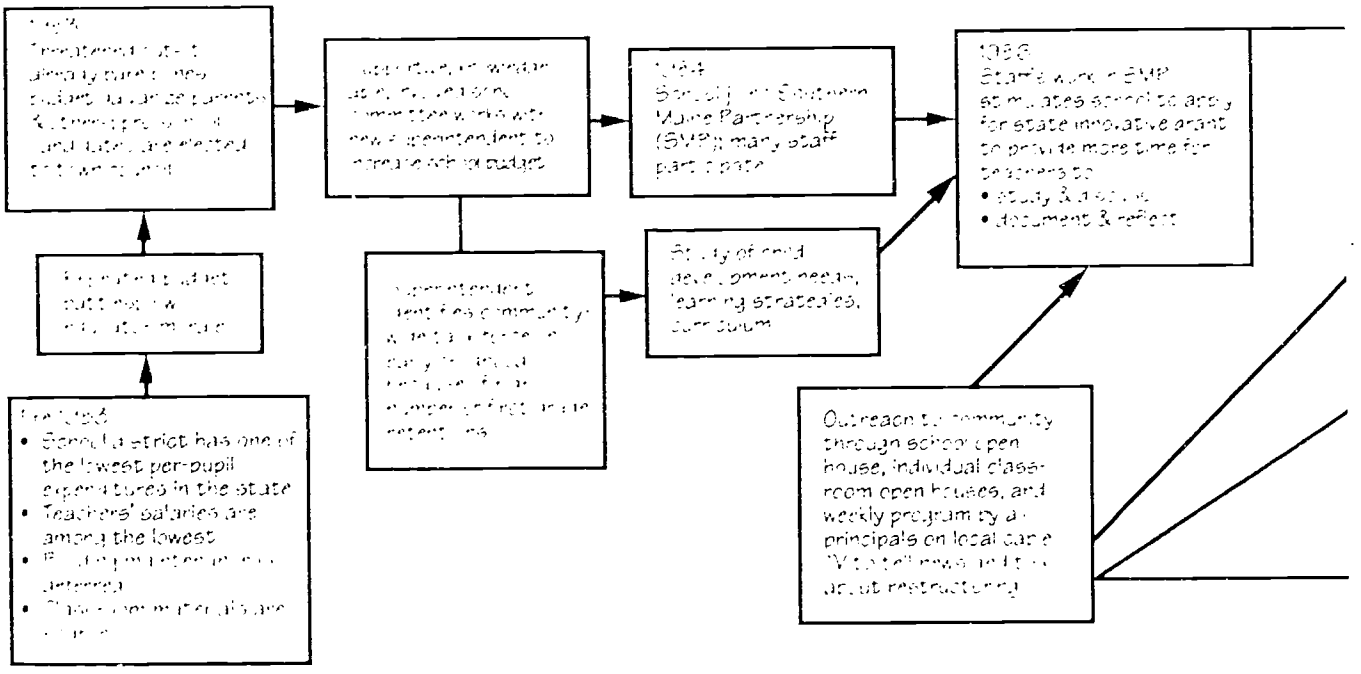
Time Required: It depends on the purpose and how many are involved. An individual reflecting on an experience can create a journey in 20 minutes. For a team or larger group to develop a journey requires time for the group to orient themselves to the task, then to talk as they build the journey, and finally to reflect on its meaning. In addition, when a number of individuals or teams are working on different journeys, people want to share their journeys and insights from creating them. Small teams can complete a rough journey in 45 minutes, but that leaves little or no time for reflection.

We recommend one hour for journey creation and one half hour for reflection, followed by sharing-out time as appropriate.

NARRAGANSETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: *"Becoming a center of inquiry"*

Narragansett Elementary School is located in Gorham, on the outskirts of Portland, Maine's largest city. It is one of six schools in a K-12 school district serving about 2000 students. The population in Gorham is growing rapidly. Until 1990, Narragansett had 580 students enrolled in grades K-3. The formation of a Kindergarten Center in another building in 1990 reduced the number of students at the school to 430, grades 1-3. Narragansett is one of two schools in the district receiving state restructuring grant funds, the other being Gorham High School. The school district has a long history of school improvement efforts. Gorham is also the location of the University of Southern Maine (USM), which has a strong education program. Narragansett has found the USM sponsored Southern Maine Partnership, a network of schools engaged in questioning their practices, to be an invaluable vehicle for inquiry and exchange of ideas. In the same spirit that businesses fund R&D to keep their organizations at the cutting edge, Narragansett has used some of its restructuring grant to fund a position devoted to connecting the staff with research: "If we're going to be a center of inquiry, we have to go, think, do, and have access to information -- and that takes money." At the same time, the Narragansett staff is acting on the realization that, to continue change over the long haul means that there must be a "community of leaders," with leaders coming forward as needed and then moving back to let others lead: "Nothing meaningful happens if only one person carries it."

NARRAGANSETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT NARRAGANSETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. WHAT'S DIFFERENT FOR STUDENTS?

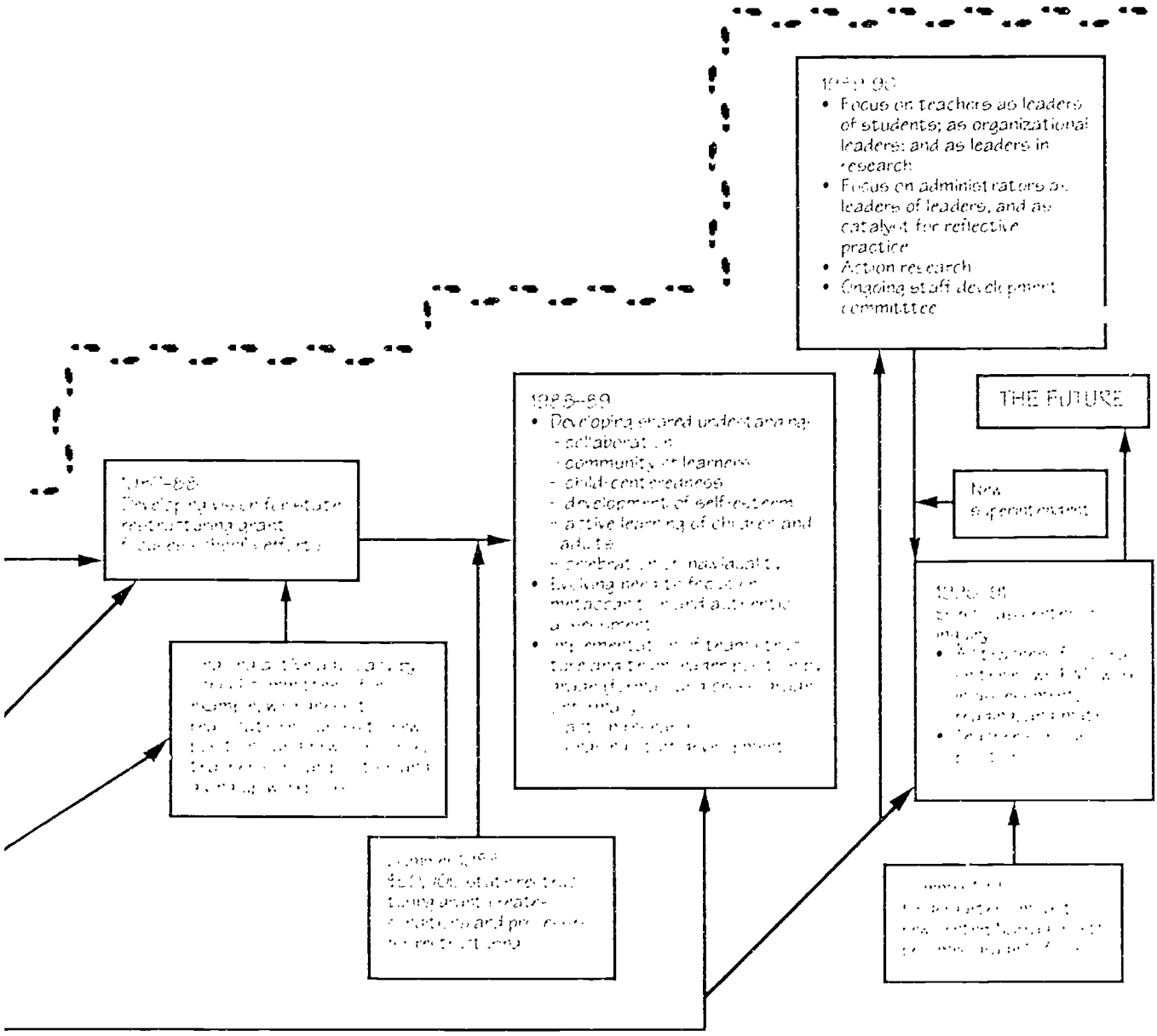
As kids:

- have an opportunity for success as active learners
- learn in variety of ways with a variety of materials
- are appreciated for their developmental stages and differences

As kids (continued):

- feel safe and successful in school
- see inquiry being respected and modeled
- have choices and involvement in the learning process
- are empowered with skills and treated with dignity
- are taught to think about, talk about, and assess their own learning process

Source: Cox and deFrees, op cit., 23-8-10



2. WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Teachers:

- are reflective practitioners modeling inquiry
- have as a key question "how is this child smart?"
- trust one another so all can succeed in his/her own style of teaching
- have the opportunity to try new programs and practices
- engage in cross grade level teaching
- team both within and across grade levels

Students:

- have the opportunity to stay with same students for two years
- develop curriculum using children's prior knowledge and curiosity
- have the opportunity to study and to conduct research projects
- use more child centered assessment approaches
- are working with a district technology specialist to develop a cumulative portfolio assessment system K-12 that uses multiple media (video, document scanners, audio recorders) to record student progress

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT NARRAGANSETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (continued)

3. WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE SCHOOL?

- team leader positions for teachers
- time for teachers to work with and observe colleagues and children at all grade levels
- professional development for all faculty, through which staff learnings have led to a "common language" in which to discuss education
- services to students in the classroom rather than in separate programs, e.g., students with disabilities are mainstreamed
- paraprofessional help in every classroom
- clerical assistance to dignify student work through "publishing" and other preparation of materials and to allow teachers more time to listen to children
- the opportunity for the principal to make facilitation of change an ongoing part of her role
- the position of teacher scholar, which funds one staff member fulltime for a year to engage in intensive study and to assist colleagues in gathering information, developing and sharing research

4. WHAT CONNECTIONS ARE BEING BUILT?

With other schools:

- working with the computer coordinator at the junior high to develop multi-media assessment portfolio
- strong support from superintendent
- the high school is involved in its own restructuring project
- the other primary school in the district is creating its own restructuring vision

With parents and community:

- parents work with teachers to place students in the appropriate learning settings
- parent volunteers are active in the school
- community television network features weekly reports from principals and scenes at the schools

With assistance resources:

- membership in Southern Maine Partnership with the University of Southern Maine "taught us to think and not to be complacent"
- networking with other schools engaged in restructuring

5. WHAT QUESTIONS ARE BEING ASKED?

- How does a restructuring school link with other schools in the same district?
- How does one share a changing school culture to keep the restructuring going?
- How does one find the funding from the local school budget to continue the initiatives?
- Looking into metacognition: how do kids perceive themselves and their learnings and what strategies do we give them about how they think?
- How do we know what is important to teach and how do we assess that?

Changes in My Community

Introduction: A community is as strong as the sum of its parts. One way to strengthen any group is for the members to have a shared understanding of their own history. This activity gets individuals to consider the context in which they are operating and "sets the stage" for changes they are about to plan and implement.

Purpose: To assist individuals and groups in understanding the present, it is often useful to review the past and to plan for the future. This activity paints a local historical perspective that can be discussed in the context of the present local conditions in the schools.

Materials: Enough copies of the Changes in My Community form (see page 33) for all participants, newsprint, easels, masking tape, markers, and pens or pencils. If available, copies of news articles from the local paper from five to ten years ago (these may be available from your local library, historical society, or the Chamber of Commerce).

Leader's Notes: This activity helps people recognize how their community has changed regarding numerous variables. Once the chart has been completed by individuals or small groups, the whole group should discuss the changes and their implications for the schools. This exercise is ideal for a diverse community group and helps get at the question "Why change?"

Suggested background resources that support this activity include most articles by demographer Harold Hodgkinson, in particular, "The Right Schools for the Right Kids" [*Educational Leadership*, February 1988, 45 (5): 10-14], and the video *Reschooling for the Future: Restructuring American Education* (National Alliance of Business, 1991).

Process/Steps:

1. If the group is large enough (10–12), divide participants into groups of three or four. If possible, each group should have at least one person who has been in the community for at least ten years.

2. Ask participants to fill in the Changes in My Community form, one form per group, filling in as much detail as possible.

3. Debrief the activity by leading the group in creating one set of information on newsprint. The goal is to arrive at a consensus and to build a shared understanding about events that occurred over the last five to ten years. This should help people understand that every era has its own set of problems and that understanding these problems can help inform why things are the way they are now.

Source: Developed by the Council for Educational Development and Research Cross-Laboratory Restructuring Collaborative, Fall 1990.

4. Ask the group to brainstorm:

    - What are some of the implications for the people involved—students, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and community members—when schools change?

    - How does the community's history impact on learning for all students?

Time Required: 1 hour

Changes in My Community

How has my community changed over the past ten years?

Demographic Changes: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Economic Changes: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Value Changes: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Technological Changes: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Designing a Personal Portfolio

Introduction: If we think of assessment as a "portrait" of a child, then we should create a picture that is as rich and multidimensional as possible. Imagine that you are trying to understand the abilities and strengths of two children. For the first child, you are given every report card they ever received from the first grade through high school. For the second child, you receive a large box that contains a variety of artifacts collected by the child's mother. In addition to all of the report cards are drawings and other artwork from kindergarten through high school, awards from sporting events, certificates from music classes, lots of photos, samples of writing—compositions, poems, and term papers—the child's scrapbook, and a journal kept by the mother with her impressions of her child at every birthday.

The portrait for the second child is far richer and more meaningful than the first. This activity engages participants in what they would put into the "box" if they were creating their own portfolio.

Purpose: To assist participants in understanding the importance of portfolios, to expand their concept of what a portfolio can include, and to reconnect them with the learner inside themselves.

Materials: Newsprint, easels, markers, masking tape, blank paper, and pens or pencils.

Leader's Notes: This activity helps people look at themselves as learners and encourages them to think about their own growth and development both personally and professionally. By thinking about what they would like to collect to document their growth, participants begin to imagine what their portfolios might look like. This activity has been used effectively with groups of parents, teachers, and mixed groups of educators (across grade levels and roles).

The activity also elicits insights about the usefulness of portfolios for students. For example, after a high school principal listened to teachers talk about what they would put into their portfolios, he realized how important it is for students to self-select pieces for their portfolios.

Generally, people enjoy sharing their choices and rationales. In Step 5, be sure to spend at least half of the time explicitly outlining the connections to students and their use of portfolios.

Here are some sample "pieces of evidence" that teachers have selected to put into their portfolios:

- design of a new multiage program written with a colleague
- evaluations from peers

Source: Adapted with permission of Cheri Roberts, Sunapee Elementary Central School, Sunapee, NH, 1992

- thank-you notes from students and parents
- excerpts from reflective journals about teaching
- list of books read
- list of beliefs changed over the years
- a photo of my daughter—I've learned a lot from her
- unsuccessful thematic units with notes on how I might change them
- schedules from my classroom and how those schedules have changed over time
- old and recent essay questions, showing my development in asking questions
- progress report on a student who improved significantly

Process/Steps:

1. Ask participants to think about their own development as a teacher/administrator/parent over the last year. What stands out as excellent work, and in what ways have they grown significantly?

2. Have them make a list of no more than ten items that serve as evidence of growth. Have them imagine these items in a portfolio. Would they as a collection portray a picture of growth over a period of time? Have them include reasons why they chose these items.

3. Have participants form pairs and take turns sharing a few items with a partner, explaining how they represent growth.

4. Have a whole-group discussion with some sharing of items from people, along with their rationales. Record on newsprint.

5. Then, lead a discussion about how this activity connects to students and their use of portfolios.

Time Required: 1 hour

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Creating New Visions for Schools Users Survey

The activities in this booklet were developed by the staff at the Laboratory in partnership with our many associates and colleagues in schools and communities throughout our region. We rely on your feedback to improve our products and services. Please help us by filling out and mailing this survey. (To mail, cut on the dotted line, fold in thirds with return address on outside. Use a single piece of tape to close. No postage is necessary!)

1. What is your role (for example, principal, teacher, professional development coordinator, school board member, parent, community member, state department staff)?

2. How and with whom did you use the activities?

3. Please rate the activities you used.

	Not at all Useful				*Extremely Useful*
A Walk Through a Learning-Centered School	1	2	3	4	5
Powerful Learning Experience	1	2	3	4	5
Becoming a Better Learner	1	2	3	4	5
The Journey	1	2	3	4	5
Four Corners Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Changes in My Community	1	2	3	4	5
Designing a Personal Portfolio	1	2	3	4	5

4. Overall, how would you describe what happened as a result of using the activities?

5. Please share with us any suggestions you have for improvement for any of the activities.

6. Would you use any of the activities again? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, which ones? If not, why?

Optional:

Name/Position _____

Address _____

Thank you.

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You can't design a successful learning-centered school without the thoughtful involvement of administrators, teachers, and community members. But how do you engage these groups in thinking through and wrestling with important educational issues such as achieving new standards, adopting new assessment and instructional practices, and making wise curriculum choices?

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands has worked with hundreds of such groups, fostering reflection and focused action. Many of the training activities developed by the Laboratory for these sessions are included in this booklet. Tested by groups throughout the region and across the country, these training activities have proved to be valuable tools. In explaining how one of the activities, "The Journey," was used by several groups in one school district, including a group of representatives from the teachers union and school board, an educator said, "It became a tool to get people talking together and sharing their rich experiences with school reform. . . . It was a nonthreatening way for them to communicate."

Creating New Visions for Schools can help educators and community members begin the process of transforming their schools into places that center on learners and learning.

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands is one of ten regional laboratories nationwide and is sponsored primarily by the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The Regional Laboratory serves the educators and policymakers of New England, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. For more information about our products and services, call or write:

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