DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 299   EA 029 823

AUTHOR   Borthwick, Arlene C.; Beverly, Sherman, Jr.; Burnett, Julie;
                Nauman, April D.; Patay, Heather Nissenson; Pistorio,
                Charles
TITLE   School-University Partnerships and Student Voice.
PUB DATE   1999-04-00
NOTE   22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American
                Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada,
                April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *College School Cooperation; Educational Environment; *Focus
                Groups; High Schools; School Community Relationship;
                *Student Attitudes; Student Empowerment
IDENTIFIERS   *Chicago Public Schools IL

ABSTRACT
                This paper discusses three examples of the use of student
voices to inform external-partner activities in Chicago's public schools. The
text is based on a collaborative effort directed at diagnosing the needs of
the Chicago schools. The article focuses on the perceptions of the probation
process as reported by student-focus groups. Some of the themes that emerged
from the focus groups included issues of equity, such as greater access to
technology and longer school hours; mutual respect between teachers and
students; the need for time management; and the pressure and stress
associated with school. Also discussed are hurdles to high-school completion
and student feedback designed to inform classroom change. The focus groups
reinforced the need for consistent reflection, planning, and organizing and
the importance of teachers having the support to try new ideas. Part of the
benefit of using an external partner in evaluating a school is that the
process involves all stakeholders in sharing ideas, enabling the process in
which solutions to problems come from a synergy of thoughtful and caring
people involved in mutual cooperation. Adding student perceptions to those of
teachers and administrative staff also enhances the credibility of partner
recommendations and programming. (RJM)

School-University Partnerships and Student Voice

by
Arlene C. Borthwick
Sherman Beverly, Jr.
Julie Burnett
April D. Nauman
Heather Nissenson Patay
Charles Pistorio

Northeastern Illinois University

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Montreal
April, 1999

Introduction

In an effort to effect school reform, Chicago Public Schools has placed approximately 100 of its schools on probation. Each of these schools is required to implement a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that is developed and monitored by a leadership team that includes an external partner. External partners are also expected to provide support to implementation of programs and activities identified in the SIP. As an external partner to over 15 schools in Chicago, Northeastern Illinois University's Interactive Teaching and Learning Project (NEIU/ITL) focuses its efforts on (1) building a community of learners, (2) authentic teaching and learning, (3) ongoing assessment and reflection, and (4) support for changing school structures to enhance program implementation (e.g., restructured time for professional development).

In its collaborative approach, ITL recognizes the importance of using data to inform decision-making and action at each school site. District level leadership and the public media may focus primarily on student data in the form of test scores on normed and criterion-referenced assessments, and indeed, test scores form the basis for placing a school on probation. However, in diagnosing the needs of the school and taking action to improve student achievement, ITL staff have solicited information from multiple data sources. *Three examples of the use of student voice to inform external partner activities are described in this paper.*

Theoretical Framework

As a university partner, NEIU/ITL participates, in a natural role, in the collection, analysis, interpretation, and/or reporting of data. This use of data provides input to decision-making and action at a school site and can be described as action research. "A basic model underlying most organization development activities is the action research model—a data-based, problem-solving model" (French & Bell, 1984, p. 107). In addition to providing a foundation for school level changes (e.g., structural changes), collaborative action research in the classroom can enable teacher development. "Action research can revitalize the entire learning community, as well as aid teachers in changing or reflecting on their classroom practices" (Calhoun, 1993, p. 62). Calhoun goes even further to envision inquiry as the basis for school reform and renewal (Calhoun, 1994, 1995). Likewise, Sagor (1997) describes significant improvement at a high school "with a 40-year history of poor performance" where "understanding teaching and learning has truly become *journey* not a destination" (p. 185). Finally, as stakeholders in the learning community, students must be included in the picture and process of school change.

> The traditional exclusion of young people from the consultative processes, the bracketing out of their voice, is founded upon an outdated view of childhood that fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives. The need to take student perspectives into account when planning school improvement is pressing. (Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997, p. 73)

An example of representing the student voice, and one that played an important role in the restructuring of Chicago high schools approximately three years ago, was a study by the University of Chicago (Sebring, Roderick, Camburn, Luppescu, Thum, & Kahne, 1996). They surveyed 39,000 Chicago Public Schools students in sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grades during the spring of 1994. The primary purpose was to determine student perceptions regarding their

school experiences with respect to their teachers, peers, classes and own efforts. "Our particular concern was whether Chicago schools afford a student-centered learning climate: one that is safe, orderly, and respectful, as well as academically challenging and personally nurturing. Past research indicates that such environments promote student learning" (p. 77). The following were some key findings related to student-centered learning climate in Chicago Public Schools:

1. Elementary students were more positive about their teachers, while high school students perceived their environments as more impersonal.
2. More elementary students believed their teachers expected more from them with respect to homework and doing their best than the high school students.
3. More elementary students believed they received more support from their peers than high school students did.
4. Over 30% of high school students and 40% of elementary students rated their classrooms as disruptive.

Students in both elementary and high schools felt safest in the classroom, less so in public places within the school, but felt the least safe in traveling between home and school, especially students in higher crime areas.

The idea of hearing the students' voices and including them in the change process is supported by a number of authors (Bechtel & Reed, 1998; Campbell, Edgar, & Halstead, 1994; Corbet & Wilson, 1995; SooHoo, 1993).

School restructuring often calls for modifying the roles and responsibilities of teachers, students, and administrators, yet most efforts to restructure schools involve educators, rather than students. Changes are made *for* students, but without the involvement *of* students. If students are expected to change as a result of school restructuring efforts, they must be involved in determining the changes to be made (Bechtel & Reed, 1998, p.89).

Example 1. Focus Group Perceptions of the Probation Process
Background on Focus Groups

There has been renewed interest in the use of focus groups that has coincided with the emphasis on qualitative research designs (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). While the focus group methodology was primarily developed for research in communications and the media, its efficacy with student groups has received growing attention (Bechtel & Reed, 1998; Eisenberg, Wagenaar, & Neumark-Sztainer, 1997; James, Rienzo, & Frazee, 1997; Morningstar, 1997; Rosenthal, Lewis, and Cohen, 1996.

The basic methodology "involves bringing together a group, or more often, a series of groups, of subjects to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator. A moderator ensures that the discussion remains on the issue at hand, while eliciting a wide range of opinions on the issue" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 80). Although it sounds like a simple procedure, there is much diversity in the actual methodology, including such issues as size of the group, recruitment of participants, value of qualitative versus quantitative data, reliability, validity, and manner of interpreting the data. Data is typically collected through audio or video recordings and transcribed at a later date. The content of the transcripts is then studied to identify the recurrent and broader themes across a number of groups of participants.

Lunt and Livingstone (1996) identify a number of advantages and disadvantages to the focus group approach. The advantages include: (1) the addition of phenomenological and real life experience data to supplement and help to interpret the impersonal and limited data

generated by quantitative methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and other experimental approaches; (2) sources of new ideas and hypotheses; (3) identifying salient dimensions to develop further quantitative research; (4) researching sensitive topics or issues where participants can support each other; (5) generating or stimulating ideas or responses from participants that might not be possible for the individual when she or he is alone; (6) covering and uncovering a wide range of issues and topics; and (7) the ability to explore participant's responses in depth. Rosenthal et al. suggest that the focus group is advantageous because it provides for an interaction among students and provides opportunities to raise issues that may be novel to the researchers.

The disadvantages include: (1) the lack of rigor associated with controlled experiments; (2) the inability to identify cause-effect relationships; and (3) contamination of data as a result of the influence of the moderator and/or the social pressure exerted by the group on individual responses (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). Rosenthal et al. (1996) suggest that the data be interpreted cautiously because both the focus group method and students do not guarantee reliability. However, by interviewing a large number of students across a diversity of student types (e.g., student leaders, athletes, across grades 9-12, students of average academic achievement), one can cross-validate information and themes from students who do not know which other students may be interviewed nor have the opportunity to discuss these matters before participating in their groups. This is equivalent to the method of triangulation in which the researcher can validate observations by "gathering data from a variety of sources using a variety of methods over time" (Caro-Bruce & McCreadie, 1994, p. 36).

Focus groups were one of a number of research methodologies, including written surveys, which were used for documenting the restructuring process of a racially mixed, Midwest urban high school (Bechtel and Reed, 1998). The purpose of such "documentation seeks to describe in detail the design and implementation of educational innovations and provide formative, improvement-oriented information about these innovations to planners and participants as they are being implemented" (Bechtel and Reed, 1998, p. 90). One of the interesting aspects of this study was the training of students as documenters who helped to develop the questions, observe, take notes, and lead the focus groups. Bechtel and Reed suggested that giving students an important role as "student-documenter" was consistent with the restructuring literature on having students take more active roles in their education.

Problem Statement/Purpose

We had at least three major goals in conducting our focus groups. First, we believed it was important that teachers hear the students' voices with respect to their needs, concerns, and beliefs. Second, any recommendations for change should be data driven. Finally, our third goal was originally stated as a question: Would hearing the voices of students through the method of focus groups (1) contribute to the process of change of attitudes by teachers of students and (2) contribute to change in the classroom learning environment?

High School A Methodology

High School A was a large urban school with almost 2700 students. The students were predominantly Hispanic American (73%), with smaller populations of African American (10%), European American (14%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2%), and Native American (<1%). Over 83% of the students were from low-income families, 24% were eligible for bilingual education, and over 50% of the students spoke English as their second language.

The external partner initiated the focus groups for the reasons stated above. Our first step was to obtain permission from the principal to engage students in focus groups. We then made recommendations with respect to the methodology and worked with one of the assistant principals who organized the sessions in a manner least disruptive of the school's schedule. The coordinator/external partner met with a total of 10 classes of students. He met with intact classes during their regular 50-minute period. The administration and students were promised complete confidentiality which was ensured by running the groups without the teacher being in the classroom and *not* audio or videotaping the meetings. Confidentiality included not asking for students' names and requesting that students not name the teachers or others about whom they had both positive and negative comments. The external partner wrote personal notes as soon as possible after the focus group in order to record the major themes of each session. Over 250 boys and girls participated in the groups representing all four grade levels and a variety of student types (e.g., student leaders; participants in Jr. ROTC; and students enrolled in regular, advanced, and/or honors courses including literature, drafting, music, history, and physical education).

The students were asked to address three major questions during the focus group sessions:
1. What are the problems at or what is wrong with this high school?
2. What would they recommend to change or improve at this high school?
3. What questions did they have of the external partner, especially with respect to the probation process?

High School A Results

A number of themes surfaced during the discussions, but there were three which students raised in the majority of groups. First, and discussed in every group, was the stricter dress code. This received most of the discussion by students in almost every group. Students generally agreed that it was illogical to believe that the new code would decrease some of the gang problems. The dress code generated a number of other concerns. For example, with respect to motivation for school, they believed the dress code had no impact on a student's study habits, completion of homework, or on their general behavior in school. Many students stated that the dress code did not allow them to express their own personalities. Another factor was expense; besides the clothes they had to purchase to meet the dress code requirements, they also purchased the clothes they preferred wearing outside of school. Finally, they said that many students, including those with higher grade-point-averages, were getting in trouble with the code, missing classes because of disciplinary reasons and not being allowed to make-up the missed assignments.

Second, most classes mentioned the amount of stress teachers seemed to be experiencing under the probation process. They said many teachers were openly fearful of losing their jobs and blamed the students for the school being on probation. The third issue dealt with discipline and the students' perception that some teachers, administrators, and security personnel were often unfair and inconsistent in the application of policies. They expressed negative feelings about some of the security personnel for trying to be "one of the kids" and allowing some students to get away with infractions.

There were other issues raised in some, but not the majority of groups. These included comments about administrators, the need for and qualities of good teaching, school activities, and perceptions that upper-class students had about this year's freshman class. One of the most thoughtful discussions was about students' perceptions of good teaching. The qualities they

identified among good teachers included being prepared for class, having a "plan" for class as well as the next day and beyond, a good sense of humor, using a variety of activities and ways of making the content more interesting (not just lecturing all the time), and developing personable and friendly relations with students but still keeping boundaries. Finally, although not discussed directly, there was one opportunity to observe racial tension among some groups of students.

High School B Methodology

High School B was an urban school with over 1700 students. The students were mostly Hispanic American (52%), with smaller populations of African American (10%), European American (16%), Asian/Pacific Islander (22%), and Native American (<1%). English was the second language for 1400 students.

The procedures at High School B were similar to those used for High School A. The focus groups were held in the classrooms for 50 minutes, during the students' regular classroom periods. The external partner coordinator, who served as facilitator, set up the boundaries of the groups before beginning, by establishing an agreement of confidentiality wherein no names were used and no specific classes, teachers, administrators, or students, would be identified. No taping was done. However, at High School B, notes were taken during the session, read back to the students to verify accuracy and mutual understanding, and transcribed as soon as possible after the session.

At High School B, teachers had asked the external partner to meet with the students so that the external partner coordinator could better understand the dynamic between teachers and students in the classroom. The teachers' stated purpose was to influence the theory, instructional strategies, and the nature of the professional development sessions being developed by the school's curriculum committee (a faculty committee) and the external partner. The teachers wanted the external partner's project coordinator to get to know the students better and potentially validate their perceptions of their students' needs and motivation or lack of motivation.

The focus group questions were formulated with the teachers during three "flex- time" professional development sessions. The questions were:
1. What do you feel should be added to the School Improvement Plan to make your experience at this high school a better one?
2. What kinds of things happen in your classes that help you learn?
3. What kinds of things happen in class or at school that make it difficult for you to learn?
4. What issues, concerns or suggestions do you have that you would like the University or school to know or address?

High School B Results

Over 250 students participated in the focus groups, representing all four grade levels and a variety of student types (e.g., student council, in-school suspension, special education, self-contained classes, regular and honors English, history, algebra, psychology, and biology). Students offered very detailed and specific suggestions. Several themes emerged consistently.

One theme was an issue of equity: students expressed the need for greater access to technology, updated software, Internet access, updated computers, longer school hours, teachers who were more familiar with the job requirements of the "real world," better trained teachers,

smaller classes, more extra-curricular activities, better safety and security, and school maintenance that was less "ghetto."

The second theme was about mutual respect between teachers and students. Mutual respect resulted in order, predictability, everyone knowing the rules, freedom to ask questions, and varied opportunities and ways to learn things. Respect also meant refraining from embarrassing students in front of their peers and providing a classroom climate in which fear of consequences was not a motivation for learning. A dominant theme was the issue of time: start times, end times, time to get to class, time between classes, time management, time for homework, balancing time for work and time for study, lateness, tardiness, etc.

The fourth theme concerned probation and standardized testing. All groups made reference to pressure and stress that was impacting the teachers and students. Students saw the pressure as causing an increase in tension and anger and as being counterproductive to the student-teacher relationships and learning climate at the high school. Some of the groups raised issues concerning special education and bilingual students, test incentive programs, specific class offerings, parent-school issues, and differing perceptions of school safety and security between the freshmen and the upperclassmen.

Discussion

Part of our role as external partner is to help facilitate a learning community in the school and involve all stakeholders, including students, parents, and faculty/staff, in sharing ideas and learning to appreciate that solutions to problems come from a synergy of thoughtful and caring people involved in mutual cooperation. We believe the focus group methodology is one way to gather data and inform our problem-solving and decision-making process as we work towards change in our schools. While it does have the limitations discussed earlier (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996), focus groups provide a number of advantages, for example giving students important and more active roles in school change and their own education (Bechtel & Reed, 1998). Focus groups also provide the opportunity for personal interaction between students and external partners. Trust and respect is enhanced when people have an opportunity to interact in person versus the mailing of surveys and other impersonal methods for data collection. It gives us, the external partner, an opportunity to model what we believe with respect to collaboration and team building.

With respect to our original three goals for conducting focus groups at High Schools A and B, we offer the following conclusions. The first goal dealt with the need for teachers to hear their students' voices. At High School A, the results were not communicated to the entire faculty in any systematic way. In fact, the external partner/coordinator intended to communicate the major themes in a newsletter the external partner writes for the school and disseminates to the entire professional staff. However, the director of the university center who oversees all partnering relationships believed some of the results might be a little controversial and asked the coordinator not to report the results at this time, even though the coordinator had the draft approved by some of the school's administrators. The coordinator has reported some of the student data informally on an individual basis with teachers and administrators and in group meetings where the information seems pertinent. At High School B, the results of the focus groups were shared in writing with both teachers and students. The teachers read the results and discussed them in committees among themselves and then with the external partner. Some of the faculty set aside class time to discuss the focus group data with their students. Both the teachers and students identified themes, issues, suggestions, and action plans.

Our second goal proposed that recommendations for change should be data driven. Having a better understanding of students from first hand experience through the focus groups played a role, along with other data, in the kinds of programs and recommendations offered by the external partner at High School A. For example, two new pilot projects, the Model Writing Program and Project Success (designed to follow a group of freshman academy students in order to target areas of concern and plan interventions), were initiated the academic year following the focus groups. In the 1999-2000 academic year, the external partner will begin an internship program in counseling using masters degree level students from the university, another initiative based, in part, on the focus group data.

At High School B, there were four "data-driven" outcomes as a result of the focus groups. First, including student recommendations for writing tests and test questions led to modification in the test preparation program being designed by the curriculum committee. Second, the school's Leadership Committee entertained the questions of equity, diversity, and training suggested by students. Third, teachers seemed to feel that the external partner had responded to their needs. The teachers, increasing in ownership and decreasing in overt resistance, generated topics for inservice sessions. We believe this represented a parallel process between teacher and student needs. Because we wanted teachers to attend to the voices of their students, we did everything we could to model the behavior and attend to the teachers' voices. Finally, as a result of the focus groups, a faculty team began to organize "academies" in order to have teams of teachers working with cohorts of students with the aim of addressing student needs of personalization, affiliation, and individualized learning styles. Unfortunately, the principal decided to sever the relationship with the external partner and we are unaware of the progress, if any, the school has made with respect to these four outcomes.

The third goal was a hope that teachers' attitudes about students and a change in the classroom learning environment would be an outcome of hearing students' voices through the focus groups. We did not immediately plan how to assess this outcome, but believe it is one of the most important to determine. High School D (see below) may offer one method of assessment.

Example 2. Hurdles to High School Completion as Expressed in Student Essays
<u>High School C Methodology</u>

At High School C, a predominantly Hispanic American high school in the inner city, the university partner had the opportunity to ask all juniors during a test session to respond to a writing prompt on barriers to success. The prompt read:

> Imagine yourself 5 years from now as a successful [High School C] graduate. You have achieved many of the goals you set for yourself in high school. The principal of [High School C] has asked you to talk to current [High School C] students about your success. Write a draft of your speech to the students. Think about all aspects of your life when your were a student at [High School C]: classes, after school activities, jobs, and time with family and friends. Describe the things that helped you achieve your goals. What problems did you face? What helped you overcome them? Give the students advice about how they, too, can be successful.

Of a total of 291 juniors at High School C, 103 girls and 117 boys answered the writing prompt. Essays by 25 girls and 28 boys (about 25% of the total group) were chosen randomly using systematic selection and typed verbatim for thematic analysis. In a subsample of these essays, two researchers, using constant comparative method and inductive analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), identified and agreed on salient themes. Seven categories emerged, most with several subcategories (see Table 1). Interrater reliability was 85% for the main categories and 80% for the subcategories. *The Ethnograph* (Seidel, Kjolseth, and Seymour, 1988) was used as a tool to sort the data.

High School C Results

In their essays, students wrote that their ability to finish high school and achieve their goals was influenced by (1) personal characteristics, including effort and persistence, goals and vision, decision-making, attitude, and intelligence; (2) interpersonal relationships with family, friends, members of the opposite sex, and others; (3) outside activities, such as jobs and sports; (4) school, including teachers, organized support programs, academics, and school activities; (5) health and injury; (6) church and religion; and (7) other factors. Interestingly, most of these categories could be either a source of help or a source of difficulty. For instance, many juniors discussed the importance of friends as a support for academic success, whereas others (mostly boys) warned that "friends" could have a negative influence, acting as a conduit to gangs, drugs, and academic failure. Similarly, having an outside job could have negative or positive effects on students' attainment of goals: though some described their jobs as a demand on time and energy that interfered with school work, others wrote that their jobs taught them responsibility. For others, having minimum-wage jobs was a motivator to stay in school and prepare for higher-paying jobs that could also offer them more respect.

Overwhelmingly, the students attributed their imagined successes or past failures to the presence or absence of certain personal characteristics. Among the boys, 89% mentioned the need for effort and persistence to succeed or identified the lack of it as the reason for their failures; 71% mentioned goals or vision (academic or career); 61%, attitude; and 54%, decision-making and problem-solving. Among the girls, 100% mentioned effort and persistence; 92%, goals and vision; 72%, attitude; and 32%, decision-making and problem-solving. Only 11% of the boys and 8% of the girls referred to innate intelligence or lack of it as a factor in succeeding or failing.

Statements about the need for effort and persistence dominated students' advice to other students, consisting mostly of urges to work hard and never give up. Many of these comments took the form of common American idioms or even familiar slogans for success. For instance:

Quiters [sic] never win and winners never quit. (Girl 36)

And you. could [sic] always be somebody...Stay in school. (Girl 44)

You can achieve anything you like if you just do your best. (Girl 68)

...you have to be willing to go the distance. (Boy 42)

Dont [sic] give up, dont [sic] drop out cause if you do you'll regret it. (Boy 74)

> Read, go to school and give it all you got, cause you only live once. It's either now, or never. (Boy 78)

> What I'm trying to emphasize is if you work hard, and take your time there is nothing you cannot accomplish. (Boy 105)

> In conclusion everybody should stay in school and listen to what they tell you such as advice, because believe me it will come handy when your [sic] in the real world all buy [sic] yourself." (Boy 117)

The students' frequent references to personal characteristics as the key to success or the cause of failure are especially striking considering that the writing prompt, which gave examples of what the students could address in their essays, did not ask them to discuss personal qualities.

The writing prompt did ask the students to consider the influence of their families and friends in the attainment of the future goals. After personal characteristics, the influence of interpersonal relationships was the second most common theme in these students' essays. Eighty percent of the girls and fifty percent of the boys talked about the role of their families in their successful completion of school and future goals. The vast majority of these described their families (parents, siblings, and extended family members) as a positive influence, being encouraging, helpful, and proud of their daughter's or son's academic success. A typical statement was: "...my parent [sic] wanted me to be somebody in live [sic], and I wanted them to be proud of me." (Girl 60) Another girl wrote:

> My parent [sic] were always there for me. They would always cared [sic] for me. If I didnt [sic] understant [sic] something they would take me by my aunt [sic] house. because [sic] my aunt had graduated and went to college. (Girl 44)

Of the thirteen boys mentioning their families' role, only two described problems in the family that may have hindered their school success. Of the twenty girls writing about their families, only one wrote about a family problem, which was her mother's disappointment in the daughter's low grades.

Forty-four percent of the girls and thirty-nine percent of the boys discussed the impact of the teachers at High School C on their success in achieving goals. The teachers were described as being helpful, encouraging, nice, and caring; as being role models; as explaining clearly; as getting help for the students, sometimes meeting with parents to get help for students; and as enabling students to achieve their goals. Some students said they wished to achieve their goals to make their teachers proud of them. None of the girls wrote negative comments about the teachers; rather, the girls tended to interpret teachers' demands in a positive way:

> I wouldn't of have [sic] been here if it wasn't for all the hard things that the teachers here made me do. Not because they didn't like me But Because [sic] they knew that someday I would need it and it was necessary to pass in order to graduate. (Girl 81)

Though two boys made negative comments about teachers (one referring to "some teachers" and another specifically to one teacher he did not like), these two boys also made positive remarks

about teachers. The rest of the boys' comments about teachers were all positive. Like the girls, the boys often interpreted teachers' demands in a positive light: "...not one day goes by without me thanking the [High School C] faculty for pushing me so hard to succeed." (Boy 85) Another boy, in his imaginary speech, thanked his "teachers who uncovered my better self." (Boy 46).

Discussion

This analysis of students' perceptions of the barriers to successful school completion and of ways to overcome these barriers can help inform the future reform efforts of the probation team, external partners, local school council, principal, teachers, and other reform stakeholders. Offering such information is a neutral way to get such stakeholders to appreciate the realities of students' lives, to re-examine and discuss previously held beliefs about these students. For example, many teachers at High School C expressed a belief that the lack of parental involvement was a major factor in their students' lack of academic success. However, these student essays suggest that this assumption is untrue. Though other barriers may have prevented these Hispanic American parents from contacting the school about the academic performance of their sons or daughters, these parents seem to be very interested in and supportive of their sons' and daughters' school success.

This analysis may also have a positive impact on the teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and the administration's views of the teachers' effectiveness. The students' direct, unprompted praise of their teachers provides the teachers with positive feedback that can be lacking in schools serving at-risk, low-achieving students (Firestone, 1989). Such positive feedback can increase teachers' feelings of confidence in their ability to influence student learning and motivation, identified as a key component in successful teacher motivation of low-achieving students (Alderman, 1990). In addition, the students' positive comments may help disrupt the "cycle of alienation" that exists in schools where respect for both teachers and students is low (Firestone, 1989).

These data may also be used as part of an alternative assessment of the progress made at schools undergoing reform. Such progress is often gauged solely by students' scores on standardized tests (Newman, 1989), for which teachers may be held accountable. Sometimes, an individual teacher's effectiveness may be linked directly to how well her or his students score on such tests. However, a teacher whose students do not perform up to a mandated mark on a norm-referenced test may be instrumental in motivating those students to stay in school. Student retention, and teachers' positive influence on it, may be valuable indicators of a school's success.

Finally, these data suggest a need for all involved in school reform--administrators, external partners, and teachers--to go beyond the teaching of learning strategies, content, and standardized test-taking skills, to rethink the important issue of student motivation. Though these essays' high proportion of unprompted comments about the importance of personal characteristics in achieving one's goals may initially be gratifying to us, consistent with our Euro-American beliefs about the secrets of success and thus seemingly "correct," effort and persistence in the face of relentless failure does not build motivation (Alderman, 1990) and is more than we could ask even of ourselves. To ensure that students have genuinely useful skills rather than simple slogans for success, we need to help our students make connections between what we teach (learning strategies and content) and their own personal and academic goals (Alderman, 1990; Firestone, 1989; Johnson, 1997). We need to ensure that these at-risk students experience successes that lead to feelings of competence, that they see how academic achievement can lead to the rewards that they value, that they are motivated intrinsically, that

they feel their classroom environments are safe for intellectual risk-taking, and that they have some input into the work they do in school (Newman, 1989). Unfortunately, these crucial components of student motivation are often overshadowed by the drive to deliver information on strategies in the hopes of raising standardized test scores. The current data, however, provide external partners with an opportunity to begin new discussions on how schools serving at-risk populations can provide a more motivating academic experience, one that truly enables these young women and men to attain the goals that are important to them.

Example 3. Student Feedback to Inform Classroom Change

In 1994, Gloria Ladson-Billings reaffirmed the role of teachers as curators and managers of the hopes and dreams of their students. These teachers showed respect and care toward their students, as well as solid content and pedagogical skills. Henry Giroux, in <u>Teachers as Intellectuals</u>, stated, "I have argued that by viewing teachers as intellectuals we can begin to rethink and reform the traditions and conditions that have prevented teachers from assuming their full potential as active, reflective scholars and practitioners." This section will discuss procedures and results of collaboration of two teachers and the external partner in both a professional development course and in their related classroom practice. This project was initiated with the idea of teachers assuming the role of "active, reflective, scholars and practitioners" as they implemented new classroom practices.

High School D Methodology

A 15-hour professional development course was designed by the external partner using an approach to developing *learning plans* rather than *lesson plans*. The workshop encouraged teachers to be facilitators and to deconstruct curricula to be more comprehensive, diverse, and meaningful. Methods included a combination of reflection, planning, and organizing. The work of Ladson-Billings, as well as Bell Hooks, Lisa Delpit, Michelle Foster, Ella Baker, and other educators and historians was discussed in the course. Ladson-Billings's book was important because of her study and description of characteristics of effective teachers of African American children.

High School D was 99% African American and was located in a high-poverty neighborhood that was undergoing gentrification. Two social studies teachers from High School D attended the workshop sponsored by the external partner at a central location. Over the course of the school semester, the focus was on teachers shifting from using didactic methods of teaching to teacher as facilitator and students as active learners. Workshop sessions were followed by on-site meetings, cooperative planning, and evaluation of the changes in their classrooms. One teacher was an African American with over 10 years experience teaching in private and public schools in the Chicagoland area; the results below describe outcomes in two sections of the African American History class she taught. The teacher and university partner examined changes through videotaping of classroom activities and collection of student feedback.

High School D Results

We videotaped the African American History classes and students participated in viewing the tape with the teacher and external partner. Students seemed to enjoy viewing the tape of the classroom activities and were able to pick up on classroom management issues and student behavior in collaborative groups. The teacher was not threatened by the videotaping or sharing

the uncut results with the students. We sat in a circle and discussed what we had seen and how things might have been different. The students openly commented on what they had observed about teacher behavior and actions as well as fellow students' behavior. There was no tension or refusal to participate; it was an informative session and a great opportunity for sharing.

Feedback forms (see Appendix A) were collected from a group of 32 eleventh and twelfth graders in two sections of African American History. Feedback forms were distributed at the end of the school year and focused on the attitudes and beliefs of the students regarding their experiences in the classroom of the participating teacher. The students were asked to respond to seven yes/no questions and three open-ended statements regarding the content and quality of the course.

Students affirmed teaching methods and materials, believed that the classroom was a safe place to make mistakes, believed that the teacher showed respect for every student, and expressed confidence in applying the strategies and information to other academic areas as well as other areas of their lives. Also, regardless of anticipated grade in class, students felt that the teacher had communicated that every student could be successful. Students also believed that they had learned a lot from the class; responses to the seven yes/no questions were overwhelmingly affirmative.

Further, the three open-ended questions gave more details about why every student responded in such a positive manner. When asked to name three things that they had enjoyed about the class, student replies included:

When we worked as a group, and the movies. Anybody can work together.

I enjoyed the oral discussing, I enjoyed the videos, I also enjoyed writing the questions of the day.

The way I can say what I feel and not be judged, the learning is fun, I had the best teacher.

I enjoyed the teacher's openness and understanding. I enjoyed the free discussions we had. I also enjoyed the cooperative learning experiences.

The fact that we worked in groups at times. We all were treated equally there was no favoritism. Every class meeting something new was taught.

Cooperative learning, she [the teacher] take time out for us, also she help us when we is [were] down.

Good teaching/learning. How to treat people with respect. How to share.

Learning more things about my culture. Becoming able to tell how I really feel. Being treated the way that I wanted to be treated.

I learned about our Black history. I learned how to conduct myself. I feel good all over!

Things the students would change about or add to the class fell into three categories: add more class time, add more group work, and do not change anything about the class. As one student recorded, "I wouldn't change the teachers' way of communicate [ing] and way of getting through to her students. I wouldn't change the fact the we just didn't taught to out of [learn from] a book, but from the heart." A request for additional comments brought direct comments about the teacher. Students continued to praise the pedagogical and interpersonal skills of the teacher.

These student responses suggested an appreciation for and understanding of the teachers' preparation and implementation of learning activities. The students supported group work and cooperative learning activities. These students felt respected in the classroom and, in turn, respected their teacher. As a result, from the external partner's perspective, both the teacher and students had a substantive and rewarding educational experience.

Discussion

Excellence of education for American youth has involved an ongoing debate over the quality, content and access of education. The contemporary recommendations for improved school conditions have centered primarily on curriculum and teacher training issues. Within the last two decades reports such *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, Making the Grade: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, The Condition of Teaching: A State by State Analysis*, and *Tomorrow's Teachers* have all contributed to this discourse. These reports have raised issues that are vital and potentially effective in regards to the quality of education for American children. Yet, few suggest methods to transform the roles of both the teacher and student.

The goal of our work with High School D was to support both teacher and students in engaging in an educational process that emphasized learning. The results from High School D illustrate how interrelated the role of teacher and student are in the educational process. The students were able to appreciate the teacher's planning and implementation of collaborative activities, and thereby, the teacher was able to see concrete, positive results in the classroom. What the research suggests is that issues of caring and respect are important for any teacher of African American children. This is regardless of the race of the teacher, as illustrated by the other participating social studies teacher at High School D who was not African American but who, nevertheless, was respected by the students. While these results may not be unique to African American children, many of the texts we discussed in the workshop dealt with the needs of black children and dealing with students of diverse backgrounds.

What we learned as external partners was that consistent reflection, planning, and organizing with teachers provided the support for teachers to try new ideas. The teachers participated in the course, we met and planned at the school weekly, and the external partner provided in-class support. This peer support and collaboration also contributed to a successful classroom project. The project culminated at the end of the year with a student protest and sit-in about educational opportunity and equity. The students came up with this culminating group activity across two classes (African American History and U.S. History) based on what they had been learning. They developed petitions, held a rally, and made posters demanding an equitable education. We also taped that activity. The U.S. History class made dioramas as a project, and the students wrote daily, answering the question of the day. As a result of the development of learning plans, we were able to expand and get the teachers to do things they hadn't done before. The diorama exhibit was placed in the foyer of the school and hopefully will be a yearly activity.

In essence, if we are to transform the role of the teacher, teachers must have support to implement classroom changes such as collaborative group work and supporting different learning styles.

Conclusions

Information on students' perceptions of classroom activities, school, school-related issues, barriers to successful school completion, and of ways to overcome these barriers can help inform the future efforts of teachers, principals, probation teams, local school councils, and other reform stakeholders. As external partners, NEIU/ITL coordinators and consultants have been brought into the schools to focus on staff development activities for teachers. Adding student perceptions to those of teachers and administrative staff enhances the credibility of partner recommendations and programming. As discussed above, at High School B, focus groups were held in the classrooms of those teachers who seemed most unhappy with professional development programming planned by the external partner. Teachers remained in the room during the focus group activity, and the partner reported an increased level of trust by teachers following the activity.

Collecting information from students also provides a neutral way to encourage stakeholders to appreciate the realities of students' lives in relationship to previously held beliefs about these students. For example, at High School C, data suggest that many students' parents value education highly—a fact that teachers sometimes distort in their frustration with students' apparent disengagement with school. In addition, action research in the classroom can invite student participation and reflection on new instructional strategies, for example the use of cooperative group work at High School D. Affirmation by students of teacher effectiveness, as at High Schools C and D, may also help to end the cycle of alienation as described by Firestone (1989).

Part of our role as an external partner is to help facilitate a learning community in the school that involves *all* stakeholders, including students, parents, and faculty/staff, in sharing ideas and in learning that solutions to problems come from a synergy of thoughtful and caring people involved in mutual cooperation. In reflecting on what we have learned from writing this paper, we realize that: (1) students need to be more directly involved in the change process at the school, (2) the other stakeholders need to believe that student needs are important and their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are key to the success of the high school, (3) there needs to be an organized way in which these student needs, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are fed into the system and become an integral part of the problem-solving process, and (4) the students need feedback and validation that their voices and input have been heard. Now we must decide on our next steps--an action plan--to achieve these four goals. University partners writing this paper realize that their attempts to include student voice are just a beginning. Partners especially commented on the need to increase student involvement in the planning stage for data collection, having students participate in the preparation of focus group questions, for example, or as actual data-gatherers as exemplified in Bechtel and Reed's description of students as documenters (Bechtel and Reed, 1998).

We know that what we have learned is influencing our daily efforts in school settings, whether we, as external partners, remain in the very same schools (High Schools A, B, C, and D) or not. For example, NEIU has established a professional development credit course entitled "Action Research in the Classroom." From October to May, teachers have met and will continue to meet on a bi-monthly basis to investigate interesting and pressing questions related to their

work. One special education teacher wondered how to improve testing to enable bilingual students to perform better, to demonstrate what they really knew and understood. An immediate response from one author of this paper was, "Ask the students what would help them." That became the teacher's next step in her action research cycle!

Educational Importance

Increasingly, external partners are called upon to provide technical assistance to comprehensive school reform programs (Education Commission of the States, 1998). Comprehensive urban school reform should more often take the form of inquiry into what is needed and what works in the specific context. One reason to encourage action research in the school reform and renewal process is that "what participants learn from information, as it is uncovered, *puts pressure on them* to change" (Sagor, 1997, p. 170). Charles Payne has challenged the Chicago educational community to become a learning community—a community that meets the challenge of reform with a spirit of inquiry. "If we can do that, Chicago may be uniquely well-poised to help us figure how to blend the creativity and commitment that bottom-up reform can generate with the bottom-line mentality of business in ways that will help the neediest children in the toughest schools" (Payne, 1998, p. 65).

In a spirit of inquiry, stakeholders responsible for measuring effects of school reform programs need to broaden their approach to assessing program impact. State funding for after-school programs was endorsed in a recent editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* (March 13, 1999). And how would these programs be evaluated? "The state can gauge the success of the after-school efforts by comparing standardized test scores year over year. The point of the programs is to raise achievement" (Section 1, p. 24). Once again, instead of just consulting test scores to learn more about the impact and importance of both in-school and after-school programming, we need to allow and even encourage a dialogue of voices. Student voice can enrich our knowledge of the context and inform, enlarge, and enhance an effective plan of action. External partners must make provision for including student voice. Such voice is not just that of a student council president or student representative on the Local School Council. The University partner is in an excellent position to assist with action research activities in the schools—including planning for, collecting, analyzing, and reporting out data that includes student voice and participation.

References

Alderman, M. K. (1990). Motivation for at-risk students. Educational Leadership, 48, 27-30.

Bechtel, D. & Reed, C. (1998). Students as documenters: Benefits, reflections, and suggestions. NASSP Bulletin, 82 (594), 89-95.

Calhoun, E. F. (1993). Action research: Three approaches. Educational Leadership, 51 (2), 62-65.

Calhoun, E. F. (1995). How to use action research in the self-renewing school. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Campbell, P., Edgar, S., & Halstead, A. L. (1994). Students as evaluators: A model for program evaluation. Phi Delta Kappan, 2, 160-165.

Caro-Bruce, C. & McCreadie, J. (1994). Establishing action research in one school district. Elementary School Journal, 95 (1), 33-40.

Connaway, L. S. (1996). Focus group interviews: A data collection methodology. Library Administration & Management, 10 (4), 231-239.

Corbet, D. & Wilson, B. (1995). Make a difference with, not for, students. A plea to researchers and reformers. Educational Researcher, 5, 12-17.

Education Commission of the States. (1998). Comprehensive school reform: Criteria and questions. Denver, CO: Author.

Eisenberg, M. E., Wagenaar, A., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (1997). Viewpoints of Minnesota students on school-based sexuality education. Journal of School Health, 67 (8), 322-326.

Firestone, W. A. (1989). Beyond order and expectations in high schools serving at-risk youth. Educational Leadership, 46, 41-45.

French, W. L., & Bell, C. H., Jr. (1984). Organization development: Behavioral science interventions for organization improvement. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Giving kids an after-school edge. (1999, March 13). Chicago Tribune, Section 1, p. 24.

Giroux, H.A. (1988). Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning. Granby, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

James, D. C. S., Rienzo, B. A., & Frazee, C. (1997). Using focus groups to develop a nutrition education video for high school students. Journal of School Health, 67 (9), 376-379.

Johnson, S. (1997). No failures here. American School Board Journal, 184 (6), 40-41.

Joyce, B., & Calhoun (1995). School renewal: An inquiry, not a formula. Educational Leadership, 52 (7), 51-55.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). Ethnography and qualitative design in education research (2nd ed.). San Diego: Academic Press.

Llorens, M. (1994). Action research: Are teachers finding their voice? Elementary School Journal, 95 (1), 3-10.

Lunt, P. & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. Journal of Communications, 46 (2), 79-98.

Morningstar, M. E. (1997). Critical issues in career development and employment preparation for adolescents with disabilities. Rase: Remedial and Special Education, 18(5), 307-320.

Newman, F. M. (1989). Student engagement and high school reform. Educational Leadership, 46(5), 34-36.

Payne, C.M. (1998, January). So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform. Paper prepared for the Chicago Region Assembly, Chicago, IL.

Rosenthal, S.L., Lewis, L.M., & Cohen, S.S. (1996). Issues related to the sexual decision-making of inner-city adolescent girls. Adolescence, 31(123), 731-739.

Rudduck, J., Day, J., & Wallace, G. (1997). Students' perspectives on school improvement. In A. Hargraves (Ed.), Rethinking educational change with heart and mind (pp. 73-91). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sagor, R. (1997). Collaborative action research for educational change. In A. Hargraves (Ed.), Rethinking educational change with heart and mind (pp. 169-191). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sebring, P. B., Bryk, A. S., Roderick, M., Camburn, E., Luppescu, S., Thum, Y. M., Smith, B., & Kahne, J. (1996). Charting reform in Chicago: The students speak. A Report Sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Seidel, J.V., Kjolseth, R., & Seymour, E. (1988). The Ethnograph [computer software]. Corvallis, OR: Qualis Research Associates.

SooHoo, S. (1993). Students as partners in research and restructuring schools. The Educational Forum, 4, 386-393.

Table 1.
Themes in High School C Juniors' Essays on Barriers to Success

Categories/Subcategories	% Boys Mentioning	% Girls Mentioning
Personal Characteristics		
Effort & persistence	89%	100%
Goals & vision	71%	92%
Decision making	54%	32%
Attitude	61%	72%
Intelligence	11%	8%
Interpersonal Relationships		
Family	50%	80%
Friends	39%	48%
Opposite sex	4%	20%
Other	39%	40%
In School		
Teachers	39%	44%
Academics	39%	60%
Organized support programs	32%	28%
Activities	50%	56%
Outside School		
Job	36%	68%
Sports	7%	0
Other	4%	20%
Health/Injury	29%	0
Church/Religion	0	8%
Other	0	4%

Student Feedback Form
Spring 1998

Grade: Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

Period:_____

Anticipated Grade in Class: A   B   C   D

Please circle the appropriate response.

1. I believe that I have learned a lot from this class.   Yes   No

2. I believe that I can apply what I have learned in this class to other academic subjects.   Yes   No

3. I believe that I can apply what I have learned in this class to other areas in my life.   Yes   No

4. The teacher showed respect for students as individuals and valued each one as a learner. Yes   No

5. Students were not afraid to make mistakes in class.   Yes   No

6. Teachers communicated that each student can be successful.   Yes   No

7. Different teaching methods and materials were used to help students learn.   Yes   No

8. Name three things that you enjoyed about the class.

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Name three things that you would add and/or change about the class.

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Additional comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

EA 029823

ERIC ®

REPRODUCTION RELEASE
(Specific Document)

AERA
1999

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:
School- University Partnerships and Student Voice

Author(s): Borthwick, A.C., Beverly, S., Jr., Burnett, J., Nauman, A.D., Patay, H.N., Pistorio, C.

Corporate Source: Northeastern Illinois University	Publication Date: April, 1999

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ____ Sample ____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ____ Sample ____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ____ Sample ____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1 ↑ [X]	Level 2A ↑ [ ]	Level 2B ↑ [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

Sign here,→ please

Signature: Arlene C. Borthwick	Printed Name/Position/Title: ARLENE C. BORTHWICK
Organization/Address: NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY TEACHER EDUCATION DEPT. 5500 N. ST. LOUIS AVE CHICAGO, IL 60625-4699	Telephone: 773-794-2778 FAX: 773-794-6243 E-Mail Address: a-borthwick@neiu.edu Date: 4-21-99

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2nd Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com

ERIC 088 (Rev. 9/97)
PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE.